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United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Statement at the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on the Role of National Institutions Against Discrimination in Combating Racism and Xenophobia

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Julie Finley
May 30, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

We would like to express our thanks to the ODIHR for organizing this conference. We think we were particularly lucky that Naomi Earp, the Chairperson of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and who has a lengthy professional background in combating racial and other types of discrimination, was able to come to Vienna to provide valuable insights on best practices and continuing challenges in the United States.

The United States takes pride in its rich history of ethnic and cultural diversity. The implementation of our democratic ideals is a gradual and continuing process that has required political action, legal developments and social transitions. We have learned valuable lessons along the way, including the necessity of reconciling sometimes competing interests: the moral imperative to achieve equality; the shifting legal, political and societal landscape; and the economic realities of success. Like others, we are well down the road of progress, but have long distances yet ahead to achieve equality.

The United States has numerous federal, state and local departments and agencies which enforce civil rights laws and provide education, training and technical assistance to stakeholders and the public. Most states and many local governments have civil rights or human rights commissions or offices that administer and enforce state and local laws prohibiting discrimination in areas such as employment, education, housing, and access to public accommodations.

Numerous non-governmental organizations and associations promote ethnic and racial tolerance, including the Anti-Defamation League, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, the Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Council of La Raza and the Southern Poverty Law Center.

It is important that the OSCE continue to address such important issues on a regular basis. We support firmly the efforts of the Chairman's Three Personal Representatives on tolerance to raise awareness of tolerance-related issues at the political level. The United States believes that the Personal Representatives provide a critical link between OSCE institutions and civil society organizations fighting intolerance at the grassroots level in participating states.

Combating intolerance and discrimination remains a very important issue. However, we must ensure that the ODIHR's work in this area remains focused on themes where we have reached consensus - combating anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, Christians and members of other religions, and racism, xenophobia and related intolerance.

In our view, OSCE participating States have consciously and correctly limited the scope of OSCE interest in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination to those that could threaten the security of the region.

Finally, we again join everyone in thanking the ODIHR for this meeting. And we most certainly thank Ambassador Strohal for the innumerable opportunities for such discussion that he has overseen these past years.

Thank you Mr. Chairman