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Report by

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Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to once again have the opportunity to report to you on the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

Most of you came to Warsaw and high-level, expert delegations from your capitals also joined and contributed to the discussion. Your commitment and dedication to ensuring relevant participation from your states is imperative for this meeting. The fact that so many civil society organizations take part is also encouraging. They add a necessary dimension to our discussion, their message is not always comfortable or easy but it is important that they get an opportunity to hold governments to account.

Together we spent two weeks listening, discussing and sometimes disagreeing on interventions, many of whom highlighted human rights violations in participating States. The topics covered, included challenges to democratic institutions and elections, how freedom of religion and belief is being confronted, how intolerance, radicalization and discrimination seems to be on the rise, as is our common and continued inability to turn our words into action when it comes to addressing the situation for Roma and Sinti.

These two weeks reminded me yet again of HDIM's great importance in providing a platform for dialogue. A platform that allows participating States, civil society, international organizations, the OSCE and its institutions as well as the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE to meet and discuss the commitments undertaken by participating States.

For ODIHR as an organization HDIM is also very important. It is the main opportunity for us to listen to your governments' views on how you see your own implementation of the human dimension commitments as well as how you see your peers' realization of the same commitments.

It is also an important opportunity to listen to and meet civil society.

But let me now turn to the organization of the human dimension meeting.

I want to start by expressing my sincere gratitude to Poland for once again hosting HDIM and providing necessary support in relation to this event.

I would also like to thank the CiO, for excellent co-operation in organizing this year's event and for all the efforts of the Chairmanship team in ensuring that the meeting could be held with the stipulated decisions in place.

The time and effort that goes into organizing the HDIM also deserves recognition and appreciation, including for my own colleagues at ODIHR, who have done an outstanding job at preparing and running a meeting of this magnitude.

Following last year's meeting, we listened to your feedback very carefully and tried to reflect upon it with the aim of further improving the meeting. As you all know, just before last year's HDIM we introduced a new registration system which faced some challenges. Ahead of this year's meeting we mitigated many of these issues but we are fully aware that there are still some improvements to be made to have the system better serve the participants, to be more user-friendly and to better cover all aspects of the meeting.

On the conduct of the actual HDIM, we did take notice of the concerns that many of you raised. In the past, we have had two introducers at each session but this year we only had one, in most sessions, with the aim of ensuring more time for discussion. I think this worked well.

Within ODIHR, we worked hard to improve the moderation of the meeting with the aim of being more consistent and attentive in our moderation. I'll be the first to admit that there is always scope for improvement but I think it's fair to say that the conduct of the meeting significantly improved this year.

The code of conduct introduced last year was also revised, reflecting the feedback we got from many participating States, and I believe this also served us well.

But it is also important that participating States help with improving the meeting. The increase in the number of times delegations raised points of order without having a specific procedural point to make had a negative impact on the meeting as it suggests that the primary purpose was to interrupt the speaker.

It is worth noting that we continue to have more media outlets visiting HDIM. It is important that our discussions reach a wider audience. The OSCE human dimension commitments and their implementation are of direct relevance to the general public in participating States and media coverage of the issues discussed serves to spread the word further and wider.

We had a record number of people taking part in HDIM. Of the 1521 registered participants, there were 491 state representatives from 54 participating States. We had three participants from partners for cooperation countries, 29 from international organizations, 97 from OSCE bodies, 23 from national human

rights institutions, 42 media representatives and, altogether, 878 representatives of 569 NGOs. I don't think these kind of numbers of participants actively engaging in a meeting that lasts for two full weeks are often seen.

Our public outreach online continues to be important. During HDIM we saw a significant increase in traffic to our website and the number of viewers of the live streaming of sessions is significant.

As in previous years, to facilitate a lively and dynamic discussion, the upper limit for the speakers list was set at 50 and that number was reached in almost all sessions.

Let me just say in this connection that we need to explore how we can improve the current system of signing up to the speakers list as it is not ideal from many points of views. The equal opportunity to sign up for the list is crucial. This year saw the lines sometimes abused and cases of intimidating behaviour, but also, lines that started for the afternoon session when the morning session was still ongoing, forcing some participants to choose between the morning discussion and the opportunity to speak in the afternoon.

Together with my team I want to look into how this can be done better and more efficiently so that participants can focus on the discussion in the plenary and side events without losing sight of the importance of respecting equal opportunities for all participants

Almost 100 side events were organized, providing opportunities for all participants, including participating States, to break out of the strict procedures of the plenary sessions and have a more informal and lively discussion. The demand for side event slots is remarkably high, nearly all slots were booked within the first four minutes of opening up the registration. This is a clear indication of their added value to the meeting.

Now, let me turn to the working sessions of the two weeks in Warsaw.

The statements and conclusions of HDIM have been distributed to you so I will not go into them at length.

My first observation is, however, that I find it somewhat discouraging that the situation for human rights and democracy has not showed a lot of improvement since last year; rather the opposite.

There are a few issues I would like to touch upon from the various sessions, fully aware that I am not doing justice to the variety of views and input to the discussion.

One area that I continue to pay a lot of attention to is the quality of our democracies. The session on *Democratic institutions, including democracy at the national, regional and local levels, and democratic elections* highlighted deteriorating democratic institutions in many places. Additional attention needs to be paid to this, not least to the quality and strength of democratic institutions and elections.

Many participating States referred to increased challenges when it comes to elections in the OSCE region in terms of freedom of the media, transparency, the financing of campaigns and participation of women, as well as youth, minorities and persons with disabilities.

It is encouraging that the importance of follow up to electoral assessments and recommendations gains increased attention and continues to be something ODIHR is asked to pay particular attention to.

