

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2015**  
**Statement by the Delegation of Canada**  
**Friday, September 25, 2015**

*Working Session 9 – Democratic Institutions*

Madam Moderator,

Democracy is a core Canadian value rooted in the fundamental principle that individuals must have a voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Of paramount importance in a democracy is the right of people to freely choose their representatives. Canadians regularly exercise their democratic right to vote at numerous levels, and will certainly do so at the upcoming federal elections to be held this October 19.

All 57 OSCE participating States have committed to build democratic institutions and to hold free, fair and inclusive elections. We have also mandated ODIHR to support us in the implementation of these commitments, notably through the observation of national elections on the basis of a well-known and respected methodology.

Canada is proud to have contributed to numerous ODIHR observation missions, most notably in Ukraine where hundreds of Canadian observers have, over the years, worked with ODIHR to support the democratic aspirations of the people of Ukraine. Canada is equally proud to welcome an OSCE Election Assessment Mission to Canada for our upcoming federal election.

We also appreciate the crucial contribution of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to election observation activities through which Canadian parliamentarians have shared their experience and their strong commitment for democracy.

Madam Moderator,

While long-standing democracies continue their efforts to protect and improve their democratic institutions, and while many younger democracies in the OSCE region strive to develop and establish institutions that reflect their commitment to human rights, democracy and the rule of law, we must not be blind to the worrisome shrinking of democratic space in other participating States. Worse still, some now actively seek to weaken and question our joint OSCE commitments and our institutions.

We call on those States to cease their attempts at undermining the very foundations of this organisation, therefore putting at risk our broader collective security and depriving their own citizens of their rights. It is not sufficient for citizens to have the right to place a ballot in a box; they must feel safe casting that ballot according to their own free will. Citizens must have the confidence that rule of law and human rights are respected, as well as being fully able to enjoy their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, association and expression. Moreover, States need a free and vibrant civil society, driven by an empowered citizenry, including the full participation of women in all decision-making processes. These conditions are essential to foster a culture of openness for debate, dissent and diversity, to enhance popular participation in public life and political processes, and to form critical links between people and their elected governments.

On September 15, we celebrated the International Day of Democracy, whose theme this year was “Space for Civil Society”. Concerned by the erosion of this space, Canada continues to work bilaterally

and multilaterally to combat this trend. Since 2009, Canada has chaired the Community of Democracies' *Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society*, which focuses on countering the adoption of legislation that stifles civil society around the world. This year, Canada also launched the *International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Civil Society Partnership Policy*, which will further deepen Canada's engagement with civil society organizations in Canada and worldwide.

Canada's recommendations for this session are:

- For ODIHR, to continue strengthening and updating its election observation activities and methodology to ensure it remains a global leader in this field;
- For ODIHR, to work in close cooperation with other governmental and civil society organizations to support efforts where democratic principles are most threatened in the OSCE region.
- For ODIHR and OSCE Field Operations, to continue their efforts to strengthen democratic institutions through the provision of advice, legislative review and training;
- For participating States, to consider appropriate measures to support ODIHR financially and to engage in genuine dialogue for strengthening, not weakening, ODIHR's election observation activities.
- For participating States, to recommit to the core values of the OSCE and to reverse actions that undermine democratic institutions and the holding of free, fair, and inclusive elections.