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Statement by Human Rights First

**Working Session 5: Preventing aggressive nationalism,
racism and chauvinism
September 30, 2009**

Human Rights First has documented a growing wave of aggressive hate crime violence throughout Europe and North America. Hate crime is one of the most destructive manifestations of aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism. Many governments are failing to respond adequately to violence motivated by racism, religious intolerance, xenophobia, and homophobia. Poor police investigations and unsatisfactory prosecutions of individual incidents fuel and perpetuate aggressive racism and nationalism.

In many countries, among the perpetrators of racist and other bias-motivated violent acts are those who belong to groups that adhere to ultranationalist and extreme right-wing ideologies. These perpetrators are drawn typically from ordinary citizens who are receptive to a pervasive message of supremacy, hatred and fear of those who do not fit a particular ideal. Across the OSCE region, tens of thousands of mostly young people have been mobilized in a loosely organized movement of “skinheads” united by aggressive nationalist ideology.

Racist and bias violence is often being perpetrated in an atmosphere in which the ultranationalist and racist discourse is not limited to extremist groups, but has extended into the mainstream through certain political parties and media outlets. Such discourse is increasingly a part of mainstream politics—for example, as evidenced by the xenophobic rhetoric used by a number of political parties in this year’s elections to the European Parliament. Xenophobic statements by political leaders and media coverage exacerbate preexisting fears and prejudices among the public at large.

Hate crimes victimize a wide range of communities across Europe and North America by reason of their origins, and the color of their skin. Threatened communities are often distinguished by their ethnic or national origin, religious affiliation, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, and include both national minorities and people of immigrant origin, citizens and noncitizens, longtime residents and newcomers. Extreme groups have also carried out attacks on government offices, police precincts and law enforcement officers, as well as human rights defenders and activists working to promote the concepts of tolerance and nondiscrimination in their respective societies.

Human Rights First has been particularly concerned about the attacks on racial and ethnic minorities in the Russian Federation. We are glad to note that authorities appear to take the

HEADQUARTERS
333 Seventh Avenue
13th Floor
New York, NY 10001
Tel: 212.845.5200
Fax: 212.845.5299

WASHINGTON D.C. OFFICE
100 Maryland Avenue, N.E.
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20002
Tel: 202.547.5692
Fax: 202.543.5999

www.humanrightsfirst.org

problem more seriously; however, in order for the fight with aggressive nationalism to succeed in Russia, the government must be open to international collaboration and willing to implement a set of comprehensive policies put forth by the likes of Human Rights First, the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, and other anti-racism nonprofits focusing on this problem.

In Hungary too, Human Rights First has raised concerns about an apparent rise in the incidence of violent acts against Roma that in many cases appear to be motivated by bias against the victim's ethnicity. NGO monitors have documented a disturbing pattern of such cases, ranging from severe beatings in broad daylight to murders by arson or shootings.

Prevention of aggressive nationalism and racism requires comprehensive policies, directed at both addressing the urgent need to curtail the rise of bias-motivated violence and instituting programs that promote a culture of respect for human rights throughout society.

Human Rights First recommends that the participating States continue to:

- **Send clear signals to police and prosecutors** about the importance of combating aggressive nationalism and racism, and project a categorical response to the perpetrators of this violence, **ensuring** that those responsible for hate crimes are held accountable under the law, and that the record of accountability is well documented and publicized.
- **Empower national antidiscrimination and human rights bodies** with the mandate to address violent hate crimes through monitoring, reporting, and assistance to victims.
- **Conduct outreach and education efforts to communities and civil society groups** to reduce fear and assist victims, advance police-community relations, encourage better reporting of hate crimes to the police and improve the quality of data collection by law enforcement bodies.