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**OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting:  
Upholding the Principles of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination including in the  
Promotion and Protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief**

**Session I: Root Causes and Consequences of Racism and Discrimination in  
Connection to Religion or Belief: Implementing the OSCE's Comprehensive  
Approach while Addressing the Particular Needs of Marginalized Groups**

**Statement by Sophie Hofbauer  
UNHCR Liaison Office to the OSCE and Vienna-based UN Agencies  
Vienna, 1 April 2019**

Distinguished Chairperson,  
Dear Participants,

Racial discrimination and related intolerance, in particular in its worst manifestations when cumulating in hate crime and violence, are common causes of flight and can threaten the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees at subsequent stages of the displacement cycle. They can be manifested through restricted access to asylum or negatively affect the quality of asylum. Asylum-seekers and refugees may be denied equal access to public services and become targets of racially motivated acts. What often begins as subtle expressions of dislike and intolerance can gradually develop into institutionalized discrimination, incitement to hatred, verbal and physical abuse and, ultimately, hate crimes, if not countered in time.

Discrimination on the basis of race, religion, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin, sometimes in combination with discrimination on other grounds, is also a recurring cause of statelessness. Statelessness in turn hampers access to rights and itself often leads to discrimination.

Fear of the "Other" typically underlies racist and intolerant sentiments. This fear is compounded by the current global economic crisis and the deteriorating political and social environment in some countries. It poses additional challenges to the protection of people of concern to UNHCR.

The particular vulnerability of asylum-seekers and refugees to racist and xenophobic attitudes and acts is an ongoing issue that needs to be addressed. The necessary public support for the reception of asylum-seekers and refugees continues to be hindered by the tendency of certain media and politicians to confound concerns over irregular migration with those of refugee movements. It is of deep concern to UNHCR that, by some segments of society, asylum-seekers and refugees have been demonized and sometimes are subjected to verbal or even physical attacks.

It is important to acknowledge the humanitarian nature of asylum and the role the institution of asylum plays in protecting human rights. Refugee protection issues should, therefore, not be unduly politicized. Fears of the population should not be ignored but addressed by a well-informed substantial debate, by raising awareness on the causes of displacement and on refugees' plight, as well as by sharing information on the many success stories and contributions of refugees to host societies.

Creative approaches are needed to "roll back xenophobia" and UNHCR is ready to assist States, OSCE and other partners to design and implement programs that promote tolerance towards, and respect for, foreigners, including refugees.

We invite participating States to reiterate their support and show efforts to combat hate crime and work with UNHCR, OSCE and other stakeholders to effectively protect refugees and asylum-seekers vulnerable to xenophobic and racist attacks.

Thank you for your attention!