



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Plenary Statement

As prepared for delivery by Joseph Manso, Director,
Office of European Security and Political Affairs, Department of State
OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting,
Warsaw, October 2, 2015

As we conclude another OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), our thanks go once again to Poland for hosting the conference and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Michael Link and his team have worked tirelessly to prepare and facilitate these last two weeks, and we are grateful to them for their efforts. ODIHR's improvement to the quality of the live-streaming and Twitter coverage of our debates has made it possible for some who cannot be here to observe and even participate from a distance. This is progress that should be incorporated into other OSCE meetings.

HDIM is intended to review implementation of our shared OSCE commitments in the human dimension. What we heard over the last two weeks should inspire every participating State to redouble its efforts to fulfill all of its OSCE commitments, without exception.

It has become common, of late, to speak of a "crisis in European security." This phrase has become a polite way to refer to **Russia's** occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea and its aggressive actions in eastern Ukraine in clear breach of international law and blatant disregard for its OSCE commitments. Russia's violation of **Ukraine's** sovereignty and territorial integrity has led to conflict that has taken the lives of thousands and displaced over a million more. This is what has undermined European and Eurasian security.

And there is a related reality to confront. The crisis in European security finds its roots in a human rights crisis in the OSCE area. In far too many places, the work of building a Europe and Eurasia that is whole, free, and at peace is not just incomplete, it is moving backward. Russia's external aggression against neighbors has been accompanied by internal repression. Russia's aggressive actions have reconfirmed the need for the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. As President Obama said in his speech to the UN General Assembly on September 28, "internal repression and foreign aggression are both symptoms of the failure" to provide a strong foundation for the strength of nations, based on "individual rights and good governance and personal security."

The crackdown on civil society and independent media in a number of participating States constitutes a failure by those states to uphold their OSCE commitments in the human dimension. It also constitutes an early warning sign of grave risk for other security challenges in our region. It is not only right that we should raise our concerns about failures to implement human dimension commitments with each other, it would be irresponsible not to. These failures represent threats to our common security.

HDIM would not be HDIM without civil society. We thank the many civil society representatives here — who often scrimp and save to make the trip from far away; who spend hours preparing the recommendations and statements they deliver in formal sessions; and who share with us their insights and research and experiences. We are listening to you, we are learning from you, and we are grateful to you.

We also recall that members of civil society were prevented from participating in this year's meeting, including Khadija Ismayilova and Rasul Jafarov, whom I met at HDIM in the past but who are now imprisoned in **Azerbaijan** on spurious charges. Members of peaceful opposition groups were also precluded from attending, including Zarafo Khujaeva, who remains in detention along with fellow members of the now banned Islamic Renaissance Party of **Tajikistan**. We do not forget the many imprisoned for longer terms, including Turkmenistan's former Ambassador to the OSCE. We join NGOs seeking accountability for imprisoned individuals in **Turkmenistan**. And we call on all participating States to refrain from punishment of civil society actors and political opposition representatives who share their views with us at HDIM.

We ask governments who brought oxymoronic government-organized NGOs (GONGOs) to this meeting to refrain from doing so in the future. For the rest of us it's a nuisance, but for you, it's an embarrassment: That you need to pay private individuals to represent or defend your policies and practices undermines, rather than reinforces, your position.

The **Russian Federation** attempted to send an official it claimed represented Crimea in its Federation Council to an OSCE meeting in Vienna earlier this year. Russia tried to send sanctioned members of the Duma to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Helsinki. They brought someone from the occupation authorities in Crimea to this HDIM meeting. These are provocations. They remind everyone of the truth that Crimea is part of Ukraine. No political theater can change that.

A number of comments have wrongly suggested that European and North American countries are attempting to destabilize other states by fomenting so-called "color revolutions." These accusations are often used to promulgate two false claims that we reject:

First, human rights are not a Western invention. They are universal, as is human dignity and the desire to exercise those rights freely. Autocrats who suggest that people who struggle against repression are motivated by others, rather than by their own genuine desire to see a fairer, stronger, freer society, are wrong.

Second, the cause of instability is not the universal desire of people to be free; repression is at the root of instability.

Beyond the challenges of constricted space for civil society and of external aggression against neighbors, we also heard a great deal over the last two weeks about the need to respond to the migrant and refugee crisis in a way that accords with OSCE commitments and to condemn and combat the continued rise in intolerance throughout the OSCE region, whether toward migrants, or members of racial, religious or ethnic minorities, or other vulnerable populations such as persons with disabilities or LGBTI individuals.

As we leave Warsaw, the United States hopes that other participating States will join us in taking the last two weeks' discussions as an inspiration for action in a continuous effort to improve implementation of our shared OSCE commitments.

We have listened carefully to criticisms and recommendations in formal sessions, in side events, and in meetings with civil society. As we did last year, we are again prepared to follow up. Initial steps the United States will take include:

- We will work with other participating States, including at next week's special meeting in Vienna, at the upcoming Mediterranean Partners conference in Jordan, and in other fora, to leverage the OSCE to respond to migrant and refugee challenges in the OSCE area in ways consistent with OSCE human dimension commitments.
- At a side event on the rights of persons with disabilities, a Finnish civil society member pointed out that participating States could do more to identify opportunities for persons with disabilities to work for the OSCE. With this in mind, in our recruitment, we will seek to publicize OSCE employment opportunities to a wide and diverse audience.
- As we mentioned in our opening statement, the United States delegation will convene a briefing delivered by a U.S. Department of Justice colleague on policing and anti-discrimination initiatives in the United States later this month.
- We heard the call from the EU to be open to a public debate on the topic of the death penalty. We have a very lively public debate on this subject in the United States. We will invite a non-governmental participant in that debate to come to Vienna to share perspectives.

In closing, let me once again thank ODIHR for convening HDIM and for what ODIHR does year 'round. ODIHR assistance to participating States to foster their implementation of OSCE commitments remains invaluable -- including ODIHR's vital monitoring of the upcoming elections in Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Ukraine and Turkey. The United States continues strongly to support you in your essential work.

Thank you.