

**UNITED Conference**  
**Speak Out! Against Racism**  
**Largest NGO meeting in the European Year Against Racism**  
**June 12-13 1997 in Amsterdam (NL)**

**The outcome of the IGC: The new European Union Treaty**  
**One step forward, two steps back?**

The Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC) in Amsterdam on 16 and 17 June 1997 decided on three subjects that are of great importance to all those working in the field of anti-racism:

**1. The anti-discrimination clause**

In the new Treaty the following is stated in article 6a: "Without prejudice to the other provisions of this Treaty and within the limits of the powers conferred by it upon the Community, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation." So, it is possible for the Union in unanimity to conceive rules and action on this subject, but it is not necessary to do so. The European Parliament has only the right to be consulted. Missing in this list of groups that should not be discriminated against are national and social minorities.

**2. Asylum and Immigration policy**

The Asylum and Immigration policy has been moved from the Third Pillar (where decisions are made between governmental representatives) to the First Pillar (where usually the Commission, the Parliament and the European Court of Justice have powers as well as the European Council). The actual changes in policy are unclear, as the Schengen acquis will be integrated in the European Union policies. The Schengen agreements are not public, nor are they democratic. If these agreements are incorporated, it is not clear at all what the powers of the Commission, the Parliament and the Court of Justice will be. Moreover, there are several governments who have successfully demanded an exceptional position in which they can disregard (part of) the agreements in the Treaty. The 'communitarisation' can only be seen as positive, when it does not mean that asylum and immigration policy will be created on the lowest common level. Only the future can tell if this is a step forward or back.

**3. Democracy and transparency**

In the new Treaty several areas have now been moved to the First Pillar. This means that more democracy and transparency is possible. Unfortunately, as we

have stated before, this is in no way applicable to all agreements. For most important decisions, it is still the Council that decides, in secrecy. It seems citizens have less information, or say, about important matters such as security policy (EUROPOL) than about the size of cucumbers. It is also clear that a democracy in which ALL inhabitants can participate has in no way become closer. European citizenship will be complimentary to Member State citizenship and will exclude all third country nationals.

## **1. Introduction**

UNITED organised a two day conference on 12 and 13 June 1997 to draw attention to the crucial issues surrounding Fortress Europe, Everyday Racism and Institutional Racism in Europe. The conference **"Speak out Against Racism"** was attended by more than 250 participants, representing 140 organisations from 27 countries across Europe working in the fields of anti-racism, refugee protection and human rights. The audience participated actively in the discussions that took place after each expert contribution. The preparatory group was glad to see that there was a big turnout of those affected by racism in Europe: black and minority men and women.

The meeting coincided with the European Summit and the closing of the Inter-Governmental Conference (IGC). Under the auspices of The Alternative Summit and the platform 'Towards a Different Europe' this unique gathering united NGOs, MEPs, people working at the grassroots level, a representative of the European Commission, and several other experts who voiced their views and concerns to a receptive and committed audience of participants. It attracted national and international media coverage which was essential in publicising our concerns, particularly as the EU's treaty revision entered its decisive phase. The upcoming pages will provide an overview of the interventions given by expert speakers and participants during these two days spent speaking out against racism.

## **2. Fortress Europe**

### **Economic justice and migration**

#### **Zaya Yeebo (Britain), The African**

Yeebo began his speech by putting forward that the distinction between political refugees and economic migrants have ceased to exist, except in the eyes of the receiving European countries. The legal battle of definitions over this issue is seriously undermining any logic in favour of meaningful protection for people seeking refuge from political persecution or economic devastation as imposed by the North. "The economic persecution faced by women, the youth, workers and peasant farmers in these societies is far more pervasive, worse, than any political or religious persecution you can imagine." A direct correlation can be drawn

between the support of the IMF and World Bank by European governments to the increasing number of asylum-seekers. "Under the brutal policing methods of to the World Bank and IMF the new world order has come to mean the domination of market forces over human welfare and compassion." It is essential that European policy-makers gain a deeper understanding as to why people leave their homes to come to Europe as refugees and asylum-seekers and that asylum policy reflect this knowledge. Instead, refugees are constantly viewed as suspect, bogus or as economic migrants, which is a categorisation without any opportunity. Yeebo drew our attention to celebrated decisions passed by the Canadian Court of Appeal which acknowledged "persecution" suffered by economic migrants. Regarding a case involving a Ghanaian the Court concluded that: "it is not necessary for an individual to be beaten or tortured for him to have a feeling of persecution. It is sufficient if his fundamental freedom, his feeling of membership in a particular group or the expression of his opinion are threatened for a well-founded fear to arise". Yeebo closed on a positive note pointing out that new governments might approach this reality with greater understanding, e.g. by the revision of "draconian immigration and asylum laws" by Britain's New Labour government and the legalisation of 40,000 'illegal' immigrants initiated by the new Socialist led government in France

## **Securing the Fortress**

### **Claudia Roth (Germany), MEP, President Green Group, EP Committee on Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs**

Although we are all familiar with the dangers and injustices produced by the policies which have created Fortress Europe, somehow having them explained in such stark and concrete terms by Claudia Roth casts a shadow of impending danger.

