

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

OSCE Ministerial Council, Brussels, 4/5 December 2006

**Statement on behalf of Ireland by Mr. Noel Treacy, TD, Minister of State for
European Affairs**

Mr. Chairman,

May I begin by thanking our colleague, Minister Karel de Gucht, the Belgian Chairman in Office for the efficient way in which he and his colleagues have organised this conference and for the warmth of their hospitality. I would also like to express my appreciation for the professionalism and commitment which they brought to the challenging role of OSCE Chair both in Brussels and Vienna.

Ireland aligns itself with the statement made by Finland on behalf of the European Union

Much work inside our organisation over the past year has focused on how we might strengthen the effectiveness of the OSCE. The first part of the task, which the Ministerial Council decided on at our 2005 meeting in Ljubljana, concerned what might broadly be called the instruments and procedures of OSCE.

This proved to be a challenging discussion and we are grateful to the Chair for the report which summarises those areas in which it proved possible to achieve consensus.

The document *Common Responsibility: Commitments and Implementation* which we have before us represents a response to the second element in our decision of 2005, that relating to Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). I believe that this very comprehensive report, which fulfils the mandate that we gave at Ljubljana, should be endorsed in its entirety by the Ministerial Council, allowing us to bring this long running debate to a conclusion.

ODIHR can be justly proud of the election monitoring and assessment methodology which it has pioneered. These are rooted in the Copenhagen standards and have become part of the OSCE acquis. In the language of the report, they represent the fundamental rule book for developed democracies. For our citizens, election monitoring represents the aspect of the work of OSCE for which it is most widely known and deeply valued.

ODIHR is recognized as a world leader in the field of election monitoring. This reputation should be carefully guarded and any proposal which might tend to weaken or dilute those standards could never be accepted by Ireland.

The independence of ODIHR from political control is particularly important. It is this autonomy that allows its assessments to command such widespread respect and assent.

The work of ODIHR is not confined to monitoring elections. Ireland values highly the programmes undertaken in other areas of democratisation and in human rights. We particularly value the efforts of ODIHR to promote the mainstreaming of gender issues throughout the OSCE area. I am pleased to be able to inform you that Ireland will shortly conclude a multi-year agreement with ODIHR to provide about one million Euros over three years in support of the Fair Trials Programme of the Democratisation Unit. This support, which will be delivered via Ireland's development co-operation programme, Irish Aid, is intended as a pilot commitment which, if successful, will serve as basis for extending our existing support to other institutions and the work of Field Missions.

Ireland values the work undertaken by the High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and by OSCE field missions and has demonstrated this through our extra-budgetary support for their work. This will continue.

The appointment by the Chairman in Office in 2004 of three personal representatives on intolerance issues was the clearest possible indication of our Organisation's rejection of racism, xenophobia, religious persecution and other forms of intolerance. I understand that consultations are ongoing with regard to the continuation of their

mandate for one more year. As we are all aware, the role of the three Personal Representatives was not intended to be a permanent one. I would suggest that the coming year gives us an opportunity to reflect on the best means of carrying forward this important area of work in the longer term, perhaps by embodying it institutionally within ODIHR, or indeed by other means.

The firm defence and implementation of human rights is one of the core values of our Organisation. It is therefore with regret that I note that the situation in a number of participating States is developing in a negative direction. The human rights situation in Uzbekistan remains deeply disturbing. Turkmenistan also gives rise to concern. It is unclear whether the government of that country is in conformity with any of the commitments it has freely undertaken in the Human Dimension. On the borders of the European Union we are concerned at the continuing deterioration in respect for democratic norms and standards in Belarus. It is Ireland's strong wish to have good relations with all OSCE participating States.

In reminding States of their commitments, and of the need to abide by them, we act out of genuine concern, not hostility.

Together with NGOs, lawyers, trade-unionists and journalists, human rights defenders have a vital role to play in the consolidation of democracy. In supporting efforts to promote and protect human rights internationally, Ireland pays particular attention to the treatment of human rights defenders and assists organisations which monitor their position. I echo the call made earlier by the Finnish Presidency of the European Union for all participating States to fully comply with their OSCE commitments towards human rights defenders.

Ireland supports the work of Special Envoy Ahtisaari in Kosovo and looks forward to his proposals on its future status.

We realise that OSCE will be called on to play a significant role in the future of Kosovo and are confident that it will do so, in close cooperation with the European Union, drawing on the skill and experience gained in the region to date.

Efforts to resolve “frozen conflicts” must continue. In the cases of Georgia and Moldova, the full and unconditional implementation of the commitments given at the Istanbul Summit in 1999 remains an essential element in any solution.

Ireland welcomes OSCE’s involvement in the Environmental Security Initiative and look forward to working on the environmental issues, which have been chosen as a priority by the incoming chairmanship.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you once again for all your efforts over the past year in the difficult position of Chairman in Office. I would like to wish the very best to our Spanish colleagues in the challenges which they are taking on and to assure them of our co-operation and support for their continuing work on behalf of the OSCE.