



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities

ADDRESS

by
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to the
**2nd Practical OSCE-UNHCR Seminar on Sharing Good Practices on Statelessness
among OSCE participating States**

[Check against delivery]

Hofburg, Vienna – 31 October 2018

Distinguished Ambassadors,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning, here in the Hofburg, in order to open what I know will be a very interesting and informative practical seminar on sharing good practices on statelessness within the OSCE area. Let me appreciate in particular the driving force that our friends in the UNHCR bring to the table, and the commitment they have shown towards collaboration with the OSCE. I appreciate this partnership, and hope that it will continue.

Today, I come before you in my capacity as OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, however I was also present here in a previous capacity, as Secretary General, in order to launch the *Handbook on Statelessness in the OSCE area: International Standard and Good Practices*, in March last year. I may have changed my hat, and my mandate is now different, but I still remain personally committed to this issue. It is now time to find out how this handbook has proved useful to participating States, and what use has been made of it.

The impact of statelessness runs far beyond the inconveniences caused by the lack of the right documentation. Statelessness can be truly devastating, affecting peoples' access to healthcare, employment, freedom of movement, even the education of children. It is the *opposite* of what I advocate for on a constant basis as High Commissioner, which is for the integration of diverse societies, and effective participation. Statelessness legally banishes a person outside of society altogether, and in this day and age it is simply unacceptable. Also, though I do not believe this is the primary way in which this issue should be viewed during this seminar, from a security perspective, when you consider the number of people affected, it is simply asking for trouble.

I *must* bring in the issue of the security perspective, or in the OSCE context, the 1st dimension, as this is the starting point from which I commence my own work. The work of the HCNM focusses on conflict prevention. National minority issues and statelessness issues sometimes converge, particularly where there has been state succession, or a geopolitically significant division into smaller territorial units of a larger one. Where this is the case, I continue to work with all participating States concerned in order to assist them in addressing this issue. Whilst the human dimension commitments underpin our work, I focus more on stability and security rather than on the human rights angle. In this context, mass statelessness issues in particular *may* attract the attention of the High Commissioner on the basis of potentially posing a threat to the long-term peace and stability within and between participating States.

Some participating States are struggling to achieve integration of their multi-ethnic societies, and progress in this direction is often too slow. Considering that the practical and political challenges faced by several participating States are considerable, we should offer assistance rather than criticism. We often talk about the OSCE as a platform for dialogue; I know I have, countless times. This dialogue is not “only words”. It also includes transfer of knowledge and expertise. There is no clear geographic divide in this respect, and the transfer is in no case a one way street. We all have something to learn from each other. I think the diversity of the participating States who will present today demonstrates that fact, and I see from the programme, that we will have very interesting contributions from Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkmenistan, the Russian Federation and Iceland. I have co-operated on national minority issues with several of these States, and I fact am returning this week from a very productive visit to the Russian Federation. I also visited Georgia last month. I would like to thank these five participating States for stepping-up to take an

active presentation role in this seminar, and also to those participating States who have attended, and who I am sure will want to speak from the floor. While the primary responsibility for implementing human dimension commitments lies with the participating State itself, the OSCE Executive structures stand by to assist, with expertise and good offices, wherever this is welcomed. Please do make use of these resources.

I would not here go into the various steps which have been outlined by UNHCR in terms of reducing statelessness, I would leave that to the experts who have come to speak today. However, if I may be allowed to put my own opinion, as a first step, I strongly encourage all participating States who have yet to do so to take measures to ensure that no child is born stateless, including proper birth registration, and to remove gender discrimination from nationality laws. In my view, this is a minimum starting point to prevent statelessness from being passed on to the next generation.

Dear Ambassadors,
Ladies and gentleman,

I am very much encouraged by the active co-operation I see here between OSCE participating States, OSCE executive structures and our partners in the UNHCR.

I welcome UNHCR's Global Action Plan to End Statelessness, and offer my encouragement to the *#ibelong* campaign, which I and my staff, who will actively follow your discussions today, will continue to support.

Thank you for your attention.