



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### Opening Plenary Statement

As prepared for delivery by the Honorable Professor J. Brian Atwood,  
U.S. Head of Delegation  
**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**  
Warsaw, September 22, 2014

We are gathered for this Human Dimension Implementation Meeting at a time when the fundamental precepts upon which European security and this Organization rest are under increasing threat. Not least among these is the OSCE's comprehensive security concept, which recognizes that security and cooperation *among* states is indivisible from respect for human rights and democratic principles *within* states. Sovereignty and territorial integrity are inviolable and disputes among States should be settled peacefully without the threat or use of force. Adherence to these commitments in all three dimensions of security – politico-military, economic and human – is essential to lasting peace and well-being.

When governments breach these fundamental principles, they do harm not just to their neighbors, but also to their own citizens' ability fully to take part and succeed in an increasingly interconnected, rules-based international system. Moreover, they undermine our common effort to achieve a Europe that is whole, free and at peace.

The **Russian Federation's** actions in Ukraine have led to the worst crisis in the OSCE region in twenty years. Russia's continued violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity; its campaign to frighten the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine; its illegal occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea; its armed support of violent separatists; the direct insertion of Russian forces and heavy weapons into Ukraine; and the dramatically deteriorating human rights conditions in separatist-controlled areas of Eastern Ukraine and Russian-occupied Crimea have resulted in 3,000 deaths and the senseless suffering and displacement of tens of thousands of civilians. As a result of its behavior, Russia is increasingly isolated from the international community, both politically and economically.

Despite having suffered violations of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, **Ukraine** under the Poroshenko government continues to strive toward long-needed political, legal and economic reforms and integration with Europe. It has done this in response to the overwhelmingly expressed aspirations of its citizens – citizens from all ethnic backgrounds and from all across Ukraine. Indeed, pressing ahead with domestic reforms will be just as essential to Ukraine's unity and wellbeing as defending itself against separatist violence and external aggression. A major first step was the free and fair democratic presidential election held last May, with strong support from the OSCE. Another will be the parliamentary elections in October, which OSCE also will monitor. The OSCE can do much more in the months and years ahead to help Ukraine stay the course of peaceful domestic reform that will benefit all the people of Ukraine. And I wish to thank the Swiss Chairmanship for its commitment to strengthening the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and the observation mission on the border with Russia. My government reiterates its unwavering support for OSCE's efforts to support all of the objectives outlined in the September 5 Minsk Agreement

between Russia and Ukraine, and encourages a rapid increase in monitors to help implement the ceasefire.

Mr. Chairman, the **Russian Federation** intensified its systematic campaign at home to stifle dissent in the media and civil society. It has blocked public access to independent news websites and blogs that were critical of government policies and practices. Meanwhile, Russia's state-controlled television spreads intolerance, invokes threats to so-called "traditional values," decries purported internal enemies allegedly colluding with foreign governments, and lies about conditions in Ukraine and the Baltic states. The Russian government has enacted a series of new laws that restrict the fundamental freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly and religion, including broadly worded anti-extremism laws that target members of ethnic and religious minorities. It has labeled the country's most respected human rights NGOs "foreign agents." Following the enactment of so-called anti-gay propaganda laws, there has been an increase in brutal assaults on LGBT persons.

During the next two weeks of HDIM, my delegation also will draw attention to serious human dimension concerns arising in other parts of the OSCE region. To cite a few illustrative examples, the intensified closing of space for independent civil society in **Hungary** and **Azerbaijan** and for free and open expression in **Turkey**, **Turkmenistan** and **Uzbekistan** continue to imprison human rights defenders, journalists and peaceful religious adherents amidst abiding concerns from the outside world about torture and unfair trials. Political prisoners remain behind bars also in **Belarus**, and we call for the immediate and unconditional release of all individuals imprisoned in participating States for nothing more than peacefully exercising their human rights. An alarming spike in anti-Semitic hate crimes and hate speech gives Jewish communities a well-founded reason to fear for their safety. In many **EU** states, public officials still make statements and take actions that condone and even tacitly promote intolerance against the Roma. We share the concerns of principled governments and citizens across Europe about the growing appeal of blatantly extremist and xenophobic parties in local, national and EU-wide elections.

The United States continues to regret the denial of a seat at the table for **Kosovo**, which has a right and a need to be seated as a fellow participating State. I hope that the progress this year in relations between **Serbia** and Kosovo will allow Kosovo to participate soon.

Just as we will raise these and other human dimension concerns regarding fellow participating States, we will respond to concerns raised about our own policies and practices at home and abroad. This year the United States celebrates the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Civil Rights Act. That landmark piece of legislation went far in moving my country closer to living up to its founding ideals. However, we are the first to recognize that our nation – at all levels of government, our courts and law enforcement, the press and civil society -- has more hard work to do to ensure that all of our citizens enjoy equal protection, justice and opportunity and live in a society that is free from all forms of bigotry and intolerance. In this regard, we note that we have made significant advances toward providing equal treatment to members of the LGBT community at both the federal and state levels. We recognize that further progress is still needed, but we believe that our nation continues on a very positive path.

Mr. Chairman, the participating States are fortunate to have at our disposal an array of diplomatic instruments and institutions to help them meet their human dimension

commitments and avert or respond to crises. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, and the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office on Tolerance issues, have the utmost respect and support of my government. We urge all participating States to fully avail themselves of these pioneering diplomatic capabilities and ensure that OSCE institutions and mechanisms have the personnel and budgetary resources they need to be effective now and in the future. We also strongly support the OSCE's field missions. We call on all states hosting field missions to respect their mandates and permit them to function without obstruction in all three dimensions – and that includes their ability to freely engage with civil society.

This Organization was the first regional organization to affirm that human rights are not solely matters of States' internal affairs, but the legitimate concern of other States. The OSCE also was the first to recognize that civil society has an important role to play in promoting the implementation of OSCE commitments.

My delegation and I welcome the opportunities that this unique forum provides for civil society representatives to participate on an equal basis with governments. We look forward to hearing their indispensable perspectives and insights. Many of the civil society activists here in Warsaw have taken considerable personal risks to be present. That makes it even more imperative that our discussions be straightforward and focused on the most serious human dimension issues in our region. My delegation and I also look forward to the many side events and meetings that accompany the formal sessions. We will be interested to hear ideas from civil society members and governments alike on ways to strengthen the OSCE, defend its founding principles, and advance the cause of human rights across this region.

Finally, I wish to thank our host, Michael Link, the newly appointed director of ODIHR, and his outstanding team for their phenomenal work organizing this conference.