



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to ODIHR Director Michael Link's Report on the 2016 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 13, 2016

Director Link, the United States welcomes you back to the Permanent Council and thanks you for your report on the 2016 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. On behalf of my delegation here in Vienna, and our colleagues from Washington, Moscow, and Baku who were part of the U.S. delegation to HDIM, I would like thank you, Director Link, and your outstanding ODIHR team, for organizing Europe and Eurasia's premier human rights event. We extend, once again, our deep gratitude to the people and government of Poland for hosting ODIHR, and for so graciously receiving us at HDIM -- and to the Chairmanship for its efforts. We regret that the decision was adopted so late this year, and we commit to work with the incoming Austrian chair to support adoption at an appropriate time next year.

The annual HDIM remains a much-needed platform for participating States and civil society representatives to engage in a comprehensive review of the implementation of OSCE human dimension commitments, spotlighting concerns and identifying ways to address them effectively. We are proud to have brought a high-level delegation to HDIM, including Assistant Secretary of State Tom Malinowski and Ambassador Michael Kozak. We took full advantage of the opportunity to engage government counterparts and civil society organizations from across the region. And if I may say, I believe I am the Ambassador that spent the most time there, so I take a personal interest in the assessment of this meeting and I think I have some credibility in assessing it as well.

Director Link, we agree with you that the 2016 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting was a resounding success. HDIM drew a record number of participants and hosted a record number of side events. The high turnout and high quality of these events show that HDIM remains one of the most important elements of the OSCE calendar. The event hosted by ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews exemplifies the leadership, dedication, and pride which the ODIHR team takes in ensuring HDIM's success.

Throughout the course of our discussions at HDIM, one truth kept coming up: the necessity of promoting tolerance and ensuring we have a strong and active civil society to address contemporary challenges, such as those presented by violent extremism. Steps forward or setbacks in the human dimension have a direct and measurable effect on the security and economic dimensions. Meeting our commitments in the human dimension remains integral to our collective ability to effectively address the stark security threats we now face.

Director Link, dear colleagues: civil society and independent media need our support now more than ever. The participation at HDIM of independent civil society members and advocates for freedom of expression online and offline is essential to the quality and integrity of our discussions. Independent voices provide ground-truth, deepen our understanding of the situation in specific countries and in the broader OSCE region -- and they help us find practical solutions to problems. Civil society representatives spoke about the difficult human rights situations in a number of participating States, including Russia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine in the form of Russian-occupied Crimea, and several Central Asian states. They effectively counteracted the self-serving statements given by certain national delegations, as well as the government-organized NGOs that parroted their benefactors.

Director Link, we share your concern that all civil society representatives who wish to participate in HDIM can do so. The human rights activists, NGO members, and advocates for media freedom who enriched our HDIM discussions must be able to exercise their right to return to their countries without reprisal -- including against family members or other associates.

The U.S. delegation regretted that national delegations left HDIM part-way through the meeting. We were interested to hear the perspectives of their governments on the range of issues covered at HDIM, and due to their early departures did not have the full opportunity to do so. We look forward to all OSCE participating States engaging fully in future OSCE events.

We should all redouble our efforts to make HDIM a key opportunity to understand one another's viewpoints, review implementation of our shared commitments, identify areas where we can cooperate with one another, with ODIHR and other OSCE institutions, and with civil society to make progress and generate recommendations for future human dimension work. In response to our distinguished colleague from Kazakhstan, I would underscore that while certainly we should seize any opportunity to find common ground, HDIM remains what it was meant to be. As its name conveys, it is an implementation meeting. It is an opportunity to review gaps between the commitments that we have made and the situation on the ground.

We call on all participating States to uphold their democratic principles and OSCE commitments, and to ensure that individuals who participate in HDIM need not fear reprisals upon returning home.

Colleagues, mounting pressure in many participating States against civil society and independent media is accompanied by efforts to undermine HDIM and weaken the OSCE's independent bodies and field missions. The United States opposes any shortening of the annual HDIM or any hollowing-out of the HDIM agendas. We also oppose any weakening of OSCE institutions, of the integrity of their mandates, or of their budgets. We are committed to working with other delegations, and with the German and Austrian Chairmanships, to ensure that fearless, determined, effective successors are chosen for the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Before I close, Director Link, thank you for your "food for thought" questions about how we can ensure an open, respectful, interesting HDIM in years to come. Our delegation will be

ready to share input, and while I suspect that new rules may be difficult to agree -- as they often are -- they also may be unnecessary. Encouragement from you and from moderators for participants to help make the meeting respectful would be a large influence in and of itself.

In closing, let me once again thank ODIHR for its efforts to maintain and uphold our collective OSCE human dimension commitments that are fundamental for our collective security. Director Link, let me reassure you that the United States strongly supports ODIHR and its efforts to assist participating States in meeting their human dimension commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.