

Canadian Delegation to the
Organization for Security & Cooperation
in Europe



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Délégation du Canada auprès de
l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération
en Europe

**DELEGATION OF CANADA TO THE OSCE
STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE REPORT
BY AMBASSADOR CHRISTIAN STROHAL
DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE FOR THE DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS
AND HUMAN RIGHTS
700TH MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
7 FEBRUARY 2008**

Canada again warmly welcomes Ambassador Strohal to the Permanent Council. We thank him for his presentation of ODIHR's plans for the coming year. This provides us with a useful snapshot of the areas of particular focus for ODIHR for 2008.

We thank him as well for his detailed account of the actions taken by ODIHR to address the issues identified in the Common Responsibility report of 2006, and in Brussels MC Decision 19/06.

We must remember that these documents also call on participating States to do their share to implement better their OSCE commitments. This is why Canada, like several other delegations, has been calling for a renewed focus on reviewing implementation of our existing commitments in the human dimension. We are doing this Organization, and our constituents, a disservice if we shy away from examining how we are all living up to the standards we have set for ourselves. We hope that we will find our way clear in the near future to place a greater emphasis on improving implementation within the human dimension.

We broadly share the orientations outlined by Ambassador Strohal for ODIHR's programme of activities.

We also note that Ambassador Strohal chose to start his presentation by referring to the human rights aspect of ODIHR's work. This is quite appropriate, in our view. Our human rights commitments are a fundamental cornerstone of the Helsinki foundations.

As participating States, we must not lose sight of the primordial importance of fundamental rights and freedoms in our pursuit of an OSCE area secure and safe for all – we need to constantly look at how we are doing in terms of respecting those rights and freedoms. We are looking forward to reading the two handbooks on human rights and terrorism, and human rights and armed forces, and are glad to see that ODIHR will continue working on the protection of human rights defenders.

Let me highlight only a few other specific areas addressed by Ambassador Strohal. As regards NGO participation in our Organization, we also agree that we need to keep the door open to NGOs. Our openness to civil society has been more of a blessing than a burden. Dialogue with civil society has enriched our debates, and forced us to take a harder look at some of the real issues and problems that arise in each and every participating State. What would be a burden would be to create a bureaucratic system of accreditation of NGOs. Let us err on the side of inclusion, rather than exclusion.

On the matter of elections, we continue to believe that ODIHR is doing sterling work in its preparations and conduct of electoral observation missions. We appreciate the further improvements made to the way ODIHR carries out its election-related activities, in furtherance of Brussels decision 19/06. Cooperation between ODIHR and the OSCE PA also has improved, as was evident during the recent elections in Georgia.

We also note that most participating States have been very cooperative in allowing ODIHR to conduct its election monitoring work, before, during and after Election Day. We again encourage participating States to engage in a substantive post-election dialogue with ODIHR and to fully take advantage of its assistance and recommendations.

On the specific case of the observation mission to the Russian Presidential Election, we last week expressed our regret regarding the late invitation to ODIHR, and that unwarranted restrictions were being made on ODIHR's proposed mission. Such restrictions undermine the commitments participating States have undertaken in respect of election monitoring. Despite extensive efforts, we have taken careful note of Ambassador Strohal's announcement this morning, advising us that it is ODIHR's judgement that they are unable to deliver their mandate, to observe the 2nd March election, due to the restrictions imposed.

We would like to underline that a State host of an electoral mission should not dictate any aspect of such a mission: to do so would undermine the confidence-building aspect of such activity. As we recently said, the nature, scope or modalities of an election observation mission does not imply any kind of pre-judgment on the quality of the electoral process. And furthermore, the early invitation and the unconditional and unrestricted welcoming of international observers is the way to uphold our OSCE election-related commitments.

To conclude, we believe ODIHR's broad range of activities needs to be adequately supported financially. We are satisfied with the latest budget for ODIHR, as presented by the Chairmanship-in-Office. We believe this is a reasonable accommodation that provides ODIHR with the necessary means to continue to perform its mandate. We hope that this level of funding of ODIHR will meet with acceptance in the very near future.

We wish Ambassador Strohal and his staff all the best in their challenging endeavours.