

18 September 2017



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

OPENING STATEMENT

As delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad
at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2017,
Warsaw, 11 September 2017

Check against delivery.

Chair,

I join others in thanking ODIHR for the admirable preparations for this meeting, despite the difficulties caused by the late adoption of the agenda again this year.

I also want to express our appreciation to the Austrian Chairmanship for its tireless efforts to make this meeting take place.

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is important. Both as a platform to receive feedback from civil society, and as a place to exchange best practices and debate challenges faced in implementing our Human Dimension commitments.

Chair,

It is also with great pleasure we welcome the new Director of ODIHR Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir. We look forward to cooperating closely with her.

ODIHR, working with the Participating States, is an essential institution for the promotion of democracy, rule of law, human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination. We also want to stress the importance of protecting and maintaining the autonomy of ODIHR. As a cornerstone for the promotion and implementation of human rights commitments within the OSCE region, ODIHR and its director can count on our continued support.

Chair,

Democracy and respect for human rights are preconditions for securing peace and stability, both within and between states.

Good governance and the rule of law are prerequisites for development, economic growth and innovation.

Merely holding elections or passing laws do not alone constitute democracy. A vibrant and robust democracy is a mosaic: a carefully balanced mix of strong institutions, an independent judiciary and an elected government and parliamentarians with the interest of the people at its core.

Importantly, there is no democracy without a diverse and independent civil society, freedom of assembly and a free press. Individual freedoms are the foundation of any true democracy.

Unfortunately, these fundamental elements of democracy are not present in all Participating states.

Chair,

All democracies consist of majorities and minorities. Persons who belong to a minority within a minority are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and violence.

Consequently, in order to fight ‘multiple discrimination’, the principle that human rights are for all, regardless of national or ethnic origin, sex, gender identity, color, religion or belief, language or any other status is essential.

Chair,

In many parts of the world, those who advocate their own and others’ rights expose themselves to great danger. This is unacceptable.

Standing up for human rights in the face of danger and repression requires tremendous courage.

It takes courage to criticize the way security challenges and freedom of expression are being handled in our Participating states.

The protection of human rights defenders is a key priority in Norwegian foreign policy.

We are very concerned that some governments - whose responsibility it is to protect and implement human rights - impose laws and policies that do the opposite.

The freedoms of expression and association, and the right to peaceful protest, must be respected and protected.

Chair,

In conclusion, let me again stress that HDIM is important, because it gives civil society an opportunity to tell us what they see as the most pressing concerns and human rights violations. Civil society plays an important role in holding governments to account. Civil society can act as a catalyst for change and contribute to development. This is essential to fill the gaps in implementation that we all are facing.

Thank you.