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***“Exposing racism, intolerance, and inequalities – Commemorating 30 years of ECRI”***  
**Annual seminar with Equality Bodies**  
**of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)**

**Edited transcript of the speech by Michael O’Flaherty**  
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Strasbourg, 17 October 2024

Dear Chair, Deputy Secretary General,

Dear members and former members of ECRI, leaders of Equality Bodies,

Dear friends and colleagues,

It is very nice to be back again, so soon, after speaking to you just a few months ago. I am particularly pleased to be doing so on such a wonderful occasion as the 30th anniversary.

I very much appreciate the very broad representation here today, it is rare. I see so many faces of friends and people that I admire, and I particularly appreciate that you have gone out of your way to have the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) present, you do such closely related work. For me that is nostalgic, because I have my own 30th anniversary this year of being Secretary of CERD, and to hear the name Régis de Gouttes mentioned, almost in the first words of the Chair, was for me very moving.

I join with the President of the Assembly, with the Deputy Secretary General in congratulating ECRI for all of its achievements. You have heard many of them already from the Deputy Secretary General, I do not need to go back over them again, I entirely agree with him.

I would simply add that beyond these concrete institutional achievements at the national level, you have also played a very important role in raising sensitivity, awareness, consciousness of issues of human rights, equality and non-discrimination right across governments.

It is your work in particular that has made, for example, those parts of governments that deal with budgets more sensitive to the issues, and you deserve great acknowledgement for that.

You have also played a global role, your impact is not only found in the Council of Europe area.

When I served as a member of the UN Human Rights Committee, we frequently cited you, we frequently drew on your findings in our engagement with the state parties that were before us, and I am sure the colleagues here from CERD will tell you the same story.

Right now, today, you are leading the way engaging issues such as intersectionality and gender analysis.

How can I sum this up briefly? I found myself looking at what gemstone we associate with a 30th anniversary and I found out that it is with the pearl. Then I checked the symbolism associated with the pearl. And one thing that all the sources agree on is that a pearl represents wisdom, honesty and purity.

Allow me to use those three elements to describe what you have achieved.

First wisdom. By wisdom, I am referring to the extent to which you have given us strong policy guidance, you have unpacked the content of equality and made it meaningful for us, above all through the general policy recommendations. I want to express my deep appreciation for the way you are showing us the way. Right now, I am using GPR 13 on antigypsyism as a very important element of my roadmap as I seek to do my job. That is wisdom.

Second honesty. I think I can easily associate with that quality of honesty with your monitoring work, your sustained attention to the situation in member states. It is a very straightforward and direct engagement.

I was in a country last week and I was told “we did this particular action because of ECRI”. It is that granular, and it really has to be acknowledged with deep respect. The themes you choose for your cycles are always exactly to the point. I cannot help but be struck and frightened by the fact that you have had to include hate in your sixth cycle and in your seventh cycle. That says something chilling about the state of our societies at the moment. But again, it is part of the honest way in which you do your job.

The third of the sentiments, associated with the pearl is purity. Again, I do not have any difficulty in associating this with the story of ECRI. Purity speaks to us of integrity. It speaks to us of courage. It speaks to us of vocationalism. It speaks to us in other words of the qualities of the 46 members of this body and all your predecessors and indeed of the secretariats, so many of whom are here with us today.

Let me assure you of my strong commitment to cooperating with you. You can count on it. We talked about it when we last met.

I am very much looking forward to digging deep into what it means to be in cooperation with each other and to operate in a complementary way, in which there will be a constant process of mutual learning, in the context of a very challenging world.

Before I close, I would like to return briefly to the pearl. The pearl has a very important place in Persian mythology, where it is the supreme symbol of hope.

It is in this spirit that I believe that ECRI stands as a sign of hope. A sign of hope that if we all work together sufficiently smartly and with enough engagement, we can indeed build a better future.

Thank you.