



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 16: Discussion of Human Dimension Activities

As prepared for delivery by Ted Kontek, Political Adviser at the U.S. Mission to the OSCE,
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

The United States strongly supports ODIHR, which has earned its place as the leading institution in the Human Dimension. We welcome the chance to share some of our perspectives on your work and the challenges you face.

At a time when some OSCE participating States are increasingly calling into question their core human dimension commitments, we believe it is all the more important that ODIHR continue to focus on the core elements of its mission – election observation, promotion of human rights and support for the development of democratic institutions.

Election Observation

It is no accident that ODIHR remains the gold standard for election monitoring around the world, and we congratulate ODIHR for ongoing refinements in its election observation methodology. ODIHR's enduring success is directly attributable to its well-known, objective criteria and election observer procedures. All participating States have an interest in opposing any effort to undermine ODIHR's autonomy and impartiality, as well as any attempts to turn back the clock on the progress we have made in democratic practices within the OSCE region. The United States has been and will continue to be in the forefront of States protecting ODIHR from political interference.

The selection of new voting technologies is a policy issue best left to participating States. We recognize, however, that these technologies will pose new challenges for observers, which ODIHR should be prepared to address. In this spirit, we welcome the upcoming seminar on electronic voting to be held in Helsinki.

Democracy and Human Rights Programs

The Democracy program projects are well designed and implemented and provide emerging democracies with much needed technical assistance in promoting the rule of law, developing transparent legislative processes, and building civil society. They can be of great benefit to other countries that are still grappling with these issues. We encourage the ODIHR Director to get directly involved in promoting and marketing these quiet programs that may not win many headlines, but are very effective in building democratic institutions.

In our view, the Human Rights program should focus on the fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion. The Human Rights

program should develop technical assistance and training programs for the emerging democracies on how to ensure that fundamental freedoms are respected.

Tolerance Programs

The OSCE launched its tolerance work in response to several brutal attacks on members of Jewish communities in the OSCE region. As OSCE participating States, we made specific commitments to combat anti-Semitism, as well as all hate crimes, including by gathering and reporting data on such crimes. The United States strongly supports the continuance of the important work of the Personal Representatives and related targeted work at ODIHR, which cannot be successful without increased action by the participating States.

ODIHR's tolerance work should focus on the priority areas of combating intolerance where the participating States have reached consensus - combating anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, Christians and members of other religions, and racism, xenophobia and related intolerance. In this regard, we welcome the work of the Senior Advisor on Roma issues.

In our view, the ODIHR effort to deal with hate crimes is an excellent work in progress, though significant challenges remain. It may be time to focus attention on realistic, specific targeted initiatives that will help address the problem of core definitions, model legislation to meet OSCE commitments, data collection methods based on this model legislation, and a sharing of best practices.

Cross-Cutting Issues

Civil society participation is the foundation of the effective review of the implementation of human dimension commitments by participating States. ODIHR must set an example of inclusiveness of NGOs and transparency at all ODIHR-organized events and meetings and we applaud the Chairman-in-Office's strong support for NGO access.

We look forward to working with Ambassador Lenarcic, and the participating States, to strengthen the implementation of our OSCE Human Dimension commitments. We applaud ODIHR for its excellent work, and you have our full support in the coming years.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.