

Opening remarks by Ambassador Christian Strohal
Special Representative for the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship 2017

OSCE Human Dimension Seminar
Rights of the Child: Children in Situations of Risk
11 October 2017

Dear Director Gisladdottir,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

it is great to be back in Warsaw – and I am honoured to represent the Chair-in-Office today.

This Human Dimension Seminar is a special event, for several reasons:

First of all, it is the only Seminar we have. In other words, an opportunity to deepen our knowledge by focusing on a specific subject and discussing it with the broadest possible range of experts and partners – and I will come back to this aspect in a moment.

So let me start by thanking the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (*ODIHR*) for their unrelenting work in preparing for this Seminar, under not always easy circumstances. Also thank or host

country – their global role on developing the rights of the child is very well remembered.

Secondly, this is a special event because of its subject – the rights of the child as the most vulnerable in our societies. Therefore, the status of these rights and their implementation constitutes a mirror of our society as a whole, of our achievements and shortcomings, and of the state of human rights.

And this has never been more true than today:

Austria has taken over the OSCE Chairmanship at a critical juncture. In too many places, we see grave threats to peace and security; including to the detriment of our human rights and fundamental freedoms. Therefore, the OSCE with its comprehensive security concept and the principles and commitments to which we all signed up in Helsinki, Paris, Copenhagen, Astana and elsewhere is more necessary than ever.

Given these challenges, we have been striving to rebuild trust and confidence between the participating states of the OSCE. Building trust requires, first and foremost, open and constructive dialogue.

The OSCE in itself offers a unique platform of dialogue. Only four weeks ago we came together here in Warsaw at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), the centerpiece of dialogue between participating States and civil society to discuss all pertinent issues of

the Human Dimension. Regular critical dialogue among us is indispensable, all the more in such turbulent times. As Chairmanship we are fully committed to ensuring a continued dialogue on areas within the human dimension and the commitments thereof. While we are convinced that this dialogue has to engage with all groups, we are also dedicated to pay particular attention to marginalized groups. As we all know only too well, children are one of the most vulnerable groups, and even more so in situations of risk.

So today, we continue this dialogue. This year's seminar provides a special focus: on particular situations of risk for children's human rights, on how to address and mitigate them. Children face manifold situations of risk: in the context of deprivation of liberty, in situations of exploitation, in the context of migration, in the school environment, or online. Despite progress in the realization of children's rights, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, too many commitments remain unfulfilled. This is particularly true for children deprived of liberty: Instead of being taken care of, in the literal sense of the word, they all too often remain invisible and forgotten. We therefore call on you for an exchange of good practices in the OSCE region and of existing strategies for preventing situations of risks – only in this way we can learn from each other in order to improve and meet the commitments we have defined among ourselves.

Children's rights are universal rights. If they are not respected, nobody's rights are guaranteed.

So, children's rights remain high on the agenda of the Austrian Chairmanship in the OSCE, as they have been a longstanding priority of the Austrian human rights policy overall. Consequently, Austria has put special emphasis on promoting child rights, including protection from violence and exploitation, not only during its membership in the UN Security Council from 2009 to 2010, but also during its membership in the UN Human Rights Council from 2011 to 2014. Both at the UN General Assembly as well as at the UN Human Rights Council, Austria is the main sponsor of the Resolution "Human rights in the administration of justice, including juvenile justice" which focuses on the protection of children and juveniles in relation to the justice system. Austria also supports the elaboration of new UN-Standards on the elimination of violence against children in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice. These Model Strategies and Practical Measures aim to support states in preventing violence against children who come in contact with the justice system.

And this brings me to the third reason why our Seminar is a special event - it brings in new partnerships: in particular, we are very pleased to use synergies with the UN by supporting the in-depth global study on children deprived of liberty that the Secretary-General has commissioned. The global study is led by the independent expert Manfred Nowak who many of you will remember as the former UN

Special Rapporteur on Torture - we are delighted to welcome him as a key note speaker to this Seminar later today.

I would like to encourage all participants of the seminar to take part in the regional consultations of the UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty today during our lunch break. Our colleagues working on the Global Study would like to hear from you about the situation of children in three specific circumstances: in 1) the juvenile justice system, in 2) immigration detention and 3) in other administrative situations of deprivation of liberty. These discussions at the regional level of the OSCE are all the more relevant to this study since the OSCE is a regional arrangement in the sense of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter.

Subsequently, our Seminar will maintain this focus by addressing efforts to combat trafficking in children and, finally, on how to prevent situations of risk. By providing children with knowledge, digital literacy, skills and understanding through human rights education they are given agency to protect themselves. Empowering children and youth to develop the life skills they need is well worth our efforts. Their protection, however, remains the responsibility of all governments. I am sure we will hear more about the Seminar's layout from the Director and her team.

In this spirit I wish this seminar every success and fruitful discussions for the benefit of us all. Thank you.