

Equality is a right, not a charity - FRA Director Morten Kjaerum on the eve of the 2nd EU Equality Summit (29-09-2008)

“For millions of people in the EU, discrimination and inequalities remain daily experiences. This is a disgrace EU governments must address head-on”, said Morten Kjaerum, Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), ahead of the European Union’s second ever Equality Summit (Paris) on 29-30 September. “This Summit sends a powerful political signal that the EU will work together to root out discrimination. Determined action must follow the Summit in order to put ideals into realities.”

Morten Kjaerum added: “The European Union can take pride in its existing equality legislation. However, the best legislation is useless if people are not aware of it. How is it possible that only one third of our citizens say that they know their rights, should they be a victim of discrimination? I call on EU governments to fulfil their legal obligation to inform people about their rights and give them the means to realise them. At every airport you find posters with passengers’ rights. Why don’t we give the same visibility to the right to equality - in town halls, companies, schools or at the local post office? Equality is a right and not a charity.”

He continued: “We need the appropriate structures to make rights work. I am talking about creating competent bodies where victims of discrimination can go. By the end of 2007, three Member States had not even installed an equality body. In other Member States, equality bodies – though existing - have been rather invisible in tackling discrimination. Governments must ensure that equality bodies are truly independent and have strong powers, and that they are adequately resourced – the car won’t run without petrol.”

“In addition, there are still gaps in the legal protection against discrimination. Currently, in many Member States, some groups are better protected by legislation than others,” said Morten Kjaerum. “This is not right. People must have equal rights to equal treatment. The new non-discrimination package proposed by the European Commission in July would close this gap. It would ensure that all forms of discrimination are tackled with the same vigour of the law. I hope that this Summit will bring EU governments closer to a consensus on this important new piece of EU legislation.”

Background to the Equality Summit:

- The French Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission are organising this second Equality Summit on 29 and 30 September 2008 in Paris. The summit will bring together 400 high-ranking delegates and representatives from the field of equal opportunities around a single aim: effectively applying the principles of non-discrimination in the European Union. The Summit aims at giving fresh impetus to the promotion of equality by creating a longer-term

perspective, the next stage of which will be a follow-up summit held by the Swedish Presidency in 2009. More on www.ue2008.fr

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Further reading on FRA's work and findings:

- FRA is a body of the European Union. It was established in March 2007 and is based in Vienna. The Agency has three key functions: to collect information and data on fundamental rights; to provide advice to the EU and its Member States; and to promote dialogue with civil society in order to raise public awareness of fundamental rights.
- FRA's Annual Report 2008 (June 2008) provides ample evidence that discriminatory behaviour and racist violence persist across the EU. The report finds that in many countries these phenomena are not yet effectively addressed through the means that the current EU anti-discrimination legislation offers.
- FRA's recent study on "Homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation in the EU Member States Part I – legal analysis" (June 2008) highlighted the fact that not all discrimination grounds benefit from the same high level of legal protection in the EU.

These and other FRA studies are available at <http://fra.europa.eu>

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