

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished delegates,

I am very pleased to address you at the opening of this Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. It was ten years ago, almost to the day, that the OSCE held the first of these meetings. The aim was to better monitor progress and setbacks in the field of human rights, in the broadest sense. Since then, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting has developed into the main platform for coordinating OSCE efforts in this field. It provides a useful opportunity for us to tell each other about our experiences, to learn from each other and to return home freshly inspired to advance the cause of human rights.

This meeting is one of the very few opportunities, not just within the OSCE, but in the entire international community, for representatives of the fifty-five participating States, a number of international organisations and a wide variety of NGOs to meet on a regular basis, on an equal footing, and to speak frankly and openly about all human dimension issues. We must cherish this spirit of openness and make optimal use of it.

During its Chairmanship, the Netherlands has invested a great deal in the success of our work on the human dimension. As Chairman-in-Office, I have also personally endeavoured to bring in the whole array of deserving issues in this field. My visit to Central Asia is a case in point. There I spoke with heads of government not only about political, economic and security issues but also about typical human dimension topics like the freedom of the media, democratisation, a moratorium on the death penalty and the right to a fair trial and due process.

Let me say at this point that I am convinced of the need and the use of the dialogue that I had with the authorities during my trips in the past nine months. But that does not mean dialogue itself is enough. There is still a long way to go, in many parts of the OSCE area. I do not need to conceal that, as the CiO of this organization, people have asked me, both in my own country and in others, whether talking alone is enough. I have told them that I do not think it is. But I hope that my efforts to engage the authorities of various countries will actually lead to more. I cannot but stress the importance of OSCE states, all of them, living up to their human rights commitments. My own meetings with NGOs and representatives of civil society have impressed on me the importance of and the need for further improvements. At the same time, I also believe there is no alternative to continued dialogue and engagement.

Looking back, one recurrent theme in our efforts has been to promote tolerance and fight discrimination. This theme is all the more important at a time when we are confronted with serious threats to our security.

Of course, the Netherlands Chairmanship did not select the theme of tolerance and non-discrimination just out of the blue. It has been recognised as a crucial part of the human dimension for some time. One of the key decisions taken by the Ministerial Council in Porto was to intensify efforts to maintain and strengthen tolerance and non-discrimination and to take strong public positions against all forms of intolerance.

The Porto decision also called for events focusing on this theme. This year, two very successful conferences were held in Vienna, one dealing specifically with anti-Semitism, the other with racism, xenophobia and discrimination. Our discussion of those threats will continue at this Implementation Meeting and beyond, keeping us alert to the dangers they present in all our States.

It was the Ministerial Council in Bucharest which assigned us the task of producing an Action Plan on Roma and Sinti. And there is every reason to do so. Europe's Roma and Sinti communities are still facing huge problems. We need to work hard to restore their rightful place in European societies. Governments that take their human rights commitments seriously must not shy away from this responsibility. Instead, they should do everything in their power to guarantee basic human rights, opportunities for economic development and social equality to their Roma and Sinti citizens. Substantial progress has already been made on the Roma and Sinti Action Plan. Representatives of the Roma and Sinti communities are present at this Implementation Meeting. Let us make use of their knowledge and experience and keep building on the work done so far. I would like to stress the importance of adoption of the Roma and Sinti Action Plan at the Maastricht Ministerial Council later this year.

If we are serious about tolerance and non-discrimination, then freedom of religion and belief is another theme of undeniable significance. The ODIHR and its Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief have done important work in this field, both giving advice in specific legal cases and identifying issues which deserve our continuing attention. It is clear that, although progress is being made, there are still situations where freedom of religion is under threat.

Furthermore, two days have been set apart in the second week of this meeting to discuss national minorities and migrant workers. This will give you an opportunity to look at other aspects of tolerance and non-discrimination.

Clearly, the theme of tolerance and non-discrimination has been a very important one this year. But there are other themes in the human dimension that merit equal attention. Gender issues are a prime example. I welcome the efforts made by the ODIHR to promote gender equality, such as in this year's seminar in Warsaw. What the ODIHR and its Gender Unit are doing in the field to promote the rights of women is of great value and a real encouragement to the people concerned.

