

1 July 2015

HUMAN DIMENSION SEMINAR – OPENING STATEMENT BY UNITED KINGDOM

I align myself with the statement made by Latvia on behalf of the European Union but would like to make a few remarks in my national capacity.

I join others in thanking the Serbian Chairmanship and ODIHR for their efforts in organising this seminar.

The UK government is committed to having strong and effective National Human Rights Institutions. The three UK NHRIs, namely the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Scottish Human Rights Commission and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission are all accredited “A status” by the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and have been assessed to be fully compliant with the Paris Principles.

Mr/Madam Chairman,

Two weeks from today, the United Kingdom will mark 800 years since the sealing of Magna Carta, one of the most significant legal documents ever written. Magna Carta was a foundation stone of the universal values of tolerance, democracy, the rule of law and the principle that the state should be answerable to its citizens. Independent national human rights institutions can and do play an important role in promoting and protecting these principles and values. An international rules based system provides an essential framework to underpin common values and human rights. The OSCE has an important role to play in that international framework and we are fortunate to have OSCE institutions with considerable expertise whose professionalism and dedication we pay tribute to.

Mr/Madam Chairman, it is worth reflecting briefly on why human rights and democratic values matter and why therefore we need strong NHRIs, a robust, rules-based international framework and vibrant and independent civil society to promote human rights. Yes, because the protection and promotion of these rights and values is the right thing to do, but also because it is in our national interests to do so. Countries that respect the human rights of their citizens are invariably more stable, prosperous and innovative. They generally make better neighbours. All good reasons for discussing how NHRIs can better promote and protect international standards and commitments.

Thank you