



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Plenary Statement

As delivered by the Honorable Professor J. Brian Atwood,
U.S. Head of Delegation
OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, October 3, 2014

Comprehensive security is the backbone of the OSCE and in the 40 years since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act that principle has never been more important. The Human Dimension becomes all the more important given the recent violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Some participating States have retreated in implementing their human rights and democratization commitments. President Obama mentioned some of those states at the UN somewhat controversially but facts are facts. All governments and members of the public must scrutinize internal trends toward authoritarianism, as authoritarianism at home can increase the prospects of conflict between and among OSCE participating States.

The people in all of our countries have the right to exercise fundamental freedoms, such as peaceful assembly and to express their concerns over government decisions. The demonstrations for a free and fair electoral process in Hong Kong are one example of peaceful assembly.

On the Maidan in Ukraine, the people of Ukraine rose up against corruption and abuses of power. They did not see any other way. They were not agents of the West or anyone else; they were Ukrainian citizens from all walks of life and languages who wanted a better life. Ukraine belongs to the people of Ukraine, not to the East not to the West.

As I have said in my statements since the beginning of this meeting, the United States is not afraid to be self-critical and we continually strive to implement our commitments fully.

In the opening plenary, the keynote speaker, Elisa Massimino, challenged all participating States to identify "concrete actions" we can take in response to issues that have been raised here at the HDIM. My delegation has done so. And we have identified several actions we intend to take following our consultations with civil society and other participants here at HDIM:

We will continue to engage with civil society and the U.S. Congress about concerted efforts to close the detention facility at Guantanamo. It is an absolute priority for the U.S. Government to ensure that our detention operations at Guantanamo are consistent with our international obligations. Additionally, the United States recently welcomed ODIHR to meet with U.S. officials in Washington on the subject of Guantanamo, which will result in an ODIHR report on this issue.

The U.S. Department of Justice has opened an independent investigation into the death of a young, black teenager in Ferguson, Missouri. When the results of this investigation are made

public, we will provide a readout to participating States in an appropriate OSCE forum - such as the Human Dimension Committee or Permanent Council – on the findings and any policy recommendations that the U.S. Government has drawn from the investigation.

We have heard the concerns raised by other participating States and by civil society on the death penalty. Officials throughout our federal and state governments are well aware of these concerns. President Obama recently called for a study of “the application of the death penalty in this country...” We offer to conduct an informal briefing on the results of this study when they are made public.

We have heard the concerns of some delegations about the protection of the rights of Muslims in the United States. We will make every effort to include in our delegation to HDIM next year officials who can share in more detail efforts by our government in this area.

Finally, we have heard from a number of civil society organizations as well as from participating States about the importance of maintaining and expanding access to the support that ODIHR offers for effective implementation of OSCE commitments. We will both communicate the importance of this work directly to Members of Congress and others and reach out diplomatically in capitals of other participating States to ensure that budgetary conversations include as a priority a significant increase in funding for ODIHR.

For the past ten days, my delegation has welcomed good faith efforts and concrete progress by many participating States in implementing their commitments. Regrettably, even in the short time that we have met here at HDIM, steps have been taken in some participating States that widen the gulf between their commitments and their practices. We have witnessed Russia’s continuing disregard for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of one of its neighbors, Ukraine. This has resulted in a deteriorating situation and makes the ceasefire agreement reached in Minsk all the more difficult to implement. We have seen more tragic human costs from the conflict in Ukraine that Russia has chosen to instigate. We also offer our deepest condolences to the family and colleagues of the International Red Cross worker who was killed in Donetsk, and others killed at the school this week.

We have heard about increasingly closed space for civil society. I have met with a number of human rights advocates, people whose families have been imprisoned. I would like to point out one in particular: in Azerbaijan, Amar Mammadli, a person who was simply trying to exercise his democratic rights with respect to the election there.

One final word: I am very concerned as I have listened to the debate here this week, to hear the term “neo-Nazi” invoked a great deal over these last two weeks, often in a manner that mocks the true meaning of the word, and the sacrifice of all those who perished at the hands of the Nazi regime. This seems to me to be a cynical effort to overuse a word that should be very carefully used.

HDIM is unprecedented in its ability to bring together governments and civil society. My delegation has taken note – as has Norway – that a number of government-organized NGOs, known as GONGOs, who have been participating here, are taking up our time, basically repeating the government message.

Referring to the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Declaration on anti-Semitism, we encourage high-level representation at that meeting.

We strongly reiterate our support for ODIHR and ODIHR Director Michael Link, the Representative for Freedom of the Media, the High Commissioner for National Minorities, the Personal Representatives on Tolerance and related institutions and structures.

Finally, this has been a particularly contentious HDIM. However, this forum may be even more useful when we have differences over the commitments we have made. The United States refutes any assertion that there is a double standard within this community of nations and we will work with ODIHR and our partners to reinforce the standards to which we have all agreed. That will mean that we will all have to commit to being fact-based - and that has not always characterized this meeting. We should all strive to resurrect the spirit of the Helsinki Final Act.

Thank you.