

## United States Mission to the OSCE

# Opening Plenary Statement

As prepared for delivery by David J. Kramer  
OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting,  
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Thank you, Director Link.

Forty years ago, the Helsinki Final Act committed participating States to work together to seek “peace, security and justice” with the objective of “promoting better relations among themselves and ensuring conditions in which their people can live in true and lasting peace free from any threat to or attempt against their security.”

The Helsinki Final Act played a historic part in bringing the Cold War to an end and promoting universal human rights in the OSCE region. Among the principles at the heart of the Helsinki Final Act, and key to the OSCE’s success, is the recognition that the human rights of all people in all OSCE countries are the legitimate concern of each and every OSCE participating State. Every participating State has both a right and a responsibility to speak out when abuses take place in other OSCE participating States.

The signing of the Helsinki Final Act spurred courageous human rights defenders here in Poland, in the Soviet Union, and across Central and Eastern Europe to press for the implementation of commitments their governments had made, launching the Helsinki movement. Today, a new generation of brave women and men work tirelessly across the OSCE region – often risking their lives – to realize those same rights, advance democratic development, and combat intolerance. Some of those courageous individuals are with us today. Thank you for defending human dignity and seeking to improve your respective societies. Sadly, some could not be here today because they have been unjustly imprisoned by their governments or otherwise prevented from traveling.

It is important to recognize human rights defenders because their condition is a bellwether for security in individual countries and for regional security. A government that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms of citizens has no need to imprison dissenting voices or silence independent media. Dissenting voices hold leaders accountable, advocate for solving problems, and offer perspectives on how to do so. When governments stifle dissenting voices, they often attempt to justify such actions by instilling fear within their publics of internal or external threats. The OSCE’s cross-dimensional approach to security – in which the political-military, economic, and human dimensions of security are intertwined – recognizes that internal repression and backsliding on human rights obligations and commitments can increase a country’s vulnerability to external aggression. Neglect of human rights obligations and commitments also makes us collectively vulnerable to mutual threats, such as extremism and radicalism. Consequently, as we see an uptick in disregard for the human rights obligations and commitments of OSCE



participating States, we must remain mindful that these failures, in addition to being distressing in their own right, signal trouble for security across all dimensions.

Nowhere in the region is this more evident than in Russia, where an increasingly authoritarian government has eroded the democratic institutions that ensure a government's accountability to its people. In Russia today, the space for civil society and human rights defenders is closing as the government increasingly uses legislation to stigmatize and, in some cases, criminalize the work of NGOs. A largely state-controlled media is used to propagate fear, disinformation, and aggression. We see ongoing constraints on genuine political pluralism, as in the September 13 elections, in which the authorities created significant barriers to the registration of political parties and electoral candidates, as well as to independent election observation. Its attempts to exert tight control over information and stifle independent views have created an environment conducive to Russian government aggression, including the occupation of Crimea and the perpetration of destabilizing actions in Ukraine.

In the face of Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine and the Russian occupation of Crimea, Ukraine has made tremendous progress in transforming into a modern, democratic, and prosperous country. We will continue to support its reform efforts that benefit all Ukrainians. We expect the OSCE to continue to play an important role in the months and years ahead to help Ukraine stay on the course of peaceful domestic reform. Ukraine has made great progress implementing its Minsk commitments. My government reiterates its unwavering support for OSCE's efforts to implement the Minsk Agreements between Russia and Ukraine. As called for under Minsk, we look forward to ODIHR's playing a vital role in Ukraine's local elections in October.

The crackdown on civil society in Azerbaijan continues. Human rights activists, journalists and defense lawyers have been interrogated and incarcerated. The Azerbaijan government has retreated from cooperation with OSCE institutions through its closure of the OSCE's Baku office and its insistence on limiting the number of ODIHR election observers.

Our concern about disappeared political prisoners in Turkmenistan, which gave rise to invocation of the Moscow Mechanism, is unabated. We also express ongoing concern over restrictions throughout Central Asia on space for political opposition, civil society, and religious freedom.

Mr. Chairman, the Hungarian government has responded to the refugee crisis in a xenophobic, heavy-handed manner. It has persistently criticized the refugees and migrants and has focused more on police action than on meeting humanitarian needs. Rather than constructively engaging with the EU to find solutions to the refugee crisis, it deployed tear gas and water cannon against refugee and migrant families at its border with Serbia

We decry the disturbing continuation, at times violent, of anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hate crimes and hate speech in the OSCE region. All participating States must respect and protect the inherent dignity of every individual. All of us must condemn and combat intolerance and discrimination against members of religious, racial and ethnic minorities and members of other vulnerable groups, such as LGBTI persons and persons with disabilities. Recognition of our



common humanity lies at the heart of our obligation under international law to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms of all.

The United States believes that security is rooted in cooperation and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Just as we are committed to calling on fellow participating States to examine their compliance with the OSCE commitments, the United States also seeks to be an example in both word and deed of a participating State dedicated to the Helsinki principles.

Last year at HDIM, keynote speaker Elisa Massimino challenged participating States to make concrete commitments with respect to actions their governments will take to follow up on issues raised and discussed at HDIM and to enhance implementation of OSCE commitments. The United States accepted Ms. Massimino's challenge and, in our closing statement last year, listed five actions that we intended to take. They were as follows:

- **We offered to remain engaged with civil society and Congress on detention at the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base Detention Facility.** The United States Administration is intensely focused on closing the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. As recently as September 17, another detainee was transferred out of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility, reducing the total number remaining to 115. Ongoing U.S. Government engagement with the full spectrum of interlocutors and stakeholders has yielded strong and positive partnerships. We have hosted and will continue to host foreign delegations, NGOs and others at Guantanamo Bay. We remain focused on the President's objective and will continue our engagement across the globe to this end.
- **We offered to report on findings and policy recommendations on policing, use of force, and establishing community trust, in the aftermath of events in Ferguson, Missouri, and other communities that are demanding improved accountability.** We are pleased to announce that a representative of the U.S. Department of Justice plans to provide a briefing in Vienna at the Hofburg on October 19, 2015, on U.S. Government initiatives to foster collaborative police-community relationships and to reform law enforcement agencies with systemic problems.
- **We stated we would report on a review by the Department of Justice on the application of the death penalty in the United States.** The Justice Department is continuing its review of the federal protocol used by the Bureau of Prisons as well as policy issues related to the death penalty.
- **We promised to invite to HDIM Muslim-Americans who can speak on efforts to counter discrimination.** This year, Engy Abdelkader, a Muslim-American woman and member of the ODIHR panel of experts on freedom of religion or belief, is to participate in a side event on September 30 on discrimination against Muslims, sponsored by the United States and Turkey.
- **Finally, we offered to communicate with the U.S. Congress on the importance of ODIHR and our human dimension commitments.** This we have done, and continue to

do, through our daily interactions with the U.S. Helsinki Commission, members of which are here as part of the U.S. delegation.

Participating States agreed to use HDIM to discuss the implementation of our OSCE human dimension commitments. The United States intends to engage in a serious discussion during our two weeks here. Let us be productive, resist cynicism, and engage in discussions respectfully. As President Ford said to his fellow signatories at the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, history will judge us “not by the promises we make, but by the promises we keep.”

Thank you to ODIHR for organizing this event. Thank you to our host nation, Poland, for so warmly welcoming us each year. Thank you to the delegations who engage here thoughtfully, and, finally, thank you especially to the courageous activists and human rights defenders who travel here at great cost and risk. Your presence profoundly deepens our understanding and reminds us of our solemn responsibility to defend and advance respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people.

Thank you, Director Link.