Statement of Mr. Matej Marn, Deputy Permanent Representative of Slovenia to the UN, chargé d'affaires a.i., in the capacity of the Chair of the Group of the Eastern European States for the month of March 2015

on the occasion of the plenary meeting of the General Assembly to commemorate the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
(20 March 2015)

Mr. President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of the Eastern European States.

The Group of Eastern European States welcomes today's meeting of the General Assembly devoted to the commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination which is being held this year under the theme “Learning from historical tragedies to combat racial discrimination today”.

Combating racism lies at the heart of the United Nations. Human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights. All members of our societies, without distinction of any kind, must be treated equally. Nevertheless, racism continues to cause suffering for millions of people around the world. As the most recent Secretary General's report on the follow-up of the resolution 68/151 shows, despite some progress that has been made in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, these forms of discrimination have not been eradicated and no country can claim to be free from them. We all have to do more and in this fight we have to be united.

The aim of this year's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is to explore the root causes of racial discrimination and to learn the lessons history has provided. By remembering tragic events like the Sharpeville massacre and reminding ourselves of past tragedies, we help to ensure that such abuse of human rights can never be repeated. Education and awareness-raising are important tools in combating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, but we should also do more in promoting intercultural dialogue, fostering tolerance and respect for diversity.
In a few months we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial discrimination. The Convention is and should remain the basis of all efforts to prevent, combat and eradicate racism. In this respect we would like to reiterate the fundamental importance of ratifying and fully implementing the Convention which should be a priority for all countries and express our wish for its early universal ratification. At the same time we would like to underline that the fight against racism is a primary responsibility of the State and that policy, legislative and other effective measures should be taken by each country at national level in order to achieve progress in our common endeavors.

The Eastern European States are deeply concerned that the objective to eradicate racism has not yet been attained and that despite many efforts, a lot still needs to be done at national, regional and international level. We remain committed to continue to fight against racism and racial discrimination, which remains a priority in our human rights agendas. We are also supportive of the work of civil society organizations in this area and their activities aimed at raising public awareness on the importance to fight this phenomenon.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, let me reiterate that fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is an issue that concerns all countries and that the efforts of the international community for the total elimination of this scourge can only be successful if we all work together in order to achieve this common objective.

Thank you for your attention.