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VISIT TO EUROPE - What can we learn from each other? Is there any common ground for networking?

In the course of developing our international program, Director, Prof. John Powell and two staff members met with representatives of various organizations in different European cities from March 30th through April 3rd, 2007.

Among the organizations were the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI); the European Network Against Racism (ENAR); and the Representative Council of Black Associations in France (Le CRAN).

The objective of our meetings was to build an international network to fight against racism and promote inclusive democracy; to collect information; and to learn about and discuss the most pressing racial and ethnic issues in Europe in order to understand the potential areas of common action. The aim of the international network, which the Kirwan Institute seeks to build, will focus on the collection and sharing of information. Furthermore, the network will serve as a platform for discussion of the most pressing racial and ethnic issues and learning from each other in order to develop successful strategies to combat racism and discrimination.

When reading the following synopsis, it is important to be aware of the fact that most of Europe began to feel confronted with the integration challenges posed by the migration of third world nationals only in the late 90s and at the beginning of the millennium. Thus we can say that European nations started addressing issues of race and racism only recently. A number of racial issues in Europe are addressed under the conceptual framework of immigration. In a number of respects, this is not accurate. For example, a black Parisian will often be assumed to be an immigrant with a different culture while the current French President after one generation is accepted as quintessentially French.

However, the European Community has two of the most advanced pieces of anti-discrimination legislation in the world (see the two EC directives on equal treatment, namely the Racial Equality Directive and the Employment Equality Directive from the year 2000). Despite this high-level commitment, the available evidence suggests that discrimination continues at alarming levels. Thus, legal frameworks are a necessary basis for fighting racism, but they are not enough.

Challenges of the Anti-Racism and Anti-Discrimination Movement in Europe

There are many challenges that Europe faces today in the field of anti-racism and anti-discrimination. The bullet points below provide an overview of the most pressing identified issues:

- Cultural Racism

A new form of racism termed “cultural racism” is a central challenge of the last several years in Europe. The real danger is that the discourse of cultural racism is not limited to the New Right and New Right populist parties but is finding its way into mainstream society. Indeed the new conceptual tool of cultural racism has permeated many levels of European societies. Cultural racism bases its arguments not on biological facts but on a “more acceptable” language that raises up cultural differences. The ideology behind cultural racism focuses on the protection of a national and/or cultural identity. This identity is defined by language, traditions, history etc. But like the arguments about biology it assumes both a fixed and essential nature to culture and a superiority of one to the other. “Culture” replaces the idea of “race”, and takes on the role it used to play in the field of racism and discrimination. According to this notion of racism, cultures are pre-defined entities, largely seen as homogenous, unchangeable and, more importantly, incompatible with each other.

Therefore, the anti-discrimination movement is faced with the question what can be done to counter this kind of racism.

- Data Collection

There is unequivocal demand for data on discrimination in Europe. The reason for this situation is the caution exercised by both governments and citizens in the process of data collection because of potential abuse of personal data. Under the Fascist regimes of the World War II era, governmental records of national origin and descent were used to persecute Jews, Roma, and other groups. However, the European Communities’ Race Equality Directive expressly permits the introduction of statistical evidence to establish cases of indirect discrimination.

NGOs and activists have been demanding changes to data-collection policies. Data is needed to guide decision-makers, to facilitate awareness-raising activities, to enable the work of international human rights monitoring bodies, and to facilitate legal action and research on discrimination. Facts and figures can play a vital role in raising awareness of discrimination among the general public or targeted groups. An information campaign can have stronger effect if it can back up the messages with statistics. Nevertheless, such data is still often unavailable in Europe (with the exception of the UK), and if it is available, it is limited in terms of the areas of life covered.

There is some misconception that racial data collection is illegal in Europe, in particular in France. This is not the case: European legal standards relating to the right to privacy and data protection do not preclude the collection of sensitive data, they set out conditions under which data collection is allowed and lay down several principles that must be respected when data is collected or otherwise processed (European domestic data protection and privacy laws may go beyond these standards). Furthermore, State parties to international human rights treaties, including all EU member states, are obliged to report and thus collect data on discrimination in order to comply with obligations under international law.

According to French Data Protection legislation the collection of data relating to racial or ethnic origin is forbidden. However, several derogations exist.

