



OSCE High Level Meeting on Victims of Terrorism

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Opening Statement by
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Rights

Check against delivery!

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all to this High-Level Meeting on behalf of Ambassador Strohal who regrets that he cannot be with us today. It is, I believe, more than appropriate to thank the Spanish Chairmanship for identifying the issue of victim support as a priority matter for the OSCE. In this respect, it is a great honour for me and the ODIHR to welcome Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles, the Special Envoy of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

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This meeting, Ladies and Gentlemen, will, by and large, follow the *leitmotiv* of solidarity. And we should be clear at the outset that expressing support and solidarity for victims of terrorism is not just about fulfilling the immediate physical and psychological needs of the injured. It is about much more. True support for victims is about restoring the quality of their lives, to the greatest extent possible, so that the long term effects of terrorist actions can be mitigated and the terrorists' *raison d'etre* undermined.

How States provide such support is an issue that has developed a new significance. Until quite recently, victim support strategies were largely a matter of domestic policy: internal matters were left at the discretion of State authorities and helpful volunteers. However, the seemingly random nature of the devastating attacks we have witnessed in the past years, in New York, Washington, Moscow, Beslan, London, Madrid and elsewhere, served to highlight that today's threat of terrorism is not contained by national borders. States need to collaborate to tackle both the criminal elements of terrorism, and its root causes.

The United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, about which we will hear more in the course of today and tomorrow, invites States to put in place national systems of assistance to promote the needs of victims of terrorism and their families and facilitate the normalisation of their lives. It further promotes international solidarity in support of victims whilst fostering the involvement of civil society in a global campaign against terrorism and for its condemnation.

Let me now say a few words on the evolution of this meeting's topic from the perspective of the ODIHR. In March 2006, we held a technical workshop in Oñati, Spain, to enable academics, practitioners and delegates from international organizations to begin the process of examining how States' should proceed in this regard. What became clear through the course of the meeting was that while the need for solidarity with the victims of terrorism is recognised across the OSCE region, there is little consensus as to what this may mean in practical terms. The issues that were raised were extremely complex and reflected the different legal and social traditions of different participating States. It was also very clear that there were significant differences in the needs of victims of different types of terrorism or terrorist acts.

In order to address and examine some of these challenges, we began to study OSCE participating States' practice in regard of support to victims of terrorism. In February of this year, in accordance with PC Decision 618, a questionnaire was sent to OSCE participating States in which they were invited to summarise the practical support they offer to victims of terrorism within their national legal frameworks. To date, we have received responses from twenty-four States. If

States which have not yet submitted their completed questionnaires could do so as soon as possible, we could begin the process of comparative analysis.

This is all the more important as we have seen that the divergence of national practices may complicate the establishment of concrete lines of best practice in the OSCE region. A commitment to exchanging information and sharing positive models for promoting solidarity with the victims of terrorism can assist in developing priorities and addressing weaknesses that would benefit from a coordinated approach.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The programme for this High-Level Meeting focuses on practical matters. After considering how an individual may be defined as a 'victim' for the purposes of providing assistance, the meeting examines models of possible assistance and compensation, implications for national legal systems and contributions that can be made by organisations outside of governmental systems. In each

session there will be presentations from experts on national systems and international law, followed by ample time for discussion.

The ODIHR sees this meeting as an opportunity to discuss these issues at a high level, exchanging a vast wealth of views and experiences from right across the OSCE region. Also, this event provides a forum to define more concretely the context of solidarity and how it can best be demonstrated in practical terms, whilst protecting the rights of victims before the law and encouraging citizens individually and collectively to become actively involved.

It is your active participation in the discussion that will make this a rich and rewarding meeting. I am very pleased to see so many expert participants from across the OSCE region and am sure that this opportunity for an exchange of experiences will be invaluable in establishing contacts and in assisting you to develop human rights compliant policies in support of victims of terrorism.

I look forward to a dynamic and constructive discussion.