



## Joint statement on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – 21 March 2009

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Council of Europe's European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) today issued a joint call on governments, intergovernmental organisations and civil society to intensify efforts in addressing racism and xenophobia.

As we commemorate today the tragic events of 1960 in Sharpeville<sup>1</sup> and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, we are concerned that the current economic crisis is beginning to fuel racist and xenophobic intolerance across the region.

Our organisations are alarmed by reports indicating an upsurge in violent attacks targeting migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, and minorities such as the Roma. Europe's history demonstrates how economic depression can tragically lead to increasing social exclusion and persecution. We are concerned that in times of crisis, migrants, minorities and other vulnerable groups become 'scapegoats' for populist politicians and the media.

Such 'scapegoating' has already led to increased hostility and incidents of violent hate crime against minorities and migrants in some countries. As the economic crisis deepens, there is a great need for politicians and other public figures to carefully consider their statements to avoid inciting and inflaming ethnic, racial and religious tensions.

All forms of intolerance must be addressed head-on in an even-handed and balanced manner, guaranteeing protection from human rights violations for everybody in society. All acts of hate crime have a far-reaching impact on victims and their communities and require equal attention and commitment when being addressed.

We, the signatories of this statement:

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<sup>1</sup> The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is observed annually on 21 March. On that same day in 1960, police opened fire and killed 69 people at a peaceful demonstration in Sharpeville, South Africa, against the apartheid "pass laws". Proclaiming the Day in 1966, the UN General Assembly called on the international community to redouble its efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

call on political leaders and other public figures to speak out against all forms of violence motivated by racial hatred or xenophobia, and to act responsibly and refrain from providing simplistic explanations with racist, xenophobic or anti-Semitic connotations to complex social, political and economic problems or phenomena;

encourage governments to provide specific training to law enforcement personnel, prosecutors and the judiciary in order to enhance their effectiveness in dealing with racist, xenophobic and other hate crimes;

call on governments to co-operate closely with civil society in the monitoring of racist, xenophobic and other hate crimes, and intensify their efforts to collect data and statistics on such crimes and incidents;

emphasize that governments must ensure that victims of discrimination and hate crime have access to effective remedies to address grievances. Human rights institutions, specialized bodies and victim support organisations must be granted sufficient independence, adequate resources and strong competences to help advance the combat against discrimination.

warn against cutting back essential social protection and inclusion programmes, which can have a disproportional negative impact on marginalized minority and migrant groups already suffering from precarious living conditions.

*Ambassador Janez Lenarčič*

*Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)*

*Anastasia Crickley*

*Chairperson of the Management Board of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)*

*Morten Kjaerum*

*Director of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)*

*Eva Smith Asmussen*

*Chair of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) of the Council of Europe*

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## **Note to editors**

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is based in Warsaw, Poland. It is active throughout Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and North America in the fields of election observation, democratic development, human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, and rule of law. ODIHR serves as a collection point for information, statistics and legislation received from OSCE states on hate crimes. It collects and disseminates best practices for responding to and combating hate crimes and for promoting tolerance and respect. ODIHR monitors incidents of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance, including against Muslims, Christians and members of

other religions. The Office offers assistance and support to governments and civil society in their efforts to combat racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) was established in March 2007 and is based in Vienna. It has three key functions: to collect information and data on fundamental rights; to provide advice to the EU and its Member States; and to promote dialogue with civil society in order to raise public awareness of fundamental rights. FRA monitors racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic incidents across the EU. In April 2009, the Agency will present the first ever EU-wide survey on minorities' experiences of racial discrimination and racist crime covering all the 27 Member States. The Agency surveyed 23,500 persons of ethnic minority or immigrant background in the EU.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is the Council of Europe's independent human rights monitoring body in the field of combating racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance. ECRI's programme of activities comprises three aspects: (1) country-by-country monitoring; (2) work on general themes; and (3) activities in relation with civil society. In 2009, ECRI published the first reports of its 4<sup>th</sup> round of country monitoring reports and its General Policy Recommendation No.12 on combating racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport.