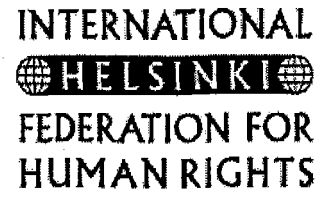


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***Joint statement by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and
the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights at the OSCE
meeting on Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, Vienna, 4 to 5
September 2003***

In Copenhagen in 1990, participating states of the OSCE made a number of commitments to condemn racial and ethnic hatred, including anti-Semitism, and to undertake effective follow up measures to demonstrate these commitments in practice. We welcome the focus of this present meeting, and trust that it will provide the basis for a long-term, sustained effort on the part of participating states -- and the OSCE as an institution -- to combat racial discrimination and violence across the OSCE region.

Racism is an attack on the very notion of universal human rights. It systematically denies certain people their full human rights because of their colour, race, ethnicity, descent or national origin. The right to be free from racial discrimination is a fundamental principle of human rights law -- and a fundamental principle of the human rights the OSCE upholds. Under international human rights law, states are obliged to combat discrimination in all its forms. They have a responsibility to ensure that laws and institutions of the state address the root causes and consequences of discrimination, and secure adequate remedies for those who suffer violations of their fundamental right to equal treatment.

Whether inflicted by agents of the state or by private individuals or groups in the community at large, racism is intimately linked to the subordinate or marginalized position which those targeted for discrimination hold in society. The failure to hold to account those who commit, encourage or acquiesce in racist abuse frequently exacerbates the problem and helps create a climate of impunity for those who commit such acts.

Recognizing that a number of international bodies tasked to monitor manifestations of racism and xenophobia already exist, we recommend that efforts undertaken on the part of the OSCE to combat racial discrimination and violence place a strong emphasis on implementation. One concrete suggestion in this regard would be for the OSCE to convene an ad-hoc inter-agency meeting, bringing together relevant actors at the international and national levels to review states' implementation of recommendations made by expert bodies, including the Council of Europe European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and other Treaty Bodies, as well as the OSCE's own institutions such as the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues.

We believe such an initiative would usefully build on and complement what already exists and lend new impetus to efforts underway. It would also demonstrate that the OSCE can play an active and concrete role in accord with its status in combating the manifestations of racism in all its forms across the OSCE region -- manifestations that remain a stain on commitments to equality and freedom from discrimination.