

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019
Opening Session – Statement by the Delegation of Canada, delivered by Ambassador Natasha Cayer, Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE, Monday, September 16, 2019

Madam Director,

Let me begin by thanking you for having former President Lech Walesa offer the keynote speech this year, as he reminded us that we should not underestimate the power of the human spirit and the desire for liberty, even when we are faced with the negative trends of increasing populism and authoritarianism.

Excellencies, Colleagues, and Representatives of Civil Society,

I am happy to be here today for our annual reflection on the implementation of our human dimension commitments, as the Human Dimension represents an integral pillar of our shared comprehensive security. Participating actively at HDIM is a demonstration of Canada's commitment to fundamental freedoms and human rights. The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting provides us with a premier forum in which to ask ourselves whether we are living up to our OSCE and other commitments, and provides us the opportunity to challenge those who we feel are not living up to their responsibilities.

To be brief, let me say that Canada shares the many concerns raised by other speakers, including with regard to the attempted illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, which we do not and will not recognize, the ongoing Russian involvement in the war in Ukraine, as well as the human rights situation and abuses in Chechnya.

Unfortunately, the trend towards a deteriorating and evermore challenging human rights situation continued unabated this past year in the OSCE region.

While there have been some rays of light, the overall picture shows democracies under threat, media freedom at greater risk, civil society restricted, and intolerance and discrimination rising. In many parts of the OSCE region, the right to peaceful assembly is not, in fact, a reality. Hate crimes, driven by racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and bigotry are increasingly common. Indeed, gender inequality, discrimination against half of our populations, remains pervasive despite efforts undertaken in many participating States.

Against this backdrop, the holding of HDIM itself is a ray of light. The Human Dimension Implementation meeting has retained its importance, as a means to reinforce our responsibility to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms by holding participating States to account. HDIM represents a unique opportunity each year to gather as diplomats, civil society representatives, activists, and journalists to address these threats head on, and to discuss ways to achieve and uphold the ideals and commitments that were first enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act, and subsequently reinforced and strengthened.

At the Milan Ministerial Council in 2018, two new decisions related to the Human Dimension, one on Safety of Journalists, and one on Combating Violence Against Women, were agreed. We, as OSCE participating States, now need to work with civil society to more effectively implement and respect these new commitments, as well as existing ones. Too many participating States ignore or dismiss the commitments they have made, and often distort the reasons behind these actions in order to engender indifference, or even support, for undermining them. This meeting is vital in enabling the citizens of those states to speak out against these contraventions of participating States' obligations.

Madame Chairperson,

Canada will play an active role in the working sessions, and will continue to espouse our firmly held beliefs in the value and necessity of diversity, peaceful pluralism, and the respect for all human rights. Most importantly, we are looking forward to hearing from civil society, and engaging with civil society representatives during the side events and in the corridors. It is essential that we hear your voices and learn from your perspectives.

In closing, let me underline our hope that over the coming two weeks we will work together constructively, openly, and with respect throughout this meeting. Despite the challenges and disagreements we face, together we can identify concrete ways to improve the implementation of our shared commitments in the Human Dimension.

Thank you.