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## **FOOTBALL FIGHTS RACISM, 3 September 2009**

Building a safe and diverse Finland

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

First of all, I would like to thank you for the invitation to take part in this seminar. It is a pleasure and honour to be here as this is an excellent forum for hearing different ways to tackle racism and discrimination by means of sports.

This seminar is also an opportunity for me to say loud and clear that I do not accept racism in any of its forms.

**Recession has hardened attitudes  
- we can feel it and hear it also here in Finland**

In recent days we have had news reports of Romanians being forced to flee their homes in Ireland. Images of Mohammed published in Denmark sparked riots around the world. Rioting also took place in France and Sweden. In Finland, an eight-year-old Somali girl was pushed out of train on her way to school in the morning. These are not just problems affecting individual countries, but problems that are shared throughout Europe. The recession has only hardened people's attitudes and racism has increased. In the new millennium, the situation has changed, problems have come to a head, and racist phenomena are becoming more widespread in Europe.

This is also a question about human rights. Discrimination based on ethnic origin is strictly prohibited, and yet it occurs.

This is something especially us Finns should remember. After the Second World War, 600,000 Finns emigrated to Sweden. During the World War alone, 70,000 unaccompanied children were sent to Sweden and Denmark. Despite a similar way of life shared by all Nordic countries, reconciling the slight differences in our cultures and customs presented many problems. And it wasn't so easy - sharing the very same Nordic culture, in spite of that. Therefore, we should remember. We should remember how different cultures can coexist.

## **Sports are international in nature**

Sports have a common language.

This language brings together young and old people, without paying attention to people's ethnic background. Thanks to sports, many immigrants have integrated well into a foreign country. People working with young immigrants often emphasise that sports and physical activities are important to young people who have moved to Finland, and out of all hobbies, sports, and particularly football, bring joy and create a sense of togetherness.

Top athletes affect our attitudes. We all know what an impact, for example, Jesse Owens, Joe Lewis, Mohammed Ali and Carl Lewis have had on the identity and status of Afro-Americans in the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Children playing football all over the world pretend to be a Pele, Maradona and these days also Cristiano Ronaldo. Over the last few decades, female athletes have also achieved the status they deserve as idols. I am sure that top disabled athletes will also become much better known among the general public in the near future. There are already signs of this. And this will have a great impact on attitudes towards disabled people in our society.

Although I am happy about the success of Finnish female athletes in general, particularly since we did not win any medals at the IAAF World Championships in Athletics, I think, however, that we may pay too much attention to the success of different individual states. But, of course I,m happy and proud of the success of finnis female team.

Sports should cross the boundaries of nationalities. As a whole we should be more pleased about great performances, and weed all nationalistic traits out of sports. In my childhood, all little boys in my home town pretended to be a Pele, regardless of their skin colour. I think this was the case throughout the world. Every little boy wanted to be a Pele, whatever his skin colour.

## **Ministry of the Interior combats discrimination**

Since the start of 2008, the Ministry of the Interior's vision has been "Building a safe and diverse Finland". In addition to steering the police service, rescue services and the Border Guard, the ministry is responsible for immigration policy and the fight against discrimination based on ethnic origin. Promoting good ethnic relations is an important part of the ministry's immigration policy. The Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations, which functions under the auspices of the ministry, increases dialogue between different ethnic minorities and authorities, and makes sure that immigrant

organisations get an opportunity to be heard in matters concerning them. In addition, the Ministry of the Interior coordinates and implements the EU anti-discrimination policy.

Today's theme - the fight against racism - is an important part of the Ministry of the Interior's work. We have organised, for example, numerous training events on anti-discrimination and equality for different target groups, such as police officers, border guards, shop stewards and NGOs. We have looked into how racism is taken into consideration in judicial proceedings. We have taken part in building an anti-discrimination training programme and preparing related material for all conscripts and civilian crisis management personnel in Finland. We have also trained immigrant organisations to plan and implement anti-discrimination projects. Finland has also started to register and compile statistics on hate crimes. What is more, we have started to build a wide-ranging monitoring system to detect discrimination.

Finland will take steps to rewrite its integration legislation. The aim is to broaden integration services so that all immigrants would have access to them. Moreover, we aim to build, together with municipalities, special integration programmes which would provide immigrants with substantially more training in Finnish language and also civic orientation on Finland during the first year of the programme. The aim with all this is to accelerate immigrant participation in Finnish society.

It is not acceptable that the unemployment rate among immigrants is constantly three times bigger than among Finns. The recession has further increased immigrant unemployment, which has risen faster than unemployment among Finns.