The introductory remarks in the rule of law session highlighted that a prerequisite for democracy is the rule of law and that there are worrying trends in the OSCE region in this regard. The importance of the independence of the judiciary was reiterated during this session.

A full day was devoted to safety of journalists, including legal, physical and online safety. The Representative on Freedom of the Media, Harlem Désir, emphasized the worrying fact that pressure, threats and attacks against the media continue to be a common occurrence in all 57 OSCE participating States. In this regard, the Representative also highlighted the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on Safety of Journalists adopted last year, and ways to help participating States to implement it.

The special sessions on hate crimes highlighted that there are unfortunately still serious challenges regarding implementation of OSCE commitments by the participating States. The special sessions also highlighted the critical role of civil society in hate crime prevention and response and the need for governments to increase engagement with and support to civil society. I encourage all of you to pay more attention to this issue.

The session titled “Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II” addressed issues of persistent racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions.

Several participating States spoke out and welcomed ODIHR's continuing work on anti-Semitism, discrimination and all forms of hate crime. Many NGOs commended ODIHR's work on tolerance and non-discrimination issues, including on anti-Semitism, and further emphasized the need for governments to show the political will to end intolerance and discrimination, including against Muslims and Christians, and to improve hate crime investigation and reporting.

The introductory remarks in the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief session highlighted that the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security recognizes that freedom of religion or belief and security are complementary, interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Discussions continue to reveal that the space for civil society and human rights defenders in the OSCE region is becoming increasingly challenging. Unfortunately, the message from this year's HDIM paints the same grim picture. Civil society and human rights defenders face intimidation, prosecution and unnecessarily burdensome administrative procedures. They are often discredited and become victims of smear campaigns to obstruct their work. While this is discouraging it is very encouraging to hear that joint efforts are being made to reverse this trend.

I can only reiterate my call from last year to participating States to live up to their human dimension Commitments and ensure that human rights defenders can serve their vital role.

Women continue to be underrepresented in public and political life in the OSCE region. We see very positive developments in some participating States in terms of women's participation in political life and decision making, including related to peace and security. But in recent years, we have also noted stagnation, sometimes regression on these issues, in particular regarding violence against women in politics. This includes the vicious harassment that many women in public life face on social media and online.

I would ask you to do more in this matter. The OSCE commitments, as well as international conventions, UNSC resolutions and declarations provide a very solid base and guide for what needs to be done. Next year's Gender Equality Review Conference will provide a good opportunity for this.

The session on combating trafficking in human beings, refugees and displaced persons looked at the particular challenges women face in migration flows and the discussions centered around the continued need for participating States

across the OSCE region to work together on addressing challenges while maintaining respect for human rights.

One of the specifically selected topics this year was Roma and Sinti. Discussions highlighted the fact that in most participating States Roma and Sinti continue to face serious challenges in participating in public and political life, resulting in under-representation and limited participation in decision-making processes. At the same time, it was stressed that they continue to have limited access to adequate housing and decent living conditions, often vulnerable to forced evictions and segregation. My office stands ready to assist you in implementing existing commitments related to Roma and Sinti.

Finally, a special topic this year was freedom of assembly. The nature of assemblies is changing and the challenges participating States face when ensuring the free exercise of the right are growing. My office stands ready to support you in areas such as assembly monitoring and providing resources on good practices.

In conclusion I would argue that most working sessions showed the relevance of your commitments. In some cases discussions at HDIM also highlighted the desire and need to adopt new human dimension commitments.

The discussion during HDIM should feed into the development of decisions of each year's Ministerial Council. Without going into all the areas and issues raised I think it is clear that efforts should be invested in the follow-up to the 2014 Basel declaration. I would also highlight an opportunity to adopt a decision relating to torture prevention; in both cases building on efforts from previous years.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

HDIM continues to be a platform where participating States and civil society organizations can meet and exchange views and assessments. The assessments of how we stand with implementing the commitments differ but HDIM is the place where they are discussed. This is very important to recognize.

Differing views on processes related to participation exist but they should not overshadow the very important subjects of this meeting or the work this organization is doing in the human dimension.

I have said it before and will say it again. ODIHR does what it can to ensure a well-run HDIM. I have flagged issues such as code of conduct, registration and meeting procedures as clear examples.

Furthermore, we strive to have the meeting as open as possible and enable wide participation of civil society.

HDIM is not a conference – it's the review mechanism of the human dimension. There are many challenges relating to it. The most simple is that as a result of zero nominal growth, face difficulties finding a venue the we can afford, financially.

Late decisions add to this by making it even more challenging for ODIHR to organize the meeting in a timely and resource efficient way.

In conclusion, I will as I have done on previous occasions, end with a positive reflection. Having recognized challenges relating to HDIM it is essential to acknowledge all the positive things that happen during the meeting and the nature of this unique mechanism. What makes this meeting unique is the large number of civil society representatives discussing democracy and human rights with the participating States on an equal footing is exceptional.

Let us focus on the groups and individuals whose solemn interest lies in advocating for the upholding of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. They come because they believe HDIM provides them with a useful platform.

In this context, I hope we can jointly explore ways of further increasing the number of civil society organizations from all parts of the OSCE region.

Even more importantly, we should value and recognize all the grassroots organizations and individual human rights defenders who participate because this meeting gives them a rare opportunity to express their concerns and in some cases even grievances to 57 state representatives.

In this spirit, I would particularly emphasize the Roma and Sinti organizations, and the many youth representatives that attended HDIM and addressed participating States and provided recommendations in a highly professional, engaged and constructive manner.

The human dimension is facing challenges and we need to be honest about that. But HDIM is truly unique, and I believe we should all work together to ensure that the nature of the meeting is preserved.



Thank you for your attention.