

Members of the European Parliament

Brussels, 19 March 2007
Our ref: B639

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

**Subject: International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination:
Amnesty International urges the EU to implement concrete measures**

While the European Union celebrates the "European Year of Equal Opportunities for All", Amnesty International remains concerned that racism and discrimination are severe and widespread, affecting all EU Member States.

- Foreign nationals and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected by excessive use of force by law enforcement officials. Discrimination reinforces impunity for police officers who act in the knowledge that abuses will not be investigated thoroughly, if indeed at all.
- The rights of asylum seekers and migrants are increasingly curtailed, due to discriminatory laws and practices and in the name of 'security'.
- Romani communities in numerous European countries face discrimination in access to economic, social and cultural rights, in particular education. Member States also fail to act with due diligence to protect members of this minority group from attacks by private actors.
- Residents are denied their right to citizenship in Slovenia by "erasure" from the registry, resulting in the denial of access to the basic rights to employment, housing, social benefits, pensions, health care and education.
- With regard to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, state authorities in several countries fail to guarantee the right to freedom of assembly and to display due diligence to protect the LGBT community against violent attacks.
- Gender-based discrimination is a recurring contributing factor of violence against women. Migrant women, women from minority communities and women with disabilities find themselves at even greater risk of further human rights violations as a result of 'double discrimination'.

Amnesty International is concerned about the glaring gap between pledges and actual practice. Not even half of EU Member States have implemented national action plans against racism, or ratified the 12th Optional Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights. At the same time, EU legislation with regard to non-discrimination remains fragmented, to date limited to two Council Directives that cover neither all grounds nor all acts of discrimination.

Amnesty International therefore calls on the Council and the Commission to:

- press for the implementation of the Race Equality Directive and the Employment Equality Directive;
- legislate to provide effective protection against racist crime and hate speech across the EU, while safeguarding freedom of expression;
- upgrade legislation with the objective of providing for equal and effective protection for all grounds and acts of discrimination.

Furthermore, Amnesty International calls on the EU Member States to:

- sign and ratify Optional Protocol 12 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms during this present Year of Equal Opportunities for All;
- ensure that national legislation provides equal and effective protection against all grounds and acts of discrimination;
- adopt, implement and evaluate National Action Plans against racism according to commitments made at the 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban.

We urge the European Parliament to take such steps as it deems appropriate to ensure that these measures are given the necessary priority. Racism and discrimination constitute Europe's key human rights problem, and that requires action to match.

Yours sincerely,



Dick Oosting

Director
Amnesty International EU Office