It is still too early to have a clear view of the full impact of the crisis on migration flows and immigrants' status in labour market, but from the past we know that the immigrants are among those who are hardest hit in the labour market during a downturn.

Immigrants are generally more vulnerable during an economic crisis because

- They tend to be overrepresented in sectors which are more sensitive to the business cycle
- They have less secured work contract arrangements having more temporary and part-time jobs
- They are overrepresented in less skilled occupations
- They face potential discrimination in hiring and layoffs and
- Their own businesses maybe more unstable and thus at a risk of bankruptcy.

I believe that it is not yet too late to learn the lesson of this crisis; once again we were reminded that the labour market is very dynamic and changes there may be very rapid

and dramatic. Thus, we should pay more attention to adapt our temporary labour migration systems so as to be more responsive to short-term economic shocks.

In Sweden they even made their labourmarket more open and easy for foreign labour and already now they can show that results are fairly good.

During this autumn, the Government will set guidelines for promoting immigrant employment.

### **Discrimination-free Zone**

Working together and social participation could be keywords for this event. Combating racism means first and foremost that we need to work together, conquer our inner fears, increase information and get to know other people. Sports and physical activities provide excellent preconditions for this.

For this reason we at the Ministry of the Interior have considered it important to launch and take part in measures against discrimination in sports. When the Finnish Multicultural Sports Federation (FIMU) proposed a few years ago that we cooperate in planning an anti-discrimination campaign, we were more than happy to accept the offer. Out of this cooperation arose the campaign '**Discrimination-free Zone**'. Organisations representing different minority groups have also later participated in its implementation. These organisations include the Finnish League for Human Rights, SETA (an NGO for promoting sexual equality), the Finnish Sports Federation and Helsingin Sanomat, which is Finland's leading national newspaper.

The campaign 'Discrimination-free Zone' challenges businesses, organisations and associations to declare themselves discrimination-free. Anyone can issue this challenge by sending a Discrimination-free Zone card to the body they want to challenge

Declaring a discrimination-free zone means combating and tackling discrimination and recognising the equality of all people. Declaring discrimination-free is also a sign for employees, job-seekers and customers that the organisation welcomes all people, regardless of their gender, age, ethnic background, religion or conviction, opinions, state of health, disability or sexual orientation.

Bodies taking part in the campaign will be sent a Discrimination-free Zone sign which they have committed to post in a visible place in their premises, for example in a coffee room, factory, lobby or school. Nice blue signs are hanging on the walls in the ministry of the interior building.

There are currently some 200 organisations that have declared discrimination-free. These include sports clubs, ministries, police departments, fire brigades, educational institutions and even a snack bar. This year we will increase the campaign's visibility in sports. Cooperation with the Finnish Sports Federation strives to challenge both sports clubs and authorities that supervise sports centres to declare themselves discrimination-free. Former top athlete – and children's books author – Wilson Kirva has promised to support the campaign.

It would be great if the campaign material would reach its target user group with the help of trainers and coaches in different sports. They have a great impact on the development of values among children and young people. Coaches and trainers who are committed to anti-discrimination can pass on important values to developing children and youngsters and this way act as an example of how diversity can be encountered in everyday life.

### **Ladies and gentlemen,**

While I have the opportunity, I would like to challenge all the bodies present here today to declare themselves discrimination-free. The declaration can be made at the address [www.yhdenvertaisuus.fi](http://www.yhdenvertaisuus.fi) (equality.fi). The pages are currently being translated into English, and they should be ready and available for use in a couple of weeks.

Just like playing football, working together is not always easy: there are many kinds of techniques, styles and tactics. Playing or working together towards a common goal can, however, be learnt if one is prepared for it and there is motivation.

The seeds of conflict often lie in ignorance, or not understanding the customs of a different culture. Prejudices grow from ignorance. The problems we face may also be quite everyday in their nature. The public discussion in Finland focuses currently on why Muslim women cannot use a public swimming pool without their own private turn. For us Finns, to whom the sauna is part of our everyday life, this was something new. Today, nearly every city has set aside a separate turn for these groups, and swimming goes smoothly. Immigrant women in particular often face double discrimination: firstly because they are women and secondly because they are immigrants.

**Ladies and gentleman,**

Racism targets values protected by society, such as equality, anti-discrimination and tolerance. It is something more than just a scuffle between two neighbours. Or a simple case of slander. It undermines the basic values of a pluralist Western democracy. An act of racism challenges the human dignity of others. Let,s hit the ball and say no to rasicm. We are building safe and diverse Finland here today.

Thank you for your attention.