SOME PRINCIPLES FOR LOCAL STRATEGIES AGAINST RACISM

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In this presentation I shall draw on my experience of working in the field of racism and minorities for more than thirty years, both in Britain and across Europe. Currently I work as an independent consultant, undertaking activities such as research, training, policy development and implementation, and evaluation. Formerly I was engaged in academic teaching and research, and I have always been closely involved in work with anti-racist organisations and NGOs. For a long while I worked exclusively in Britain, but for the past ten years I have been increasingly involved in transnational projects for bodies such as the Council of Europe and the European Commission, and also in working in Central/Eastern Europe on issues relating to Roma. While some of this work has been at national level, much of it has been concerned with developing innovative approaches at local and municipal level. I shall try to draw out from this varied experience some key principles on which local-level action against racism needs to be based if it to be effective.

1. Local strategies should address, and should be based on an analysis of, the specific characteristics of racism in the local area.

Within Europe's nation-states, local and regional situations are extremely varied. So is the extent and character of racism. Many factors contribute to this variability: the history of the area, its population composition and movements, the local economic situation, relations between the majority and minorities, and so on. Strategies that do not address this local specificity will be ineffective. The local level is also the level at which community action takes place, and is the level of delivery of most public services. The establishment of local-level anti-racism NGOs such as Racial Equality Councils in Britain and Anti-Discrimination Bureaus in the Netherlands helps local authorities and community groups to identify and then take practical action to address locally-specific issues and circumstances. National anti-racism policies (both of governments and NGOs) need to recognise the importance of, and provide support for, local-level action.

2. Local strategies should recognise that racism does not just consist of acts of overt physical violence by overtly extremist groups: it also includes 'everyday racism', 'institutional racism', and the 'effortless advantage' enjoyed by dominant groups.

There is a danger that action to combat racism becomes too strongly (or even exclusively) focussed on the overt acts of physical violence that are perpetrated by skinheads and other extremist groups. While such acts may be extremely shocking and harmful to the victims, they are only 'the tip of the iceberg' of racism and xenophobia. In many areas, minorities experience daily acts of discrimination and harassment (or threats of, or simply fear of such acts); i.e. 'everyday racism' which may be experienced at work, in the neighbourhood, in public places, and so on. Secondly there is the systematic, though usually covert and sometimes unintended or indirect racism that is practised by government institutions and other powerful organisations - highlighted as 'institutional racism' by the Stephen Lawrence Murder Inquiry in the UK. And thirdly there is the 'effortless advantage' enjoyed by members of majority or dominant groups who do not have to face the threat (and on occasion the reality) of racial discrimination or unprovoked violence as they go about their daily lives. All these dimensions of racism, the factors that give rise to them, and their potentially debilitating impact on minorities, need to be addressed by local-level strategies.

3. Local strategies need to take account of the impact of external factors on the local scene, and also draw on external resources in solving local problems.

Local situations have of course been shaped by regional and national histories, and continue to be influenced by factors at these levels. National politics, national media, and national-level racist and anti-racist movements play a major role. Specific local incidents, such as the murder of Stephen Lawrence in south-east London, and the building of the wall between Roma and white Czech residents in Ústí nad Labem, are two examples of how incidents can acquire national and even international significance. In both cases, anti-racist activists highlighted local injustice on the national stage, and the instances became symbolic of national conditions. At the same time, however, local solutions remained necessary for what were local problems, and local individuals and groups were struggling to address these. However, local resources (understanding, skills, money, etc) are often inadequate to carry out the work that is needed. External assistance, e.g. from central government, and (in Central/Eastern Europe) from international sources, is essential for the development and implementation of local strategies against racism.

4. Local strategies need to be genuinely 'strategic', in both their thinking and their execution.

In many localities in Europe, enterprising projects and other initiatives have been introduced to combat racism. Often they have short-term funding and then disappear with no lasting

impact. Also, they are often isolated from each other and uncoordinated. To overcome these problems, genuinely 'strategic' approaches are needed, with activities that are systematically planned, coordinated, properly resourced, sustainable, and capable of achieving long-term anti-racist goals. The City of Brno in the Czech Republic, with the assistance of consultants from the Council of Europe, has been one of the first in C/E Europe to draw up such a plan for the integration of the Roma minority. The elaboration of a clear strategic vision for a multi-ethnic city is also an essential requirement. The 'Reading Declaration' outlines such a vision and strategy for the City of Reading in the UK. The Rotterdam Charter, "Policing for a Multi-Ethnic Society", has been the initiative of the Dutch City, and sets out a vision specifically for policing which is now being widely adopted at municipal level across Europe.

