



United States Mission to the OSCE

Intervention on Saving the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM)

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

This is an agenda item that has dealt with the adoption of the agenda and the dates for another particular OSCE meeting. Therefore, it's the appropriate place for me to make a statement with regards to another very essential meeting that the OSCE considers.

In mid-September, just two months from now, the OSCE holds one of the most important events on its calendar, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, fondly known as the HDIM. Apparently, some are questioning whether we should go ahead with Europe's largest human rights conference, an event that brings together governments and NGOs from Vancouver to Vladivostok. HDIM is the unparalleled annual platform for assessing implementation of our Human Dimension commitments during this past year, one of the essential three pillars of the OSCE. It is an unmissable occasion to discuss the hard issues and hold ourselves and each other accountable for what we say in all of these various discussions here at the Permanent Council. And it is always an important opportunity to identify ways to improve performance.

We have heard comments from many other Permanent Representatives and many other people, and we are highly respectful of the opinions of the other delegations regarding this issue. The United States, in full consideration of this, felt it important to come to this Permanent Council to say that it is our view that it is unthinkable that the OSCE would not rise to the challenge of holding an HDIM this year, despite the difficult circumstances due to the pandemic. It is precisely because of the impact of the pandemic on human rights and democracy that the HDIM must be held.

The authority for this and for HDIM is clear. In December 2001 the Bucharest Ministerial Council tasked the Permanent Council with coming forward with proposals and agreements and a decision on how to conduct these HDIM meetings. It was taken as Decision 476, which many of you are aware of. That decision of this Permanent Council, in my view, is not discretionary. Paragraph 1 of the Decision says that during each year in which a Review Conference does not take place, and I believe, Mr. Chairman, a Review Conference is not taking place this year, ODIHR will organize a Human Dimension Implementation Meeting with all of the participating States. I don't see that as discretionary. It is an essential part of the work of the OSCE.

Now, that same decision, and the precedence of the organization, comes back to this Permanent Council with regards to dates and the agenda. It does not go to the question of whether or not a Human Dimension meeting is going to be held in order to carry out the aqis of this organization. And it is time to decide if we are going to carry out the aqis of this organization or not. Recognizing that COVID is creating difficulties with the implementation.

We recognize that this is hard. Two thousand people will not be able to travel. There will be logistical or administrative challenges posed by a blended HDIM. We heard these arguments before the first PC. But we've held PCs virtually, and then in a blended format, for months. We heard those arguments in the run up to the *Annual Security Review Conference*, the premier event in the First dimension. Yet collectively, we were able to overcome the impediments, work through the challenges, and, as a result, we held a productive and effective ASRC meeting. Let's be clear: nobody is unaware of the challenges we are facing with respect to a blended format. But given the circumstances and the obligations under Decision 476 this is the direction in which we should go.

Another example, the Alliance for Combating Trafficking meeting, which took place just this week, offered a platform for civil society representation and even included side events. I know, I participated in one a couple of nights ago. As last night's press release noted, "over 700 registered participants from almost every OSCE participating State and record numbers of online viewers, it was the largest Alliance Conference ever." Again, we've proven we're technologically adept; we see increased participation, since NGOs do not incur travel expenses. This could be a powerful signal of the resilience of the OSCE and our civil society partners.

Let me be crystal clear. The position of the United States of America is we should go ahead and hold HDIM in the best way we can, as is required by the decision of the Permanent Council in 2002. Adjusting the format in ways that make sense for public health does not require a new consensus. Nor does it set a new precedent. We all hope next year the public health context will be transformed for the better, and we will be able to return to the more familiar format. But the duty of this Permanent Council is about format, not to decide if Civil Society should have its forum, which is required under the organization's rules.

2020 is EXACTLY the year we need HDIM most. We know it will be some work. It will be challenging to pull off. But holding HDIM is upholding the third dimension of security. It comes down to defending the human values that are at the core of the OSCE at a time at which they need to be defended most. And the organization of the OSCE needs to be defended. With the change of leadership, with the beginning of new leadership, we do not now need to be changing the rules and regulations and further weaken the OSCE. It is our duty and obligation to uphold the existence of this organization, which provides essential security and safety of the populations within our countries.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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