More on France

Our most interactive meeting took place in Paris with the recently formed French NGO, Le CRAN (Representative Council of Black Associations in France). Prof. Powell presented a power point on structural racism as part of a week long movement-building workshop and gathering of CRAN leaders and member organizations. Dennis Hayes and Angela Ciccolo of the NAACP were the primary guests who, along with Prof. Charles Ogletree of Harvard Law School, and Patrick Gaston, President of Verizon Foundation, offered advice on building up and funding a civil rights advocacy organization. Also present was Doudou Diène of Sénégal, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, who spoke on using international law as a tool for racial progress. Many informal discussions with the gracious hosts brought about a fruitful exchange of insights and plans.

Prof. Powell's presentation focused on drawing out the structural nature of the racial tensions in France. He likened the November 2005 uprisings of the minority ethnic youths in the suburbs of Paris and other major cities to our Katrina. Both events represent stark and shocking national moments that expose entrenched structural racism and inequalities, challenging some of our deeply held assumptions. In New Orleans, it was not the hurricane alone that caused the flooding, but the underlying structural weaknesses of both the levees and the segregated, impoverished black community. So too in France, it was not the accidental electrocution of the two young French Muslims hiding from the police in a power station that caused the uprisings, but the underlying weaknesses of the nation's policies towards and the realities lived by persons of color, many of whom are French citizens, living in crime and gang-ridden concrete suburban housing projects. Rather than addressing the underlying web of institutional racism, police harassment, segregation, 40-50% unemployment rates, and globalization, the government attempted to quell the violence by invoking a state of emergency law and calling the youth "scum" (*racaille*).

A close examination of the way society is arranged demonstrates that structures and institutional arrangements are not neutral and can produce racialized outcomes with or

without the presence of animus. In the French context, seemingly egalitarian values and principles of the French Revolution such as *'indivisibilité de la République*, or “One France”, contribute to the current unwillingness to acknowledge that France is multiracial and multicultural. Some assert that it is unacceptable to speak about race in France for fear of compromising its national unity. The French often refer to blacks as immigrants, regardless of origin or citizenship. The nation’s model of integration requires immigrants to assimilate by embracing the culture, language, and tradition of the Republic. The practices of racialized public and private policies and structures can produce and maintain sharp racial boundaries without a language. The challenge for groups like Le CRAN might be how to embrace an identity and practice that reflects their blackness as well as their Frenchness. This will not be easy, as much of what is assumed to be French may really be unexamined whiteness.

The French Revolution also gave rise to *la laïcité*, or secularism, which contributes to discrimination against the country’s Muslims. The law preventing Muslim girls from wearing the *hijab* (headscarf) in school and the government’s refusal to grant permission for the building of mosques exemplify this discrimination. French colonialism and the Algerian war of independence are also at the root of structural racism. Algerian immigrants are not as well-received as immigrants from the West Indies and other parts of Africa. Moreover, a recent law requires schools to paint an altruistic, self-sacrificing portrait of the colonization.

In a nation in which employment discrimination creates a glass ceiling in the corporate world, trade unions are almost entirely white, anti-immigration is politically and philosophically legitimized, and only ten of 577 National Assembly members are black – all of whom were elected from overseas territories – effecting change will be difficult. But the uprisings of the non-white underclass have invigorated a movement toward a racially and economically just society.

During the workshop, Prof. Powell advised CRAN to employ a structural racism frame to foster this movement. Drawing upon the positive French principles of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (liberty, equality and fraternity) and on France being the birthplace of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, Prof. Powell suggested that Le CRAN push for structural remedies in France. Framing public discourse through a structural racism lens is essential. He urged Le CRAN to tell a story about the uprisings that challenges the racial and ethnic silence of the nation. Prof. Powell offered to share the Kirwan Institute’s efforts to test the language that one employs when speaking about structural racism and invited them to attend our conference in November on testing. Because Le CRAN will continue to fight for racial and ethnic data collection, Prof. Powell proposed doing a study that will examine when statistics further this goal and when they do not.

On a more general note, Kirwan research fellow for the international program, Lidija Knuth, is in the process of studying the best practices in Europe against discrimination and racism, which we plan to share with Le CRAN. Finally, Prof. Powell advised the organization to foster the alliance between impoverished whites and non-whites in the suburbs and step outside traditional boundaries to form new relationships with other

fields and partners. The Kirwan Institute's relationship with Le CRAN is a welcome opportunity to learn from each other and to collaborate to foster structural change in a globalizing world.