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ENGLISH only

Address by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)



at the Closing Session of the
OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
on

'Combating Racism, Intolerance, and Discrimination in Society through Sport'

Hofburg, Vienna
20 April 2012

Check against delivery!

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity during the closing session of this event to recapitulate a number of themes and discussions that arose during the SHDM and offer a forward-looking perspective based on some of the recommendations that were presented yesterday and today.

Firstly, I would like to commend Ms. Joia Nuri Jefferson, the keynote speaker of the opening session, who provided us with a historical account of the convergence of race, politics, culture, and sport in America. Her contribution was a useful reminder of the complex nature of the challenges we face in combating racism, intolerance and discrimination in our respective societies. Her - very personal - contribution here set the tone for this SHDM.

Throughout the sessions that followed, we were reminded that within OSCE we have a plethora of commitments on these topics, but that they are not being implemented effectively.

I would like to thank the group of NGOs that participated in a roundtable prior to the SHDM and who presented a set of recommendations during this meeting. They pointed out that

national sports associations and fan clubs should explicitly condemn acts of intolerance and discrimination in sports; they also suggested that sports celebrities should be used more within public awareness raising campaigns to promote understanding, fairness and equality.

We also heard about various initiatives undertaken by institutions such as the Council of Europe and the UNESCO European, Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR) to address these phenomena in society and sport.

Further, we were reminded that sports are a mirror of society and that manifestations of racism, intolerance and discrimination occur within sports as well. This is inherently dangerous because these manifestations have a wider impact, potentially touching people from the youngest of ages, and cutting through all social barriers.

So in my view, we need to be vigilant and raise awareness of the toxic impact these phenomena have on society at large. Sports can and should be used more effectively to counter stereotypes and negative perceptions of those who are victims of discrimination.

Also, we heard once again that we should take advantage of public events like the Euro 2012, the Olympics and Paralympics to raise awareness about racism, intolerance and discrimination. It is reassuring to see that national football associations are supporting this drive. I would like to commend initiatives such as the efforts presented from the floor by Mr. Piara Powar of *Football Against Racism in Europe* that engage wider society about the impact of racism, intolerance and discrimination through education awareness raising campaigns.

Similar efforts need to be enhanced and ODIHR is ready to collaborate with domestic football associations, fan clubs, law enforcement, schools, communities, and NGOs in this regard.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you all for your involvement during this SHDM and your continued commitment to addressing racism and xenophobia. We look forward to working with you all in the future.

Thank you.