

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2014
Opening Statement of the Canadian Delegation
Ambassador Isabelle Poupart
Permanent Representative to the OSCE
Monday, September 22, 2014

Mr. Chairperson,

In order for real progress to be achieved in the Human Dimension of the OSCE, the integrity and commitment of all participating States is required. Indeed, it is only when we prioritize the implementation of these commitments that we will achieve real progress towards comprehensive, co-operative, equal and indivisible security, including through full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

It has been painful to watch the very principles on which this Organization is founded be dismissed and ignored, month after month, by the actions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, including in Crimea. These actions are a flagrant disregard of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The results of Russia's violent actions have been deadly for the people of Ukraine, and also for others – not least the victims of the flight MH17 tragedy. Canada has and will continue to deplore the death of so many, caught in this senseless and brutal aggression.

We call on Russia to cease its aggression against Ukraine and to adopt a cooperative approach in which peace and security, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are not mere words to be repeated by a state-controlled press, but real values and principles upon which we can build true security for all in the OSCE region.

Mr. Chairperson,

Allow me to highlight Canada's priorities in the Human Dimension. We particularly welcome the opportunity to address the issue of violence against women and girls during the special day dedicated to this issue. As we seek to combat intolerance and hate crime, we are extremely concerned by the actions of some participating States in failing to address or worst implicitly encouraging violence against targeted groups, including LGBT persons.

Violence and discrimination on the basis of one's belief or religion is equally unacceptable and Canada welcomed the adoption in 2013 of a Ministerial Decision on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. Canada is pleased to support ODIHR's efforts on this issue and has done so through our Office for Religious Freedom, who currently supports an OSCE initiative to advance religious freedom throughout Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus and will continue to engage on this issue with a number of countries in the OSCE area.

The fight against discrimination and violence however must not be used as a cynical tool to stifle freedom of expression. Transparency and accountability are best served when citizens are free to express their views.

It is the responsibility of all democracies to reflect the will of their people. In order to know the will of their people, the voices of their citizens must be heard. New technologies are now providing innovative means for dialogue between governments and their citizens. And, as Canada's Foreign Minister Baird noted in his address to the 2014 Freedom Online Coalition Conference, "all states must respect internationally recognized human rights – both online and offline."

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are concepts that need to be protected and maintained by democratic institutions and the rule of law. Canada salutes efforts made by the OSCE and ODIHR in that regard, including through the deployment of election observation missions. We are also proud to co-sponsor a side event this Thursday (with Solidarity Fund PL and the European Endowment for Democracy) on best practices to support Ukraine's democratic institutions and we hope that many of you will join us.

Before concluding, Canada would like to welcome Michael Link as the new ODIHR Director. We look forward to continuing the excellent cooperation we had with his predecessor and the ODIHR team. Your appointment, Director Link, comes at a crucial time in the organization's history. As some try to re-interpret or backtrack on our mutual commitments through the insidious promotion of so-called "traditional values", we are confident that you and your team will continue to defend and advance our Human Dimension commitments, based on universal rights and human dignity for all.

Thank you.