

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL EU OFFICE

PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: IOR 61/010/2007 (Public)
News Service No: 052
21 March 2007

Racism and discrimination - Europe's key human rights problem

(Brussels, 21 March) While the EU celebrates the Year of Equal Opportunities for all, racism and discrimination remains severe and widespread as a fundamental human rights problem across the EU, says Amnesty International on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

"Besides the very real threat of verbal abuse and physical violence, there are citizens who cannot lead a normal life - find a job, rent a house or simply walk down the street without being stopped and searched - just because they have the "wrong" colour or ethnicity," said Dick Oosting, Amnesty International's EU Office director.

In a letter to the EU Commission, Council and the European Parliament, (available at www.amnesty-eu.org), the human rights organization urged that concrete measures are implemented to end racist discrimination that, as EU Commissioner Franco Frattini recently stated: "is tremendously on the rise in Europe".

"We have seen what racism has done to Europe in the past, there is a historical responsibility to tackle this issue with utmost priority. European citizens are clearly concerned about this problem which affects the daily lives of millions of people," said Oosting.

Whilst welcoming initiatives such as the Year of Equal Opportunities, Amnesty International is concerned by 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 Protocol that would allow taking to court cases of discrimination.

Over the past two years Amnesty International has extensively documented how laws and practices discriminate foreign nationals and ethnic minorities across Europe. How in France and the UK Muslim communities are increasingly targeted, how in Greece, Spain and Italy the rights of asylum seekers and migrants have been curtailed, and how in several central European countries Roma communities are denied their economic, social and cultural rights. ([click here for more examples](#)).

"All these examples show that discrimination is a key human rights problem for Europe. It cuts across and aggravates abuse in the important areas where human rights are at risk, especially counter-terrorism and irregular immigration", said Oosting.

Amnesty International calls on the EU to:

- Press for the implementation of the Race Equality Directive and the Employment Equality Directive;
- Upgrade its legislation and provide for equal and effective protection for all grounds and acts of discrimination;
- Legislate to provide effective protection against racist crime and hate speech across the EU, while safeguarding freedom of expression.

And calls on 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;
- 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.