

**Opening Statement by Mr. Frank Cogan, Head of the Irish Chairmanship Taskforce,
at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 24 September 2012**

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to Warsaw on behalf of the Irish OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Mr Eamon Gilmore. I also wish to convey my sincere thanks to Ambassador Lenarčič, his deputy Doug Wake, and to the entire team of staff at ODIHR, for their excellent organisation of this crucial annual OSCE meeting.

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) is the primary forum for reviewing human dimension commitments, their implementation by participating States and the ways in which we should monitor implementation. It is my sincere hope that participating States, civil society, regional and international organisations and other participants will take full advantage of the two-week period ahead to exchange views and deepen mutual understanding. I hope that a spirit of dialogue and information-sharing will help produce a fruitful outcome, generating ideas and recommendations for the December OSCE Ministerial Council in Dublin, and for the Ukrainian Chairmanship that will follow our own.

The Irish Chairmanship has been working hard to make progress across all three dimensions of the OSCE's work, building on the outcome of last year's Vilnius Ministerial. An ambitious programme of Human Dimension events was agreed earlier in the year and a number of successful meetings and seminars have since taken place. Events have included a meeting on 'Combating Racism, Intolerance and Discrimination in Society through Sport' in late March, and a seminar on the 'Rule of Law framework for combating Trafficking in Human Beings', that took place in Warsaw in mid-May. A meeting on 'Democratic elections and election observation' also took place in Vienna in July, with the important involvement of parliamentarians from across the OSCE area.

The Irish Chairmanship has made every effort to support ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in the conduct of the OSCE's election observation activities, which are fundamental to our work as a community of States committed to respect for human rights. I wish to pay special tribute to the important work of the various election observation missions that have taken place this year, and might mention that earlier this year the Chairmanship, acting in close consultation with Secretary General Zannier and his field staff, as well as relevant States, assisted in brokering an agreement which permitted the participation of Serb citizens in Kosovo in Serbian presidential and parliamentary elections, under OSCE supervision. I would also like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the Chairmanship's commitment to the Cooperation Agreement of 1997 and our fervent desire that the relevant OSCE institutions should continue to work together in the best interests of the OSCE, as was the case in the first months of this year.

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In advance of our Chairmanship, we signalled our intention to prioritise Internet Freedom, reflecting the increasing importance of the Internet as a platform for the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms, most notably the freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly. In June last, the Chairmanship organised a well-attended conference on Internet Freedom in Dublin. Over two days, we deepened our understanding of the key issues through stimulating exchanges between representatives of the 56 OSCE States, representatives of regional and international organisations, civil society, including bloggers and Internet activists, and the ICT and media sectors. The clear message which emerged from the conference was that human rights and fundamental freedoms do not change with new technologies, but extend seamlessly into the digital age. The majority of speakers highlighted the importance of protecting the Internet's universality, integrity and openness, while addressing legitimate concerns regarding cyber-crime and cyber-security, privacy and other matters.

The June Conference, being a Chairmanship event, also afforded us the opportunity to experiment with the format of the meeting, with a view to making panel discussions more inclusive and more relevant. This experiment was timely and took place against the background of the broader exercise we have undertaken as Chair, in taking forward the review of Human Dimension events mandated during the Lithuanian Chairmanship. Our starting point for this review was that any new arrangements should not undermine or in any way diminish the importance of the human dimension to the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. On foot of the very helpful scoping exercise conducted by Ximpulse consultants and a series of discussions in Vienna, the Chairmanship circulated a perception paper in early August with proposals designed to strengthen the human dimension by making human dimension events more focussed, more attractive and more effective. The Chairmanship intends to take forward these discussions in the coming weeks and will aim to conclude negotiations by the end of October at the latest. We are especially keen to ensure that civil society have an opportunity to provide input to this process also. To this end, we will host a side-event on this issue tomorrow lunchtime to brief on our proposals and we would welcome the active participation of civil society, as well as participating States, at this meeting.

Looking ahead to the Dublin Ministerial meeting, the Chairmanship has consistently outlined its intention to present a small number of balanced and focused decisions. The Human Dimension is our highest priority and we will aim to secure agreement on two important decisions at the Ministerial Council.

First, we are aiming for a decision on **media freedom**, as we believe that it is timely for OSCE participating States to reinforce their existing commitments to freedom of expression and freedom of the media. There is no region in the OSCE where these commitments have been fully implemented and media freedom can always be further improved. The Ministerial Council should address in particular the challenges posed by increasing threats to the safety of journalists and the exercise of freedom of expression on the Internet and through other new technologies.

Second, we wish to **strengthen efforts to combat racism and xenophobia**, in view of the trend of heightened incidents of racism and xenophobia towards those perceived as outsiders as a result of differing racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds, or other differing traits. We believe that it is appropriate for participating States to reaffirm the importance of integration policies that include respect for cultural and religious diversity and promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

I should also like to take this opportunity to indicate that the Irish Chairmanship will continue the recent practice of facilitating a meeting for civil society around the time of the Ministerial meetings. We are already in contact with representatives of the Civic Solidarity Platform regarding the arrangements for such a meeting and I would encourage interested civil society representatives to make contact with us or with the Platform.

In all of our work during 2012, the Chairmanship has sought to work in the closest possible way with ODIHR, the Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Parliamentary Assembly as well as the Special Representatives and Personal Representatives. I would like to thank them once again for their efforts and wish you all a successful and substantive series of discussions here at this 2012 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.