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ENGLISH only

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To the OSCE community,

As we write to you, all of our countries and the world as a whole are facing unprecedented threats to public health, the economy and social cohesion from the rapid spread of the COVID-19 virus. Despite preventive measures, many countries in our own region are suffering severe losses, and we mourn the many people who have perished from this illness.

Now more than ever before, we need solidarity and co-operation – core values of the OSCE – and we need to work together to protect our populations and stop the spread of this pandemic.

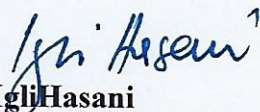
Protecting people's lives is the top priority. We recognize the urgent necessity of preventive measures now being implemented in many countries, which may limit some human rights and fundamental freedoms for a time in order to protect people from COVID-19 and to break its chain of transmission. However, such emergency measures should be proportionate, temporary, and in compliance with the rule of law and international commitments.

We therefore call on OSCE participating States to ensure that their democratic institutions continue to function effectively, that national minorities and vulnerable groups are adequately protected, and that it is made clear that discrimination and hatred will not be tolerated. At the same time, there is an urgent need to safeguard women and others at risk of domestic violence, as this increases during periods of confinement and social uncertainty. It is vital to ensure transparency in sharing information with the public, to protect access to and a free flow of information, and to enable journalists to report freely about the pandemic as media play a key role in providing important information to the public and countering fake news on the health crisis. Individual privacy should also be respected.


Now is the time for unity. The COVID-19 virus does not distinguish between peoples or countries; its threat is universal. This underscores that security is common, comprehensive and indivisible. So we join United Nations Secretary-General AntónioGuterres in calling for a global ceasefire. In his words, “it is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives.” If combatants put down their arms, they open the way for humanitarian aid, co-operation – and ultimately peace.

In this moment of crisis, we must remain true to our core principles, otherwise we risk creating greater discord and mistrust between and within our countries. If solidarity and co-operation prevail, we have the chance not only to conquer COVID-19 faster, but also to rebuild trust, create resilience, foster greater regional co-operation, and strengthen security for the benefit of us all.

Sincerely,



Iglil Hasani
Chairperson of the Permanent
Council


Thomas Greminger
Secretary General

Harlem Désir
Representative on Freedom of the
Media



Lamberto Zannier
High Commissioner on National
Minorities



Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir
Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights