



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

High Commissioner on National Minorities

Check Against Delivery

Acceptance of the House Order of the Golden Lion of Nassau

Speech by **Max van der Stoel**

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

at the

Palace Noordeinde

The Hague, 31 August 1999

Your Majesty,

Please allow me to express my heartfelt thanks to you for the very high and very special honour you have bestowed on me. My gratitude is even greater because you and Prince Claus have given a very personal touch to this occasion by offering a dinner with as special guests my family and many persons with whom I have worked together for common aims and common ideas.

The date you have chosen for this event - the day on which we commemorate the birthday of Queen Wilhelmina - recalls to us the courage and moral leadership she displayed in the dark days of the Second World War.

Your Majesty, a conductor cannot display his talents without an orchestra. Similarly, I would not have been able to achieve any results in my work without my international staff - young, talented, highly motivated and hard working - which has been a constant source of inspiration to me. Their enthusiasm compensates for the fact that in number they scarcely exceed the size of a chamber orchestra.

In the century which is now coming to a close, the enormous advances in science and technology have made wars incomparably more costly in terms of losses of human life, human suffering and material destruction. Against this background, far too little has so far been done to further develop methods and instruments of conflict prevention. I have therefore especially appreciated the emphasis you have put in your speech on the importance of what I have been trying to do with the modest means at my disposal. I also want to express my thanks to the Government and the Parliament of the Netherlands for the constant support and the generous assistance they have given to my work.

For those closest to me and for myself August 31, 1999 will remain an unforgettable day.

Your Majesty, once more many, many thanks.