5. Local strategies need to be preventive, as well as providing justice and support for those who have been victims of racist acts, and sanctions for the perpetrators.

Local strategies need to ensure that those who are victims of racism have the confidence to report incidents to the responsible authorities, that they will receive personal support from these authorities, and that they will in due course be able to obtain justice as a result of effective action by the police, courts, etc. The authorities in turn need to be able to ensure that the perpetrators of such acts will be identified and dealt with effectively by the criminal justice system or other appropriate mechanisms. Because local community groups and NGOs are likely to have the confidence of victims and their families, the authorities should be prepared to provide funding for such groups to provide support and advice for victims of racism. Two examples from the UK are the organisations GACARA in the London Borough of Greenwich, and SARI in Bristol. At the same time, however, the aim must be prevention. Firm action against perpetrators can itself be a deterrent. Authorities should also introduce community safety measures, such as protective observations, monitoring known violent racists, regular contact with vulnerable groups: this type of approach is being developed by local Community Safety Units in the London Metropolitan Police. In the long run, however, education of young people is the key, and teachers and local schools need to introduce programmes to develop inter-racial understanding and respect.

6. Local strategies should give priority to empowering the communities that experience racism, but they should also equip governmental and other institutions to tackle the problem.

Tackling racism is fundamentally about tackling inequalities of power between groups. Local strategies therefore need to give priority to empowering those communities that experience

racism, so that they can play a leading role in combating such racism and overcoming its effects. However, public authorities have a formal responsibility for tackling racism, and local strategies must ensure they are equipped (e.g. through specialist advice and training) to carry out this role, and there should be provision for monitoring and evaluation to ensure that they do so effectively. In the UK, local Racial Equality Councils have the task of promoting both community development among minorities and policy development in institutions, as well as undertaking legal and other case-work. A community-based approach to the development and implementation of local strategies against racism is essential: without this, strategies will neither have credibility nor be effective. This type of community-based partnership approach with civic authorities is the basic model being deployed for work on Roma issues in C/E Europe in the new RrAJE Programme (Roma Rights and Access to Justice in Europe).

7. Local strategies should be 'multi-agency': i.e. to involve in a coordinated way all those agencies with a capability to tackle racism, including NGOs and community groups.

Racism cannot be eliminated by any one agency such as the police, local government or NGOs working alone: all these and other agencies too have a role to play in local strategies, and need to do so in a coordinated manner. Police, the courts, probation services, schools, housing authorities, welfare agencies, legal advice centres, residents associations, anti-racist organisations, and religious and ethnic community groups - all these and more may need to come together and cooperate if local action against racism in to be effective. In the UK, the 'multi-agency approach' is well-established, and written guidance has been been published by the Home Office and the Commission for Racial Equality. In the London Borough of Greenwich, this type of approach has been formalised in 'The Greenwich Accord', a formal statement of commitment and cooperation between the police, the municipal authority, and the local Racial Equality Council. In Rotterdam, the anti-discrimination NGO RADAR developed a formal cooperation with the police and prosecutor's office to help progress discrimination cases. Implementing this approach, however, is not easy, and agencies need to develop a good appreciation of each other's roles, styles, strengths and limitations, e.g. by holding multi-agency training seminars. An example of good practice from Barcelona involves the UNESCO Centre for Human Rights which, in developing an EU-funded project on police training against racism, spent a full year building an effective coalitions and partnerships between police, community groups and other bodies before the training programme was implemented.

8. Local strategies must gain the support of local political and other leaders, and of local media, so they gain maximum support and legitimacy among the population as a whole.

This is the most obvious yet usually the most difficult principle to implement: often the political leadership and media reflect the views of majority groups who may be unfavourable if not hostile to minorities, and who may be unwilling to challenge racism even when they do not condone it. Building support from political leaders for strategies for tackling racism, and persuading them to provide genuine leadership on these issues is, however, in the long run one of the most important pre-conditions of success for local strategies against racism. Building alliances, using tactics that do not alienate potential supporters, focussing on common ground rather than differences, raising awareness of the benefits to all of combating discrimination, and being open and honest at all times - these are some of the techniques necessary for securing broad-based support whilst never compromising the basic goals and principles of anti-racism.

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