

ENGLISH only

Statement by Ambassador Sveinn Björnsson, Permanent Representative of Iceland to the OSCE, OSCE Ministerial Council in Sofia 2004.

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of David Oddsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, I would like to congratulate Bulgaria, and in particular you and your team, Mr. Chairman for the dynamism and commitment, you have brought to your year in Office. Further allow me to express our sincere thanks for the Bulgarian hospitality bestowed upon us here in Sofia as well as the excellent organisation of this meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

In a changing security environment we must ensure that the OSCE agenda reflects the new reality. The OSCE has taken on this challenge by preparing an OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Stability and Security in the 21st Century, adopted at the Maastricht Ministerial last year. The Decisions that we will adopt here in Sofia are also a clear sign of our political will in this regard.

Further work is, however, needed on internal reform of our organisation. The OSCE can be more effective. Our Decision to establish a Panel of Eminent Persons on strengthening the effectiveness of the OSCE is a positive step.

Close co-operation and coordination with other relevant organisations such as NATO, the European Union and the Council of Europe is of vital importance. In this context, we welcome the decision on enhanced co-operation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE. It is also worth recalling that in the UN context the role of regional organisations is being emphasised.

The OSCE can make a significant contribution to ongoing fight against terrorism. We have undertaken many political commitments in this area during the last three years and we need to deliver on them in practical terms. We therefore welcome the set of Decisions related to combating terrorism to be adopted here in Sofia, focusing on practical assistance and support for implementation.

Mr. Chairman,

The fight against trafficking in human beings is a priority issue which affects all OSCE participating States, whether they are countries of origin, transit or destination. The OSCE has already taken significant steps to enhance its efforts to combat trafficking in the OSCE region with the adoption of the OSCE Action Plan on Trafficking. We believe the appointment of a OSCE Special Representative on trafficking earlier this year will help in raising the political profile of this issue.

Iceland has emphasised the need to protect child victims of trafficking within the OSCE region. We therefore welcome a decision on the special needs for child victims of Trafficking for protection and assistance.

Mr. Chairman,

The fight against intolerance and discrimination is at the heart of OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. The OSCE has strengthened its efforts to combat intolerance and discrimination with the appointment of three Personal Representatives of the Chairman in Office reaffirming our political commitment in this regard. We look forward to a OSCE conference in Cordoba next year to discuss further practical actions against Anti-semitism and other forms of intolerance.

Mr. Chairman,

We are all very much aware of the situation in Ukraine. Iceland urges all parties to work towards a peaceful solution which respects the democratic rights and aspirations of the people of Ukraine. The participation of OSCE observers is an essential part of the re-run of the second round of the Presidential elections in Ukraine.

Finally, Mr. Chairman,

Five years have now passed since the OSCE Istanbul summit. We remain committed to the CFE Treaty and reaffirm our attachment to the early entry into force of the Adapted Treaty. The full implementation of the outstanding Istanbul commitments must remain the basis of our common efforts.

I wish the incoming Slovenian Chairman in Office every success in tackling the challenging agenda of the OSCE in 2005. They may be assured of our full support and co-operation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.