

**Round Table ECRI Sweden
6 November 2013**

Conclusions

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main aim of this round table - to bring all the stakeholders together to hold a genuine exchange of views - has been achieved; it has also been very interesting because our discussions have been frank and instructive.

I would again like to thank the Swedish authorities and the representatives of civil society for playing their part and having together considered the further steps that might be taken to combat racism and racial discrimination in Sweden.

It would be impossible to summarise in ten minutes everything that has been discussed here today. I am nevertheless going to try to highlight the main messages that emerged from our discussions.

First, with regard to the application of criminal law to hate crime, we saw that there is a marked discrepancy between the number of incidents reported to the police and the number of complaints actually brought before the courts. Why is this? As in many other countries, victims' distrust is undoubtedly one reason. The very strong protection of freedom of expression in Swedish legislation also plays a part in the problem. This legal choice is understandable but makes it all more difficult for politicians to take a firm stand in systematically condemning racist remarks.

A second strong message from all the representatives of groups of concern to ECRI is the importance of holding effective consultations when framing policies to promote or safeguard equality. That means doing more than simply inviting the representatives of these groups to comment on a project that is more or less finalised. Genuine consultation means involving stakeholders from the very first stage of preparation of a project. That is the only way to guarantee that minorities have the opportunity to influence the decisions taken in matters concerning them and to take a real part in their implementation.

We have had very interesting discussions on the subject of data of an ethnic nature. It is, of course, necessary in this context to distinguish between keeping ethnic records of individuals – which is, in principle, unacceptable – and collecting data on equality, i.e. global statistics on the situation of different groups, which help to frame targeted policies to redress de facto inequalities. Even in the case of the collection of global statistics, which should not pose a problem of principle, there are three fundamental “rules”: respect for the principle of free self-identification by each person concerned as belonging or not belonging to a given group; the need for informed consent, which means that persons questioned must be informed of the reasons for which the question about their ethnic affiliation is being asked; and respect for the secrecy and anonymity of the answers given. When collecting data of an ethnic

nature, the aim should not be to keep a record of the fact that such and such a person is a member of such and such a group but to ascertain the scale of the problems confronting different groups as a whole and to gauge the effectiveness of the measures taken to promote equality and combat discrimination.

The different groups of concern to ECRI also emphasised the fact that racial discrimination is, unfortunately, currently a reality in Sweden, as in other European countries. We have heard striking examples of anti-Muslim sentiments and racism against Afro-Swedes; we were told of the constant need to protect places where members of Jewish communities meet; we also heard about discrimination against Roma and Muslims in access to housing. The different groups of concern to ECRI made their message quite clear: "Enough!" We cannot go on describing our problems again and again: we need action, now!"

The fifth and last major theme emerging from today's discussions is the need to foster dialogue. The first remark that can be made is that anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Gypsyism, prejudices and discrimination against the Sami are different examples of the problem. They have points in common but different groups have had different experiences in Sweden; intolerance takes different forms. It is nevertheless clear that the vicious circle of mistrust, discrimination and prejudice cannot be broken without encouraging dialogue, seeking to listen to others and fostering mutual respect between the different components of society. It was also pointed out that everyone, irrespective of their origin or religion, can be guilty of discrimination. Policies for combating racism and racial discrimination must therefore be based on a holistic approach that takes full account of the complexity of the questions posed.

I would like to end this brief overview by thanking the Swedish authorities very much for their openness to today's dialogue. I trust that the messages expressed at this Round Table will be heard and that positive action will be taken in response.

We would also like to thank the Equality Ombudsman and her office for their close involvement in organising this round table, which could not have taken place without their enthusiasm and commitment. Finally, we would like to extend our warmest gratitude to the interpreters for their excellent work throughout the day, as it allowed us to have very fruitful discussions.