The revision of the Maastricht Treaty envisages an increase in the number of inter-governmental procedures between member states without adequate control by either parliament or the courts. "Just as with the transfer of immigration, asylum and refugee policies into the first pillar, a 'fake communitarisation' is taking place. This will happen without the parliamentary or judicial participation which is usually a necessary feature of Community policies." The Amsterdam Treaty provides no true basis for civil rights. An anti-discrimination clause has been drafted but it is open-ended, leaving endless room for interpretation and simply enables but does not *oblige* the Council to act. Additionally, if the Council does decide to act, it must do so by unanimity. Sensitive areas such as Europol and the Schengen Information System will not be affected. Not surprisingly, Maastricht II differentiates between nationals, EU citizens, foreigners and illegals. The rights of persons from third countries are not strengthened in the new Treaty. Schengen and Europol are in the process of being elaborated upon for EU-wide incorporation without adequate supervision by the European Court of Justice or the European Parliament. "In other words, they are being taken out of national control without setting up the equivalent supranational control systems." Europol will be vested with new operating powers without any democratic or judicial control. The Schengen secretariat is to become part of the Council and will therefore remain under exclusive control

of the member states. Under the pretext of controlling the free movement of people, EU-wide surveillance systems are being implemented. The promise of greater transparency was apparently about paying only lip service "although the EP is given co-decision rights concerning the guidelines to transparency, in the draft revision text every EU institution has the right to issue its own 'Special Regulations' concerning the access to documents". As Claudia stated in closing, "clearly such a Treaty should not be ratified". Too late?

### **Initiatives for refugees' rights in the European Parliament**

Marianne Eriksson (Sweden), MEP- Gauche Unitaire Européenne/ Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)

Almost 100 years ago a quarter of the Swedish population left due to political and religious persecution to seek a better life in the New World. Today the Swedish borders are virtually closed to asylum-seekers. It is not uncommon for refugees to spend 3-6 years in refugee camps. Integration programs have ceased to exist. Scapegoating is commonplace, xenophobia is encouraged by political praxis and the number of racist crimes are on the rise. These facts come from a country with a population of a mere 8.6 million people occupying 449,964 square kilometres. The week before Marianne came to speak at the UNITED conference, and despite opposition from the Nordic GreenLeft, Sweden signed the Dublin Convention (1990). Marianne voiced concern over the lack of democratic control across the EU as well as Schengen's creation of a Fortress Europe.

Marianne is active in a voluntary group within the European Parliament working toward an appeal for full employment and initiating a variety of related projects in the areas of: shorter working hours, development of the public sector, investment in environmental work and increased housing. "The EU is the richest 'market' on earth and is nonetheless home to 20 million registered unemployed and 57 million registered people living below the poverty line."

### **Anti-deportation actions and networks**

Muhammed Idrish (Britain), National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns  
Muhammed Idrish opened with a concise overview of 40 years of immigration to the UK from the former colonies. He provided a brief history of British immigration controls leading to the Asylum and Immigration Act (1996) which has imposed the strictest regulations to date in the form of safe country lists, the Carrier Liability Act, employer fines, removal of legal aid for appeal procedures etc. The net effect of these acts are the division of families, deportations, detentions, refusal of asylum, refusal of state benefits, housing and work, among others. In 1996 there were 28,000 asylum applications of which 20% were granted and 80% refused.

The anti-deportation campaigns are run on a local basis by various individuals (church officials, teachers, political activists, trade union activists, lawyers...). Since the formation of the anti-deportation campaigns in 1995 they have won 25 cases, lost 5, seen the voluntary departure of 2 people and have 42 cases

pending. Central to their achievements is the fact that they provide hope and give confidence although Muhammed willingly admitted that it does not bring about social justice on a larger scale. Nonetheless, their work is essential in putting pressure on the Home Office and publicising injustice not to mention saving lives.

