

Remarks of President Riccardo Migliori
Opening of Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, Poland || 24 October 2012

Mr. Ambassador,
Distinguished colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be with you today with the people who defend our human rights everyday throughout this region. And while I address you today, I speak also to all of those who cannot be here --

those in prison for expressing their beliefs;
those in fear of punishment for speaking out, who couldn't dare even come here today;
to those in mourning who lost a loved one in the fight for freedom.

This meeting is an important annual opportunity for our Organization to underpin its human rights founding principles. But I am not here for any yearly ritual visit nor is this a standard business-as-usual speech.

You see, I fear this OSCE's approach to human rights has veered off track.

In 1975, the Helsinki Process ensured that human rights were forever linked to comprehensive security. We called it the "third dimension" or "third basket," but for so many of us it remains the first priority.

Now, 37 years later, amid a time of frozen conflicts and failed states, climate change and economic crisis, I fear the OSCE has relegated human rights to a back seat.

Human Dimension activities in Vienna have insignificant media visibility and very scarce follow up. The main focus on this dimension is these couple weeks in Warsaw. That's not enough.

That's why at our Annual Session last July, our Assembly voted to formalize the role of civil society within the OSCE, calling for an advisory board comprised of representatives from leading NGOs working on OSCE issues. We also voted to request that the Permanent Council hold special meetings on human rights abuses that includes civil society representatives and is open to the public.

At the Parliamentary Assembly we lead by example. We hold these kinds of meetings regularly. Some of our members went from exile to election in just the last two decades.

This year we were the first international body of elected officials to vote to strengthen respect for the rule of law in Russia in the wake of the death of Sergei Magnitsky.

We've given opposition from Belarus a platform to speak to elected officials.

We've gone to Kyiv and called for the respect of rule of law.

And we have shined the spotlight on prison conditions ranging from the United States to my own home country of Italy.

Some months ago, visiting the prison in Massa, in my region, I was seriously alarmed to see appalling situations of starvation. What I saw in Massa may have been due to bureaucratic issues, but this is no excuse.

Bureaucratization is what I want to avoid in our Parliamentary Assembly and our Organization at large.

I am proud that the PA for twenty years has worked within its budget, receiving perfect audits from outside, independent professional auditors every single year. We've even expanded our activities despite a frozen budget for the last four years.

Other OSCE Institutions should emulate this record of efficiency because tax payers expect nothing less.

Our organization is not hinged on the meetings, on the documents and on the resolutions. Our work is based on what we do in the field and for the people.

This is the essence of our human dimension task: we must always recall that we are there to serve the people as their elected representatives. The paramount way for us to do this is through our election monitoring activity.

Since the early 1990s we have been recognized as a global leader in the field of election observation. And for the better part of 15 years we have enjoyed mostly fruitful cooperation with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. But this cooperation has seen some ups and downs.

I want to say, right here in Warsaw, that I consider our cooperation an added value for the OSCE election observation activities. However this cooperation must be based on an honest implementation of the 1997 Cooperation Agreement. An agreement which was conceived to better coordinate our efforts and that constitutes the foundation of our joint election monitoring activity.

And starting with my presidency, the OSCE PA from now on will request an *orthodox* implementation of the Cooperation Agreement and refuse to allow ODIHR to continue its "established malpractice" regarding our joint activities.

The PA is the professional body of elected officials with the track record to lead the OSCE's election observation work, however without the full compliance of the ODIHR to the Cooperation Agreement we cannot be as effective as the OSCE should be.

In an age of austerity and a time of damaged trust in international organizations and governments, we need to refocus on our strengths.

It's time for the OSCE's primary human rights Institution to get back to its roots – human rights.

In the last five year's election monitoring has grown to consume more than 42 of the ODIHR budget.

We have a lot of different organizations here today representing a lot of different aspects of human rights. Now, I don't know about you, but I don't think nearly half of our region's human rights abuses come down to campaigns and elections. The ODIHR needs to increase and intensify its monitoring activities to render them more effective.

As elected officials, we know the power of diplomacy, and we know there's a time for quieter talks and there's a time for blustery press conferences. But if you want to be the OSCE human rights institution then you need to speak up.

In too many of our countries the courts are a farce. We need ODIHR to say so. It's not good enough to monitor a trial, like it was done in Belarus, and then not publicize the fact that defendants weren't able to fairly present their case; and it's certainly not good enough to skip out on observing trials when you could have been there as in the critical case in Zhanaozen, Kazakhstan.

I hope those of you here encourage a more pro-active, human-rights oriented human rights office. You deserve it. You deserve an Organization that shows courage amid crisis and speaks aloud where no one else is able, like we have come to expect from the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

You deserve it not just this week or next when you are all here in Warsaw, but all the time when you are at home, when your brother is silenced in a prison, or your sister isolated in a hospital. If the OSCE is not with you then, when will it be?

Thank you very much.