

**Statement by Human Rights First
Working Session 5
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One of the assumptions of this session is that the “plurality of communities” and “harmonious inter-ethnic relations” strengthens states’ stability and cohesion. In this connection, this session is designed to examine the underlying causes of exclusion of national and other minorities as well as the ways in which states can develop institutional arrangements to ensure the active participation of national and other minorities.

Violent hate crimes – particularly in a climate in which there is a weak or nonexistent government response – are one such powerful cause of exclusion. These crimes – in which an individual is targeted because of their identity – reverberate far beyond the immediate victim, threatening whole communities who identify with the victim because of their race, religion, or other attributes, leaving many to live in fear and alienated from the larger society.

Members of communities who fear violence cannot move freely in towns and cities, much less participate fully in the larger society. Even where hate crimes don’t involve severe violence, the result may be progressive marginalization and exclusion, largely barring those under threat from the exercise of rights taken for granted by others. The right to live and worship where and how one pleases, to participate fully in political life and to enjoy economic, social, and cultural rights, including equality in employment, education and access to social services are all affected. By undermining the shared value of equality, hate crimes threaten the very fabric of the increasingly diverse societies in which we live.

Thus, in their efforts to promote equality and inclusion, governments need to take particular care to ensure the basic security of those who are vulnerable to hate crime. Yet, governments have until now not done enough to stem a rising tide of violent hate crimes. As Human Rights First reported in the annual hate crime survey we released last week, racist and xenophobic violence has been on the rise in a number of OSCE countries. Although comprehensive and systematic data collection systems are unavailable in most OSCE states, government monitoring systems in a number of countries showed moderate to high rises in the overall numbers of hate crimes in 2006 and 2007—the latest figures available. These include **Finland, Ireland, the Slovak Republic, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States**. Over a longer period of time—between 2000 and 2006—eight European countries experienced an upward trend in recorded racist crime: **Denmark, Germany, France, Ireland, Slovakia, Finland, and the United Kingdom**.

Where government data is unavailable, information from nongovernmental monitors provided evidence of rising levels of racist violence in 2007 in **Greece, Italy, the**

Russian Federation, Switzerland, and Ukraine. Available figures may only be the tip of the iceberg, however. Media and NGO surveys suggest that in many cases violence is not being reported to or recorded by police.

Human Rights First is particularly concerned about the proliferation of racist and other bias-motivated violence toward racial and ethnic minorities in the **Russian Federation**. NGO monitors there report that the number of violent hate crimes against individuals has grown steadily at some 20 percent per year since 2004. Unfortunately, 2008 is on track to be the fourth record-setting year in a row. The annual number of bias-motivated murders is approaching 100, possibly the highest in the OSCE region. The most serious of these hate crimes are being committed by loosely organized groups of neo-Nazi skinheads, united by an ideology of extreme nationalism and racism.

Governments across the region need to do more to stem the threat that violent hate crime poses to their societies. First and foremost, law enforcement officials should respond vigorously to individual incidents and hold the perpetrators of these crimes accountable. But governments should also be developing longer-term mechanisms to confront this challenge. In particular, we are calling on governments – in line with OSCE commitments they have already undertaken – to establish systems of official monitoring and data collection. This is an essential means to assess and respond to patterns of discriminatory violence. Without public reporting on the criminal justice response to hate crimes, it is difficult to ensure that adequate legal tools and resources are in place to investigate and prosecute such crimes and to reassure the public that efforts are being made to provide equal protection to all. At present, we have determined that only 13 of the 56 OSCE states have adequate monitoring systems.

Combating hate crime effectively involves a combination of efforts from a variety of government bodies and civil society actors. National antidiscrimination bodies – another topic of discussion in this session – have an important role to play in these efforts. Human Rights First was pleased to have taken part in the civil society preparatory meeting in conjunction with the SHDM on “The Role of National Institutions Against Discrimination in Combating Racism and Xenophobia.” In a document presented to governments, civil society groups made a number of recommendations, including that National Institutions Against Discrimination should:

- Be involved in monitoring, reporting and addressing the issue of hate-motivated violence
- Have the capacity to track cases through the criminal justice system
- Play a role in the harmonization of hate crime data collection and analysis by different public and private entities.
- Engage in efforts to encourage reporting and registration of incidents against vulnerable groups.

Providing these institutions with strong mandates to take on these functions will go a long way in ensuring a more robust government response to violent hate crimes, and by

extension, play a role in promoting the inclusion of all national and other minorities in society.