



Delegation of Canada
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2018

Opening Statement by the Delegation of Canada, delivered by Ambassador Natasha Cayer, Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE, Monday, September 10, 2018

Madam Director, Excellencies, Colleagues, and Representatives of Civil Society,

As Canada's Permanent Representative to the OSCE, I am very pleased to be joining you once again this year for the opening of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. A meeting I, and our delegation, see as an integral part of the OSCE's Human Dimension commitments made by all participating States.

In the interest of brevity, let me say that Canada shares the many concerns raised by other speakers, particularly with regard to the attempted illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, ongoing Russian involvement in the war in Ukraine, the ongoing detention of Oleg Sentsov, as well as the human rights situation in Chechnya.

Every year we meet together, in accordance with our consensus OSCE commitments from the 1992 Helsinki Document and Permanent Council Decision 476, committing all participating States to the holding of HDIM annually in years where there are no Review Conferences, and are again faced with the stark reality that human rights and fundamental freedoms in many participating States in the OSCE region are under threat. In many places the space for civil society is shrinking. Democracies and democratic institutions are at risk. The free media is being curtailed and journalists face threats to their personal safety for exercising their rights. The rule of law is challenged and political interference with the judiciary is rising. Intolerance and discrimination persist, often based upon what an individual believes. The freedom to express oneself, to peacefully assemble and associate continues to be threatened and restricted. Gender inequality remains pervasive, even in the most gender equal societies. Racism and xenophobia plague many of our societies and our citizens, and these fears are being exacerbated for political ends. But, to all these sobering facts, we must also acknowledge the vitality and importance of this meeting, the responsibility we all have in fighting for human rights and fundamental freedoms together, and the positive role played by the OSCE's autonomous institutions which are essential actors in this effort.

For these reasons and more, Canada values this meeting and what it can achieve. It is the largest human rights conference in Europe, and the only major human rights conference that involves civil society participation on an equal footing with government representation. It represents a unique opportunity each year to gather as diplomats, civil society representatives, activists, and journalists to face these threats head on; to strive for the ideals and commitments that were first enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and strengthened subsequently. The gains made since 1975 are being seriously tested as many participating States ignore or dismiss the commitments they have made. Worryingly, failure to uphold these commitments is often distorted in such a way as to be met with indifference or even support rather than disapproval. This meeting is vital in enabling the citizens of those states to speak out against the contraventions of those commitments and to call on all of us to uphold our obligations.

My delegation will play an active role in the working sessions, and have much to say about the concerns I have raised, about the importance of abiding by, and upholding, our shared OSCE commitments; and we will continue to espouse our firmly held beliefs in the value and necessity of diversity, peaceful pluralism, and the respect for all human rights. But most importantly, we are looking forward to hearing from civil society, and

engaging with civil society representatives during the side events and at the breaks. It is essential to hear and listen to your voices to identify concrete ways that we can work towards better implementation of our shared commitments in the Human Dimension.

Thank you Madam Director.