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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warschau, 24. September – 5. Oktober 2007

Opening Statement Switzerland

by Ambassador Rudolf Schaller

Mr Chairman,

On behalf of the Swiss delegation, I would like to thank the ODIHR for the excellent preparation of this year's Review Conference. Our thanks also go to our Polish host on whose good will and generous support we have been able to count for years.

I am very pleased to note again this year that, in addition to the official representatives, a significant number of NGOs have come to Warsaw. Their participation adds value and considerable importance to this conference. We value this annual meeting because its express purpose is to subject our ability to implement the commitments we have undertaken in the context of the Human Dimension to rigorous and systematic scrutiny and, at the same time, to set new objectives in the Human Dimension of the OSCE. We should not forget that our Organisation is what the individual participating States and their civil societies make of it, and this includes the opportunity to discuss issues and share thoughts and experiences on all questions within the institutions and structures established for these purposes. Without the inclusion of civil society in our deliberations, the further development of human rights policy will not be possible.

Mr Chairman,

In the last few years, racial discrimination, xenophobia, religious intolerance and discrimination have unfortunately again become current issues. And recently also, we have become increasingly active in a particular area that has become a particular cause for concern: religious intolerance and discrimination. It is precisely in this area where the OSCE is required to act.

A series of events have been carried out at the initiative of the Spanish

chairman-in-office which have prompted the participating states – i.e. both civil society and governments – to address some urgent questions. The next conference takes place in Córdoba. It suffices to recall at this stage that all OSCE countries, including Switzerland, must resolutely reject all forms of discrimination regardless of whether the individual cases we encounter are directed against Jewish, Muslim or Christian communities.

In this context, our attention during this year turns to Kazakhstan, the candidate country for the OSCE chairmanship in 2009. If this participating state wishes to lead the Organisation for the duration of an entire year, it must fulfil the OSCE commitments and norms to a degree that is in consistence with this role and give a good example. Efforts to support Kazakhstan in this matter demand the assistance not only of the governments of all participating States but also of NGOs. In particular, NGOs can work with civil society in Kazakhstan in ways that we government representatives are unable to do. An in-depth discussion here in Warsaw on the human rights situation in Kazakhstan would be a great opportunity for this Central Asian country – one which it must take.

Mr Chairman,

In concluding, I would like to say that it is known that the acquis in the Human Dimension of the OSCE is growing steadily. Expert verification is posing increasing problems for the Organisation and the participating States. We must nevertheless take this task very seriously, because if we don't make the necessary efforts, we run the risk that the foundations of our work will start to crumble. One of the reasons for this meeting in Warsaw is to prevent anything like this from happening. In the next two weeks, we will see many representatives of civil society, and others, explain why we need to implement our commitments in the context of the Human Dimension. We know from these critical positions of NGOs that the political will of the governments to take specific measures is not yet ensured. For us, it therefore seems important that the Permanent Council - or the Human Dimension Committee (HDC), which has been in provisional existence only since the beginning of 2007 - will increasingly be the forum where the participating States will undergo self-examination and render account on a mutual basis.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.