

STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE JOHN BAIRD
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF CANADA

20TH OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL MEETING

KYIV
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DÉCLARATION DE L'HONORABLE JOHN BAIRD
MINISTRE DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES DU CANADA

20ème CONSEIL MINISTÉRIEL DE L'OSCE

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Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The OSCE was founded nearly 40 years ago to foster dialogue and cooperation on security issues. It played a key role in bringing us together on the basis of agreed principles, shared commitments and common values.

With that history in mind, the decision ten days ago by our host country to suspend its path towards further European integration – its values and its economic prosperity - is extremely disconcerting.

The circumstances surrounding this decision are unclear and many fear that it was triggered by significant, corrosive external pressure.

But this unfortunate development will not stop the ongoing process of Euro-Atlantic and European integration as it reflects a genuine aspiration of the people of Ukraine to embrace the values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

What is more troubling in the OSCE context is the deplorable use of violence against peaceful protesters in Independence Square.

Just days ago, Canadians were shocked by the images they saw. Clearly, our expectations that Ukraine, as Chair of the OSCE, would lead by example were not met.

We will continue to monitor the situation very closely, including the investigation of the violence last weekend, and are supporting efforts to monitor the repeat elections on December 15.

We strongly encourage the Ukrainian authorities to ensure these elections are free and fair.

As leaders, we are elected to govern as a reflection of the values and will of the people.

Everyone here in Kyiv today and around this table is witness to a clear demonstration of the will of the people of Ukraine - a demonstration that has been met with a clenched fist.

It is our hope that peaceful dialogue will prevail, and that the voice of the Ukrainian population is once again heard by its leadership.

I am pleased that the EU and Ukraine have now agreed to work on a road-map on next steps, and Canada hopes that preparations for a Ukraine-EU agreement can resume as soon as possible.

Without question, this recent development reflects a genuine aspiration to embrace the values of freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

But principles and commitments alone are not enough. As democratic actors, we have all accepted to be held accountable for the implementation of our commitments.

Democracy is a journey, not a destination.

I'm proud that Canada has a long tradition of standing up for freedom and fundamental rights, and we will continue to do so.

That's why Canada has established an Office of Religious Freedom to protect and advocate on behalf of religious minorities under threat; oppose religious hatred; and promote values of pluralism and religious tolerance abroad.

We will continue to work internationally to promote freedom of religion, including the funding of a project by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) that promotes international standards on Freedom of Religion.

Our cause is just; the need is urgent; and our responsibility is clear.

A commitment to freedom and dignity must also include the empowerment of women. Women must have a voice in all decision-making processes and be included in all elements of society. Freedom and security means equality between men and women.

As well as promoting the role of women, the Canadian Government has made the protection of women and girls a priority.

There are many great challenges here. Child, early and forced marriage. Human trafficking. Rape as a weapon of war. We can all do more, and by working together we can achieve more.

Looking ahead, 2014 provides an opportunity for the OSCE to send a strong message of continued engagement in the prosperity, security and democracy of Afghanistan.

With ISAF drawing down and upcoming Presidential elections, we must be clear that sacrificing the safety and security of the people, especially women and girls, cannot be viewed as an acceptable compromise for stability.

Canada looks forward to working with the Swiss Chairmanship on regional security priorities.

And we look forward to continuing to foster the values which all the people of the places we represent share and aspire to.

Because ultimately, our credibility as politicians, as democrats, as an international grouping – depends on what we do, not just what we say.