### **3. Everyday Racism**

#### **Racism in everyday life**

Philomena Essed (Netherlands), University of Amsterdam, InDRA

"The problem is not just racism, but the fact that racism is an everyday problem" Philomena stated that racism is about practices, behaviours, attitudes and discourses about ethnic minorities and refugees. It should not be overlooked that institutionalised practices are made and enacted by people in ordinary positions, who are influenced by the same prejudices as anybody else. In this way "the notion of everyday racism transcends the traditional distinctions between institutional and individual racism". It can also be seen that everyday racism adapts to the prevalent culture, norms and values of a society. Examples of everyday racism, whether subtle or overt are " part of the larger cumulative body of day to day inequities, which contribute to dividing our societies in areas, institutions and discourses, including some, excluding others, privileging or disowning on the basis of ethnic, gender, social economic, cultural or religious grounds.

Philomena proposed seven concepts for opposition and intervention: 1. the struggle against racism must be grounded in everyday life 2. the term anti-racism creates misconceptions about the nature of racism, there is no clear dichotomy 3. tolerance of racism undermines our sense of human dignity 4. the more knowledge you have of racism, the more carefully you can judge about specific situations 5. opposition to racism cannot be isolated from commitment to other human rights 6. there is a need for permanent education about rights and responsibility for quality of life in a diverse society 7. we should identify positive examples.

#### **On the streets - racist violence and police violence**

##### **Sujata Aurora (Britain), Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF)**

In her intervention Sujata Aurora situated racist violence and police violence in the context of EU policies and institutions (Trevi etc.) as well as national policies. She rejected personal prejudice as an explanation for racist violence, instead locating it firmly in a Euro-culture of popular racism.

The European leaders' vision of Europe is clearly that of a white Europe. Time, energy and resources have been put into formulating policies to keep people out. In order to do this they scapegoat, demonize and criminalize. Cooperation between the media and the police plays a significant role in this area. It is this process of stigmatising refugees and black people which 'trickles down' to create a racist culture, in turn leading to racist terror on the streets of Europe.

EU anti-immigration policies have made 'suspect communities' of refugees and the settled black populations. Having created these suspect communities they then need to be policed. Entire communities are targeted, the use of computerised databases, ID checks and police raids on meeting places are commonplace - leading in turn to the increase in deaths of black people in police custody in Britain and in other European countries. The police response to racist assaults is non-existent or ineffective and the state does not take action against racist police officers. Normal civil rights clearly do not apply. Sujata stated in closing; "A European Year Against Racism, an EU directive or law against racial harassment will not change this. Our message to the European leaders is: we do not want these attempts to legitimise your racism. We say stop the scapegoating and build a Europe of inclusion, not exclusion".

## **Community self-defence**

### **Hossein Zahir (Britain), Newham Monitoring Project (NMP)**

The Newham Monitoring Project was founded in 1980 in response to the death of a Pakistani man at the hands of two skinheads. There is no point in addressing issues that affect the community if the community doesn't respect you and if they are not involved. The people who suffer racist attacks are not prepared to be victimised, they are ready to fight back. NMP has their base in the community and focuses on counteracting racist harassment and police harassment. They provide practical support, take on cases and organise community defence and support networks. They have a 24 hour hotline, they put pressure on the council and the police to take action against racial harassment, they expose their failure to take action, they log and videotape incidents, they mobilise campaigns when wide scale attention is necessary, they set up community associations. When necessary they stay at the houses of people who are being threatened and although they would rather fight than give in, they put pressure on the relevant authorities to relocate families who are targeted, particularly in instances where small children are involved.

Hossein explained that police racism takes on two primary forms; one being a lack of response to racist attacks and the other active participation, such as attacks and murders committed by the police. Policing in Britain is the implementation of racist laws and the police are prepared to use violence to enforce the racist legislation in place. "When someone joins the police force in Britain they are quite clear on what kind of organisation they are joining. As an institution they are there to enforce state power. They are there as an arm of the state."

There was shock and revulsion throughout the audience when a representative of Newham Council approached the microphone during discussion and addressed the conference by stating that "all whites are racist, it's just a question of degree". As it turned out, this man was also responsible for the recent withdrawal of NMPs funding.

## **Police in a multi-ethnic society**

### **Roline Hart-Kemper (Netherlands), Amsterdam Police**

Roline gave a heartfelt, personal account of her experience as a black female police officer in the Amsterdam force. Having joined 10 years ago she's seen how far the police force has come in creating a 'multiform organisation' and certainly, how far it has to go.

