Joint statement on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – 21 March 2010

19 March 2010 – In a joint statement ahead of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 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) strongly condemn manifestations of racism and xenophobia, with a particular focus on the Internet:

We must remain vigilant in the face of racist behaviour and incidents, including hate crimes and malicious expressions of hate and racist sentiments on the Internet.

Our organisations are alarmed by patterns and manifestations of racism such as the ever-increasing use of the Internet by racist groups for recruitment, radicalisation, command and control, as well as for the intimidation and harassment of opponents. The Internet has become an important communications channel that links people in 'cyberspace', who then meet and take action in the physical world.

Social networking sites are now prime locations for the spread of racist and xenophobic views, especially among young people. We must challenge such views, while being careful not to undermine freedom of expression.

The danger emanating from hate spread through the Internet has long been recognized by the international community and our organizations dedicate serious attention to this issue. Prominent examples include ECRI's General Policy Recommendation N° 6 on Combating the Dissemination of Racist, Xenophobic and Antisemitic Material via the Internet and the upcoming 22 March ODIHR expert meeting on challenges of combating crimes motivated by hate on the Internet.

At the same time, we strongly believe in the Internet's huge potential to overcome bias and prejudices based on characteristics including race, colour, language, nationality or national origin or religion. This potential should be fully utilized.

We, the signatories of this statement, believe that:

governments should investigate and prosecute criminal threats of violence based on racial, ethnic, religious or other bias and fully use existing domestic and international legal instruments and co-operation channels in this regard;
governments should provide training to law enforcement officers and prosecutors on addressing hate crimes motivated by racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic or other related bias on the Internet;

governments should reflect on whether national legislation provides an adequate basis to respond to crimes motivated by racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic or other related bias on the Internet;

governments should establish or expand educational programmes for children and young people about expressions motivated by racist, xenophobic, anti-Semitic or other related bias they may encounter on the Internet and include media literacy training in school curricula;

effective measures addressing hate on the Internet that do not endanger freedom of speech and expression should be identified and disseminated;

civil society should explore ways of utilizing the popularity of social networking sites to combat racism;

civil society's efforts to monitor the Internet for manifestations of hate, and efforts to share and publicise the findings should be encouraged and supported;

the Internet industry should take an active role in addressing the issue of hate on the Internet and develop and implement effective complaints response mechanisms while respecting freedom of expression.

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