

**Statement by the Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Russia,  
and the International Civic Solidarity Platform**

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting  
Vienna, 8-9 November, 20102

Session 1, freedom of association

I am speaking on behalf of my organization and the International Civic Solidarity Platform, an OSCE-wide NGO coalition. We suggest looking beyond strengthening the OSCE work on freedom of association as such and include in our recommendations proposals for OSCE to activate its work on the situation of human rights defenders. Other international organisations have developed mechanisms and instruments in this field while OSCE has not.

These two issues are closely related and inseparable. Freedom of association is undermined when human rights defenders are targeted for persecution for their legitimate work, convicted on the basis of fabricated charges for crimes they have not committed, physically attacked and even murdered, and when the lack of effective investigation and impunity for perpetrators prevail.

Human rights defenders face increasing risks and repressions in many OSCE participating states. This not only threatens their lives and makes their work extremely difficult. This also undermines the overall ability of OSCE to function effectively and implement human dimension commitments.

The key role of human rights defenders has been repeatedly recognised in many OSCE documents and OSCE representatives for more than two decades. However, protection of human rights defenders is an implicit, rather than explicit OSCE commitment today. We suggest adopting it as an explicit commitment within the next few years as an important step. Effective mechanisms of protecting and supporting human rights defenders must be created in the OSCE if the organization and its participating states are serious about implementation of human dimension commitments.

Some OSCE participating states say that human rights defenders “do not need special protection”. This not only contradicts OSCE and other international commitments. This is hypocrisy. Just listen to the stories of HRDs.

Over the last two decades there have been a lot of discussions in the OSCE about the need to develop more effective mechanisms and institutions to address the issue of security of human rights defenders. It is high time to move from words to actions.

Civil society has developed proposals on concrete steps the OSCE could make in this direction in the near future. They were discussed at several SHDMs, side events at HDIMs, and were included in recommendations of parallel civil society events in Astana and Vilnius.

The main proposals are as follows:

**1. Development of OSCE Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders**

Guidelines would develop capacity of OSCE institutions and field missions to address the issue of security of human rights defenders and could be modelled after the EU Guidelines on HRDs.

**2. Establishment of a panel of experts on Human Rights Defenders under the auspices of ODIHR.**

The panel would review existing OSCE documents related to human rights defenders, in particular related to related freedoms of assembly, association, expression, movement, and a right to fair trial, and make proposals to the participating States on developing an explicit OSCE commitment on protection of human rights defenders.

**3. Appointment of a Representative on Human Rights Defenders as a separate institution within the OSCE, similar to existing OSCE Representatives.**

Its mandate would build on the work of ODIHR's Focal Point on human rights defenders and could include:

- monitoring the situation of HRDs across the OSCE region and reporting to the Permanent Council and the Ministerial Council;
- rapidly responding in cases when human rights defenders are in danger or urgently in need of assistance;
- coordinating human rights defenders-related activities across the OSCE institutions and field missions;
- conducting dialogue with the state authorities;
- meeting regularly with human rights defenders in the field and coordinate their meetings with high-level OSCE officials during their visits;
- promoting awareness of OSCE commitments and international standards related to the work of human rights defenders;
- cooperating and coordinating with international organisations and NGOs working on the issue of human rights defenders;
- act as a focal point for NGOs.

**4. Establishment of Participating States' Voluntary Fund for human rights defenders and support for civil society**

Its resources could be used for:

- covering the costs of security measures for human rights defenders at risk;
- covering the legal costs in cases of trials against human rights defenders;
- covering the costs of human rights defenders' participation in OSCE human dimension events.

Making decisions to take these different steps are in the power of different actors, including the OSCE Chairmanship, ODIHR Director, some participating states, or all participating states. This process will take time, especially given that some participating states see protection of human rights defenders as "interference in their domestic affairs" and erosion of their sovereignty. However, we should insist that issues of human dimension, including security of HRDs, are, according to the Helsinki principles, "a matter of direct and legitimate concern of other participating states". This principle was reiterated in the Astana Declaration and should guide all of us in our work.