Roline entered the force naive and unaware "of the meaning and impact of discrimination and racism". Soon enough it was made clear as the prevalence of discrimination manifested itself subtly and overtly. From racist and sexist comments suggesting that she should cook to gain the favour of her white colleagues, to having to wear 'flesh' coloured stockings ill-matched to the skin tones of women of colour, to colleagues simply refusing to go on patrol with her, to white police officers openly rejecting the participation of people of colour in the police force and strongly discouraging any show of "solidarity" among black co-workers. Roline felt equally discriminated against when it took the form of indifference. "It seemed that my colleagues ignored the colour of my skin... my white colleagues did not give a damn about the way I felt towards their blindness to my cultural differences".

"In order to survive" Roline felt she needed to educate herself and so she carried out a sociological study at the University of Amsterdam in order to grasp what was going on in her environment.

Several programs and policies have since been implemented to address racism in the police force, some of which, as Roline argues "are at the cost of the optimal participation of minority groups...and presuppose imperfection".

Roline was asked several questions from participants regarding how she copes with the conflicts of her job and how she justifies enforcing racist laws and if she feels used as a token minority representative... Her response: "I struggled for my own survival in the force and for the survival of my black colleagues...You can fight the system from the outside or from the inside".

## **4. Institutional Racism**

### **Racism and discrimination in the social sector and in politics:**

#### **Ian Harknett (Germany), Dien Hong - Gemeinsam unter einem Dach**

"A woman who has grown up in Munich as the daughter of Turkish immigrants, who knows the city and country and possibly only speaks one language fluently, namely German, but only has a Turkish passport, cannot vote. Her cousin from Marseilles, whose parents emigrated to France rather than to Germany, can visit her for a few months and, as a French citizen, has the right to participate in the local elections, even to stand as a candidate".

By presenting basic facts Ian showed the repeatedly unjustifiable and systematically reduced civil and human rights of asylum-seekers. "Asylum-seekers [in Germany] must now live for the first three years on 20% less than the normal social security rates. Everything except 80 DM 'pocket money' is normally to be in the form of vouchers, rather than cash. Medical attention is restricted to the 'essential' treatment of injuries and acute illnesses" that first

became known while in Germany. He outlined the way in which figures regarding crimes committed by foreigners are distorted and manipulated to present an unfavourable image of this group, and the ways in which police statistics and the media encourage this distortion. Another key example of institutional racism is cited with regard to a proposed Bill of Rights: "The proposal also says that 'certain of these rights should benefit, in appropriate circumstances, citizens of third countries' who are living in the EU. Progressive, compared to the present situation, but note the restriction 'certain rights', 'in appropriate circumstances'. So even if an EU Bill of Rights is passed, the 15 million third-country nationals legally living and working in the EU will remain excluded from legislation guaranteeing basic social and legal protection." Ian expressed our need to fight for civil rights for all legal residents, certainly not forgetting the great need for the protection of human rights for all.

## **Political hypocrisy or how to produce scapegoats**

### **Michael Boutellier (Germany), Lord Mayor of Lübeck**

It is in the shadow of four years of arson attacks in Lübeck that Michael Boutellier attended our conference to draw attention to the causes of these racist occurrences. The political and bureaucratic reactions in the aftermath of these tragedies pushed Michael to ask himself two questions: "who are actually the victims and who are the perpetrators? And what are the societal conditions in which such actions become possible (that make citizens of a democratic society willing to kill their fellow citizens)?" In an attempt to respond Michael presents five arguments he feels are central to the matter.

"1. Who is on trial? I see a tendency to victimise the victims [asylum-seekers]... And those brave citizens who stepped in to prevent these inhuman acts...are threatened by legal action. A priest who offers the victims protection in his church is attacked by the public and the conservative party, the CDU.

2. The abuse of the state and its democratic principles. The actions of the German state systematically contradict clauses in the German Constitution.

3. The abuse of legal principles: My hypothesis is that people lose trust in our legal frameworks. And rightly so, because the law gets abused.

4. The abuse of the poorest: the future prospects of a country can be measured by the way it treats its foreigners, the poor and its unemployed...

5. Power and powerlessness of the people: Nobody feels responsible but everybody feels affected."

And Michael told us that he prays for change in Germany, for a new government that doesn't "execute its power without responsibility. That [doesn't] find scapegoats [to compensate] for its own shortcomings and failures. That [doesn't] cowardly divert attention from the real issues".



## **Debate: European Year Against Racism - A way to combat racism?**

**Simon Rahamim (Britain), Searchlight**

**Hedy d'Ancona (NL), MEP PSE - President of the EP Committee on Civil Liberties and Internal Affairs**

**Sandra Lutchman, Commission of the EU**

There was a clear consensus on the stage on two points; that NGOs should take advantage of the European Year Against Racism (EYAR) and make it work for us the best we can and that it must incorporate long-term strategies that will be visible well after the 'Year' is through if we are to achieve anything.

However, NGOs have reason to be angry and disillusioned and Simon eloquently and forcefully put forth this viewpoint. He stated that EYAR is not the best response to the entire range of problems connected to racism. He accused the institutions behind EYAR of: wasting tons of money on luxurious launch parties only then to announce that the money designated to EYAR is not enough; of not effecting youth; of funds not helping people directly under attack; of not involving people on 'the sharp-end of the anti-racism and anti-fascism movement'; of not allowing money to be allocated to where it is most desperately needed, namely the running costs of NGOs who have been active and effective for years. He explained that by placing the running of national campaigns in the hands of Interior Ministries (the same Ministries who lock up asylum-seekers and systematically deny human rights), activists have no choice but to be suspicious. Participants from the audience intervened with terms like "too little - too late" and "window dressing" when referring to EYAR.

Sandra made clear that the European Commission should not be accused of creating racism and then not doing enough to combat it. Referring to Schengen as a key example she explained that decisions such as the creation and implementation of Schengen are taken at an intergovernmental level, that it is not the Commission or the European Parliament but our own governments who must be held responsible. Nor did the Commission decide who would represent EYAR in each country. The fact that in many cases the appointment was given to the Interior Ministries was a decision made by each national government. Sandra admitted that excessive money was spent on the launch but she stressed that many NGOs were present and given an opportunity to meet.

Hedy came with compassion and personal experience at the political, institutional and grassroots levels. She agreed that in and of itself EYAR is not enough but stated that it could provide a start for some structural formation. She had a lot of empathy for the frustrations of people fighting at the grassroots and wanted the audience to know that she was using her position "to make it better". She voiced serious concern about the increased representation of the far right in the European Parliament (40) and provided explanations as to what steps she was trying to take and the hurdles she was encountering.

As Sandra explained, EYAR has two main objectives: the exchange of experience at local, national and European levels and awareness raising. In an attempt of keeping the issues of this year a priority after 1997, 20-25 NGOs have been approached to contribute to a feasibility report, a meeting is planned for July in Brussels. A follow up meeting in November, supposedly uniting 100-150 NGOs, is planned to "define common objectives and create a structure that would define these objectives". Simon explained that he does not think that NGOs need or

want new structures or networks, nor would they appreciate the use of an outside consultant to determine future developments concerning them.

## **5. The evening event**

Anti-racism in the Netherlands, open podium and music.

The evening event was organised by Nederland Bekent Kleur. Jessica Silversmith of the Amsterdam Anti-Discrimination Bureau provided an insightful lecture on the functioning of Anti-Discrimination Bureau's, anti-discrimination legislation in the Netherlands, particularly the Equal Treatment Law. Conference participants were given the opportunity to address issues, present campaigns and voice concerns at the open podium sessions. The John Kayongo Band performed beautifully and enticed an enthusiastic audience to learn some new dance moves.

## **UNITED for Intercultural Action**

UNITED for Intercultural Action

European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees

Racism, nationalism, fascism, discrimination, asylum policies... all of them have a European dimension even though they often look like pure national issues. Reports from all over Europe demonstrate the increasing dangers facing migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities. Often these dangers are increased by undemocratic intergovernmental decisions like the Schengen Treaty. Strangely enough, racist and fascist organisations have strong European links from Portugal to Russia, from Sweden to Italy. Fortress Europe needs to be fought at local, regional and European levels - it cannot be fought on one level alone.

Linked through UNITED, hundreds of organisations from a wide variety of backgrounds, from all European countries, work together on a voluntary basis. They base their cooperation on common actions and shared activities on a mutual respect.

UNITED is and will remain independent from all political parties, organisations and states, but seeks an active co-operation with other anti-racist initiatives in Europe.

Through the UNITED network organisations meet each other, work on common actions and share information. Europe-wide action weeks, campaigns and such are planned and discussed on UNITED conferences. Like-minded organisations find each other on such conferences and

work together on specific projects on specific topics. The workers in the secretariat are in constant contact with the network organisations, ensuring that information and proposals for action are transmitted rapidly. Information is received from more than 2300 organisations and mailings are sent out to about 2500 groups in Europe.

If you want to get involved... Discuss the ideas and aims of the UNITED network within your organisation. Let us know that you would like to join or receive information. And add us to your mailing list!

More information you can find at [www.unitedagainstracism.org](http://www.unitedagainstracism.org) or write to [info@unitedagainstracism.org](mailto:info@unitedagainstracism.org)

**UNITED for Intercultural Action**

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