

*Jeffrey Labovitz**

UKRAINE ON ITS WAY TO COMBAT RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

Ombudsman office has been very active, the Ministry of Interior has set up a distinct unit only to investigate these crimes, Security Services of Ukraine have done likewise and set up co-ordination mechanisms. My office meets with every one of these regularly and discusses trends and problems and approaches. And this is the model for other countries, where civic society and government and international organizations are working together to address an issue, and it's good.

2009 statistics: after the government and institutions are working together, and I think, the police have done some good work too, a huge increase number of attacks has now resulted in a huge decrease. It's not because the year is young, at this time last year we had at least triple the number of attacks. One reason why is that the message has gone to extremists groups that you just can't go beat an African and stab him in the night with a knife and nobody's going to investigate – you're gonna be investigated and you're gonna be arrested. That's a message which has gone out. We still have a lot of problems. But the number of violent racial attacks with government working together with civic society to look at this human rights issue has seen a huge decrease. And this is another reason why we recognize Ukrainian efforts.

Ukraine has invited ODIHR to human rights organization associated with OSCE to come and work with the Ministry of Interior, the third country in a former USSR that asked for assistance. The Ministry of Interior and the General Prosecutors Office have a Decree to record statistics on racially motivated attacks. This is great progress. There are special departments in the Ministry of Interior, Security Services and Foreign Affairs and there started to be convictions using hate crime. That's been a problem – there are no convictions with a lot of different attacks 2 years ago. Last year we actually saw convictions of racially motivated crimes and, again, we a decrease in numbers. There's a Ministry of Education Decree that universities, it's not a must, but, should engage in awareness raising and prevention activities. Globalization and economic crisis make everything more important here. We're looking at educational institutions where people are even younger to talk to them about racial diversity and what that means and that we don't have to be scared of each other or hate each other. Just recently the Security service initiated the establishment of independent commission to look at investigation of hate crimes.

One thing that we're trying to get out nationally is a programme where we bring people from different lives and they go to educational institutions and it's called "living libraries" and they share their experiences. My wife is a refugee, she's a refugee from a Yugoslav War, and she looks very much like everyone in this room and it's shocking to people to think that she's a refugee, so break down stereotypes and perceptions about people. And so when we bring African, Asian students and refugees together in educational environment and people sit down and read them like books, they talk to them individually for a period of time, we think that's something that can break down barriers. And with the Ministry of Education Decree we're working on rolling this out nationally, we'll see if we can succeed on it, that's one of our big hopes. It's prevention which is going to stop a lot of things, as much as it is the work of the government and the police and stopping hate group from hurting other individuals.

*Chief of IOM Mission to Ukraine