

**Address by Grażyna Bernatowicz
Under-Secretary of State
in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland**

**at the Opening Session
of the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
(Warsaw, September 26, 2011)**

*Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman,*

On behalf of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Mr. Radosław Sikorski, I have the pleasure of welcoming you at the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw.

As in previous years we are gathering here to review and assess implementation of commitments undertaken by our states in the area of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the host of this important meeting, is a key OSCE institution which supports countries to promote democratic standards and implement commitments in the human dimension area. ODIHR is a world-recognised institution, first and foremost, on account of its activity as an election observer. Let me underline also the crucial role of the Office in promoting the rule of law, tolerance and non-discrimination, freedom of assembly and association. Impartial and professional involvement of ODIHR in these areas should not be underestimated.

The European Union, whose rotating presidency is currently held by Poland, actively supports countries going through transition. The EU's efforts to promote human rights and democratic values are often concurrent with those of the OSCE. In the forthcoming days, Warsaw will host a summit of the European Union's Eastern Partnership. The main objectives of this pioneer initiative are: to reinforce institutions and democratic mechanisms and to enhance respect for human rights. Progress in these areas will allow the Eastern Partnership countries to embark on a path towards greater political stability and dynamic development. It is also a road leading to closer cooperation with the EU.

Mr. Chairman,

From the standpoint of the ODIHR's activity, 2011 is an extremely important year. In the wake of events which took place in the OSCE area and in its immediate neighbourhood, we realized, once again, how strong the desire of societies for freedom and truth can be.

People whose rights and aspirations were brutally violated rose up to defend justice and human dignity. Their victory brought freedom but also new challenges. They have to implement difficult but necessary reforms. Properly functioning states must not only prevent human rights violations; they also have the responsibility to abide by the fundamental freedoms, guarantee free elections, protect journalists and human rights defenders, ensure the independence of the judiciary, and counteract any form of abuse of power, corruption, intolerance and discrimination.

Let me underline in this context the key place of human rights and democratic standards in the comprehensive concept of security. Without an effective and reliable fulfilment of human rights commitments, we cannot really speak about ensuring full and lasting security. Without respecting fundamental rights and civil liberties, authorities cannot hope to see their countries develop well in social and political terms. Upholding these rights also has huge consequences for international relations. The recognition and acceptance of this correlation, first by the CSCE and then by the OSCE, was the first step towards a significant re-evaluation of thinking about international relations and the appreciation of the importance of human rights. Another step was the creation of mechanisms and institutions that play a role in supporting countries participating in the uneasy process of adopting and promoting human rights protection standards.

Mr. Chairman,

I trust that the discussions over the next two weeks will help us to find the best answers to the challenges we are facing today. Discussions, however, will change little if unaccompanied by a genuine desire of states to implement more efficient and reliable standards of human rights observance. A positive example of the recognition of common values and of the willingness to reach an agreement was the adoption of the declaration during last year's OSCE Summit in Astana. The text of the declaration, distinctly stressing respect for human rights, should serve as an additional inspiration for our discussions.

I am convinced that presence of numerous representatives of civil society at the Warsaw conference will positively affect the dynamics and substance of the discussions awaiting us. NGO representatives deserve our appreciation not only for supporting OSCE human dimension activities, but – above all – for their daily, passionate efforts towards human rights observance.

I wish all of you an interesting and productive debate.

Thank you for your attention.