



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING OPENING STATEMENT BY THE AMBASSADOR OF NORWAY H E Mr. GUTTORM VIK

Warszawa, 29 September 2008

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset to echo the expressions of gratitude to the Polish government for its hospitality and warm welcome to Warsaw. Our thanks also go to ODIHR, under its inspiring new leadership, and to the always competent and reliable Finnish Chairmanship for the efforts they have put into the preparation and organisation of this important annual event.

The human dimension commitments constitute part of the bedrock of this Organisation and a measure of its continuing success. All the participating States are bound by their commitments to principles such as respect for human rights and the rights of minorities, tolerance and non-discrimination, rule of law and good governance, including observance of electoral standards, freedom of the media, gender equality, and a strong civil society. As one of the main institutions of the OSCE, the ODIHR has demonstrated the importance of its mission, by providing fact-based, objective monitoring of our performances and by supporting participating States in making our best efforts to adhere to the standards and commitments we all signed up to.

Regrettably, Mr. Chairman, in some participating states we still see breaches of agreed commitments, including fairly frequent occurrences of systematic election fraud. In a situation where adherence to accepted commitments is lacking or inadequate, independent institutions like the ODIHR have a vital role to play in making independent, well-founded assessments of the situation, and in offering practical assistance to remedy shortcomings. That is why we

believe it is so important to preserve ODIHR's autonomy and to further strengthen its capabilities. Rather than succumbing to the temptation of seeking to shoot the messenger, participating states should put all their efforts into the full and even implementation of their commitments, taking full advantage of the partnership and assistance offered by our joint institutions, for the benefit of themselves and their peoples.

Mr. Chairman,

This event is to a large extent the forum of the NGOs. We warmly welcome their unrestricted participation and we salute their hard work in promoting human rights and democracy across the OSCE region. We need to protect human rights defenders and we need to protect journalists and the freedom of the media. We must recognise that NGOs are indispensable contributors to our partnership-based peer review and continue to give them full access to our meetings and conferences, in line with established practice.

Mr. Chairman,

As the High Commissioner on National Minorities just eloquently reminded us, national minorities, with all their positive features, can also be a source of conflicts between states, and recent events in Caucasus have provided a very clear and disturbing illustration of that. Accordingly, we welcome this week's launching of the High Commissioner's *Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations* in Bolzano/Bosen. We fully agree with the High Commissioner that States have the main responsibility to protect and promote the rights of national minorities under their jurisdiction, as well as to act as responsible members of the international community with regard to national minorities under the jurisdiction of another State. Like the High Commissioner, we strongly believe that States should be guided by the basic principles of international law and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other States, also in matters related to national minorities.

Finally, Mr. Chairman,

The craving for justice, freedom, human rights and accountable and representative democratically elected governments is universal. In the long term, only systems that are responsive to the aspirations and needs of the people they govern can achieve political stability. In our opinion, a state is strong with the strengths of its democratic structures and civil freedoms.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.