

Canadian Delegation to the
Organization for Security & Cooperation
in Europe



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 THE DIRECTOR OF
THE OFFICE FOR DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS,
AMBASSADOR CHRISTIAN STROHAL
565TH MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
JULY 28, 2005**

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ENGLISH only

Canada joins others in extending a warm welcome to Ambassador Christian Strohal. We also wish to thank him for this extensive and insightful report of the activities of ODIHR over the last six months. Since Ambassador Strohal's last report in January, ODIHR has organized two successful and relevant Human Dimension Implementation meetings: one on the Challenges of Election Technologies and Procedures last April; and the other on Human Rights and the Fight on Terrorism, which Canada strongly supported.

Canada values the contribution of ODIHR in assisting States to fulfill their democratic aspirations through the implementation of their OSCE commitments. The significant progress made in recent elections in Kyrgyzstan, to name but one election, is in part a testimony to the quality of ODIHR's work. Canada has seconded personnel and provided resources to a number of ODIHR's election observation missions, and we will continue to do our part. We are pleased that Partners also avail themselves of ODIHR's expertise. We welcome the OSCE Secretariat and ODIHR's involvement in free and fair elections in Afghanistan to help stabilise the country and strengthen governance. Canada will provide resources and expertise to assist in this endeavour. ODIHR's involvement before and on election day, however, is only one aspect, and we see their final elections reports as very useful instruments for states to undertake future improvements in their election process. Addressing those election-related recommendations remains an important part of our and ODIHR's work.

Yet following the OSCE's comprehensive approach, we can only agree with Ambassador Strohal when he says that, "elections are only one important part of the democratic process". We note with great satisfaction that ODIHR continues to address cross-dimensional human dimension issues such as assistance to IDPs and victims of trafficking, and gender equality. We also continue to support the work of the ODIHR Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Unit, an area of OSCE activity that strikes a particularly resounding chord with Canadians. As OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Treasurer and Canadian Senator Jerry Grafstein declared at the ODIHR-sponsored Working Meeting of International Experts and Police Officers held in Toronto last April, "we are all here on the front lines against the epidemic of hate infecting our free societies".

With regards to democratization, we believe in the use of past experience as a guide towards the consolidation of democratic principles and institutions. The adoption of a lessons-learned approach has proven its worth time and time again. It is also important that we retain the flexibility that is the hallmark of the OSCE.

We have taken good note of the comments made today by Ambassador Strohal regarding the fields of democratization and human rights. Some of the specific issues raised by Ambassador Strohal are of particular interest to Canada. As a nation that prizes the rule of law and respect for human rights, Canada remains concerned about the situation in Uzbekistan following the tragic events in Andijan. We take this opportunity to restate our call for an independent international investigation that would shed light on what happened last May. We will continue to follow the situation in the region very closely.

Canada remains concerned about the 455 refugees from Uzbekistan currently seeking asylum in the Kyrgyz Republic. We have encouraged the involved governments to collaborate with UNHCR, to consider temporary protection of the asylum seekers during status determination, and to fulfill their international obligations, under the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

We are working with international partners to protect asylum seekers who have fled the violence and to address the longer-term root causes in dialogue with the Government of Uzbekistan. The people of Uzbekistan should be permitted the right to demonstrate peacefully for democratic change in their country. Without this, and other rights, problems of displaced people will continue to affect this region.

Mr. Chairman,

Once again we would like to thank Ambassador Strohal for the commendable work of his office. We very much value the key role ODIHR is playing in fulfilling the OSCE's mandate. We look forward to reviewing and assessing the implementation of our common commitments at the Human Dimension Implementation meeting in September. On that note, we wish Ambassador Strohal and his dedicated staff every success in their work.