



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by ODIHR Director Ambassador Strohal

As delivered by Political Counselor, Samuel C. Laeuchli
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 1, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you Ambassador Strohal, for your comprehensive report on the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. The United States thanks ODIHR for making this a successful event, with over a thousand participants and a record number of NGOs. It would appear that a serious review was conducted of the implementation of OSCE Human Dimensions commitments in all participating States. Ambassador Strohal, we commend you for your continued dedicated and exceptional leadership.

Discussions at the HDIM brought out several areas on which we believe the OSCE should focus Human Dimension events in 2008. The U.S. would support supplementary meetings on freedom of religion, particularly impediments placed on the free practice of religion. We support a meeting on freedom of expression with a focus on ways to protect journalists from intimidation, harassment, threats and violence. With growing restrictions on political opposition parties and movements, in our opinion we need to remain focused on the issue of effective representation in a democratic society. We refer, particularly, to the separation of powers and of ensuring that power not be concentrated in one branch of government.

Discussions on tolerance and non-discrimination were interesting and varied. We must ensure that the ODIHR's work in this evolving topic remains focused on themes where we have reached consensus. We welcomed the issuance of the Hate Crimes report for 2006 and encourage your work on refining definitions and standardizing data collection in the OSCE region.

We support the reappointment of the three Personal Representatives on tolerance, with their current portfolios and the autonomy and resources they need to operate, in 2008. We support an expert meeting on implementation of tolerance commitments in 2008.

We welcomed the discussion on OSCE's election observation practices. We note and agree with the overwhelming majority of HDIM participants who voiced their confidence in OSCE election observation, assessment and assistance and reaffirmed the importance of our existing election commitments. With a mandate from all OSCE States, ODIHR has developed comprehensive and clear modalities and standards to observe elections.

NGOs play an essential role in protecting democratic freedoms. Unfortunately, in a number of countries in the OSCE region, the adoption and application of restrictive NGO laws and burdensome regulations are used to intimidate NGOs or even shut them down. Even more worrisome is the increasing misuse by some States of anti-terrorism or anti-extremism legislation to stifle the work of peaceful NGOs. When NGOs are under attack, democracy is undermined.

Ambassador Strohal, we welcome your report on the taskings given to ODIHR, in particular your report on MCD 19/06, on which you have already reported several times this year. We congratulate you for ongoing improvements in ODIHR's election observation methodology, which remains the gold standard for election monitoring around the world. We believe that ODIHR should not waste scarce resources simply for the sake of increasing geographic coverage in election observation. The enhanced capabilities of ODIHR in election monitoring were established by all participating States with a particular mission to assist States in transition, as was clearly stated at the Budapest Summit in 1994. We do, however, encourage you to continue to refine and improve the election observation methodology and procedures as appropriate. We support you in doing more to improve election observation cooperation with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, which has a special status different from other such bodies, on the basis of the 1997 Cooperation Agreement.

Mr. Chairman, we have tried to highlight some of the issues we believe should be priorities for the OSCE and for our governments in the coming months. We look forward to working with you, Mr. Ambassador, and the participating States to accomplish the main goal of the HDIM: to strengthen the implementation of our OSCE Human Dimension commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.