Allow me to mention the special emphasis that this Chairmanship has placed on the issue of trafficking, especially trafficking in human beings. This is a typical example of an issue which transcends the dimensions of the OSCE. It was the main topic of the Economic Forum in Prague, but at heart it is a threat to the basic dignity of human beings. The Anti-Trafficking Unit of the ODIHR and the OSCE missions have an important responsibility in this area, and I am glad to say that they are more than willing to do their part. I would like to thank you for your efforts and encourage you to continue in your fight against one of the most serious threats facing our region. I hardly need to tell you that the criminal networks responsible for trafficking have diversified their activities and are actively seeking to buy influence in our legitimate economic and political systems. We must prevent them from corrupting our societies and eroding the bonds of trust that hold them together.

The recently adopted OSCE Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings provides us with a comprehensive tool box to combat trafficking in all three dimensions of the OSCE, including through a new mechanism that is to contribute to assessment and advocacy. I am convinced we will see the results of our fight against trafficking duly reflected at the Maastricht Ministerial Council. We owe it to ourselves to provide the OSCE with the necessary high-level attention and tools to ensure the implementation of our commitments and the Action Plan. This is one way of allowing us, the governments of the OSCE, to show to others, including the victims of this terrible crime, that we are serious about replacing words by actual deeds. I appeal to you to lend your support to this effort.

The last meeting in the context of the human dimension during this year will take place in November and address the topic of torture. Torture is a direct violation of basic human rights. There can be no excuse for it, ever, and we must fight it with all the energy we

possess. I hope this meeting too will come up with suggestions on how to tackle this global problem. We owe it to the people in the OSCE area who were subjected to torture, or who have relatives who were a victim of it. My appeal to you to do something about this is inspired at least in part by those with whom I met on my trips and who have told me their stories.

The comprehensive character of the OSCE concept of security is clear when we look at the struggle against terrorism and its relation to human rights. This issue was addressed from many angles at last year's Implementation Meeting. Its importance has since grown, given that the threat of terrorism has not abated. At a seminar in The Hague organised some weeks ago by the Netherlands Helsinki Committee, I sensed a growing consensus on the need for closer cooperation and coordination, as well as more mutual respect, between the security and the human rights communities. Of course, when I am saying this, I am addressing countries both east and west of Vienna. Established democracies are also struggling to strike the right balance between security policies and human rights policies. I believe that our experience shows that the two can reinforce each other. Human rights policies must take account of the threats terrorist activities pose to human life, but security policies must respect fundamental freedoms if they are to acquire legitimacy in the eyes of the national and international public.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope that you will agree that this Chairmanship has so far attached great importance to the human dimension of the OSCE. We have tried to promote both standard-setting and implementation. But all this could of course never have been achieved without the efforts of the OSCE institutions, especially the ODIHR. This year, Mr Chairman, you assumed your post as Director of that Office and you will have come to realise in the meantime that you are faced with a vast array of issues, most of which are highly complex. Let me pay tribute to you, your Office and its entire staff for the work you are doing to advance the human dimension throughout the OSCE area. I promise you that I will use my remaining time as Chairman-in-Office to assist and support you in your efforts wherever I can.

Summing up, I would like to stress once again that, however important the work done at conferences, the human dimension is, above all, about people, about their concerns, their problems, their worries and their well-being. What matters most to people is the step from words to actions. In the final analysis, the success of our human rights policies depends not

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on the eloquence of our Declarations and Action Plans, but on our willingness and ability to put our promises into practice. We do not want our work to be seen as a diplomatic ritual. The challenges we face are too great, the solutions too urgently needed and the consequences of failure too serious.

The work undertaken by the ODIHR and its various units, by the OSCE Missions in the field, and by the individual participating States in implementing their commitments is at the heart of the OSCE. You are now going to review that implementation. The prime importance of visible and effective implementation is something you may wish to keep in the back of your minds in the coming two weeks. Finally, I sincerely hope you will be able to report not just on setbacks and reversals, or on goals still unattained, but on serious intellectual and material progress that strengthens the human dimension. For progress is a source of hope.

Thank you for your attention.

