



Delegation of Canada  
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada  
auprès de l'OSCE

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2017**  
**Working Session 3 – Statement by the Delegation of Canada, delivered by**  
**Ambassador Natasha Cayer, Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE**  
**Tuesday, September 12, 2017**

Today in parts of the OSCE area, democratic institutions are under threat on several fronts in a way not seen since the end of the Cold War. Restrictions on voting rights, use of law enforcement and the military for voter intimidation, control of the media, and attacks on the independence of the judiciary are examples of the threats that are undermining the democratic functioning of our societies. This also includes a ramping up of propaganda, powered by digital means and social media, enabling those who seek to undermine democratic institutions to do so with greater anonymity and potential impact than ever before.

In the face of these multiple and evolving threats, we must retain our focus on important international objectives that will support these institutions in the long run. Canada believes that in order to support and strengthen democracy, we must continue to uphold the values of peaceful pluralism, inclusive and accountable governance, and respect for diversity and human rights, including the empowerment of women and girls. Canada is seeking to support these aims through its international policy agenda.

Indeed, our new feminist international assistance policy ensures that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are at the centre of our efforts to support the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Women and girls are powerful enablers of democracy and democratic institutions, and, as such, Canada is using its development policy to encourage their greater political participation, leadership, and decision-making in developing countries.

Civic space is crucial to protecting our democratic institutions because it is civil society that advocates and urges governments to be more transparent and accountable. Unfortunately, those who seek to weaken democracy have targeted civil society actors and human rights defenders, often as a precursor to attacking and undermining human rights and government institutions later. It is incumbent upon all of us to unite against such behaviour and support civil society at home and internationally.

At home, we are committed to improving, strengthening and protecting our country's democratic institutions, and our Minister of Democratic Institutions is mandated to ensure that Canadians trust and participate in our democratic processes.

As Chair of the Community of Democracies Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society, we are working with other government and civil society members to employ quiet diplomacy towards securing better legislative outcomes for civil society where governments are attempting to unduly restrict their efforts.

In conclusion, we continue to believe it is critical that OSCE participating States respect their OSCE commitments to democratic principles and pursue policies and programs that support

civic space and democratic institutions domestically and internationally. In this regard, we would like to put forward the following two recommendations:

- 1) That the OSCE and ODIHR continue to seek additional opportunities to support civic space and democratic institutions;
- 2) That support for civic space and democratic institutions by the OSCE and ODIHR take into account new technological threats and seek out means to address these.