

HDIM – CLOSING SESSION - STATEMENT BY THE UNITED KINGDOM

Madam Director

As you bring HDIM 2017 to a close we have much to reflect upon.

I fully subscribe to the statement delivered on behalf of the EU and its member states, and I will not repeat all the thanks already expressed except to applaud the hard work of your team preparing and delivering this conference.

I would like to add a couple of brief thoughts, as much as in my capacity as Chair of the OSCE Human Dimension Committee as in my national capacity.

First I want to highlight the connection between HDIM, which brings together a wide range of civil society and governmental representatives, and the meetings of the Human Dimension Committee in Vienna where diplomats meet roughly monthly for in depth topical discussions related to our OSCE Human Dimension Commitments.

Over the past nine months the Human Dimension Committee in Vienna has discussed specific aspects of issues also considered here at HDIM: tolerance, hate crime; political participation; freedom of peaceful assembly to name just a few.

Secondly I want to highlight the importance of engagement with civil society. In democratic societies civil society organisations play an essential role in helping keep governments accountable. Strong, independent civil society organisations also make a significant direct contribution to the lives of individuals and to the health and stability of society. As we have seen so often this week the key to tackling some of our most difficult challenges lies in trust and co-operation between authorities and genuine civil society. I am grateful to the invited civil society experts who have significantly enriched each of our discussions this year in the Human Dimension Committee.

I pay tribute too to civil society representatives, be they activists, lawyers, journalists or simply private individuals who have travelled to Warsaw this year to fight discrimination and injustice, and to defend people and principles.

Madame Director,

As long as there is injustice, or unfairness in our region, as long as a changing world presents us with new or shifting challenges there will be a need for the conversations between states and civil society that HDIM provides a forum for.

Finally, Madame Director, you and other moderators have reminded us more than once of the need for respectful interventions. It has been deeply troubling to hear speakers using HDIM as a platform for views and language incompatible with the principles and commitments of this organisation and to attack the legitimate rights of others. Upholding freedom of expression whilst not allowing prejudice and incitement of hatred is a challenge we need to face together.

Madam Director,

The best discussion I heard in the past fortnight involved speakers with very different perspectives discussing sensitive issues with a critical but respectful audience. That for me is what HDIM should be about.

I look forward to working with you over the coming months in support of the valuable work of ODIHR and as you plan ahead for next year's HDIM and other activity in the coming year.

Thank you.