



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Report by the Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

As delivered by Chargé d’Affaires Courtney Austrian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 16, 2023

Director Mecacci, it is always a pleasure to welcome you back to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your detailed report. ODIHR’s quick reaction to Russia’s brutal and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine through your human rights monitoring work is an important contribution to international accountability efforts. Thanks to your extensive interviews and documentation – including over 140 in-depth interviews with survivors and witnesses of abuses and violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including acts of sexual and gender-based violence – the world has a vivid picture of Russia’s extensive and abusive filtration system in Ukraine and its forced deportations and adoptions of Ukraine’s children. Russia’s ongoing effort to erase Ukraine from the map as an independent state will fail – and those responsible will be held to account.

It is clear that the work of the human dimension is more important than ever, and safeguarding democracy is an important part of that. ODIHR is to be commended for conducting 15 election observation missions in 13 OSCE participating States last year, which the United States supported by sending 174 observers. The United States was also pleased to host 40 long-term observers and 132 Parliamentary Assembly short term observers for our November 2022 mid-term elections.

We also greatly value the rule-of-law-related expertise ODIHR has provided and continues to provide to participating States, including your assessments of legislative processes and human rights tools to help ensure fair legal proceedings. We encourage all participating States to avail themselves of your assistance.

ODIHR’s work on tolerance and non-discrimination remains compelling. The Chairmanship’s recent conference on combatting antisemitism in Skopje -- in which the Personal Representative of the Chair, Rabbi Andrew Baker, as well as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly’s Special Representative Senator Ben Cardin, the U.S. Deputy Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, and many European envoys participated -- was a valuable forum for coordinating efforts at a time when we are witnessing rising antisemitism around the world, including in the United States. The Biden-Harris Administration is currently undertaking the development of the first National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism, Islamophobia, and Related Forms of Discrimination and Bias.

We continue to value OSCE's work countering intolerance and discrimination against Roma and fostering Roma inclusion. The U.S. Special Representative on Racial Equity and Justice Desiree Cormier-Smith, with whom you met in Warsaw during the Human Dimension Conference last September, looks forward to working with you on enhancing engagement on Roma issues as well as with persons of African descent and other racial minorities in the OSCE region.

We applaud ODIHR's work on preventing discrimination against persons with disabilities when appearing in court. Your organizing the first-ever moot court competition on the rights of persons with disabilities is an important reminder of how ODIHR remains an innovative leader in ensuring the human rights of all are protected.

We also commend your continuing efforts to advance gender equality and equity, empower women's leadership and full participation in political and public life, and address violence against women and girls in all their diversity, including through online harassment and abuse. This issue continues to be a priority for the Biden-Harris Administration across both our domestic and foreign policy, including the imperative of preventing and addressing online harassment and abuse, which disproportionately targets women political leaders, journalists, activists, and human rights defenders. This will be a focus of the second Summit for Democracy, which will take place at the end of this month.

ODIHR's work countering hate crimes could not be more timely. We urge all participating States to provide ODIHR the disaggregated data crucial to shaping effective strategies against these despicable crimes. No one should ever be targeted for violence because of who they are, how they look, who they love, or what they believe.

Finally, the United States shares ODIHR's regret that the mandated Human Dimension Implementation Meeting was again not held last year, and we strongly support holding the formal HDIM in 2023. We also share your view that the hugely well attended 2022 Warsaw Human Dimension Conference under the Polish Chairmanship sent a clear signal that the vast majority of OSCE participating States support the essential role civil society plays in advancing OSCE's human rights and democratic goals. The attendance of well over 50 governments and some 600 civil society representatives from across the region underscores the fact that the OSCE's work will go on despite attempts to obstruct it. Comprehensive reviews of how participating States are living up to Human Dimension commitments will remain integral to the OSCE process. All participating States, my own included, must be held accountable for our actions – or our inaction.

The protection of human rights and the strengthening of democratic processes remains an urgent priority, and the United States will remain a stalwart supporter of your work and a defender of ODIHR's mandate and independence.

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