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Address by

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I present to you today the Annual Report of the activities of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in 2017. It gives me an extra pleasure that this happens on a day very close to my heart, 8th of March, the International Women's Day. All around the world women celebrate the achievements made to date in the struggle for women's rights and women's empowerment while we are reminded of the efforts we still have to make to ensure gender equality and gender equity.

As the largest regional security organization in the world, the OSCE has an important role to play in addressing the issue of a comprehensive approach to human rights and security of women and men, girls and boys. At OSCE, we recognize that all efforts to manage conflict and to establish long-term stability and peace require the inclusion of women and men on an equal basis. Research tells us that gender equality is a better indicator of a state's peacefulness than other factors like democracy, religion or gross domestic product (GDP).¹

Studies show that gender inequality has been a predictor of armed conflict whether measuring conflict between states or within states.²

For example, as the percentage of women in parliament increases by five percent, a state is five times less likely to use violence when faced with an

¹ O'Reilly, Marie, Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies, Institute for Inclusive Security, 2015, <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Why-Women-Brief-10.12.15.pdf>.

² Marie O'Reilly, Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies, Institute for Inclusive Security, 2015, <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Why-Women-Brief-10.12.15.pdf>.

international crisis. Increased participation of women in parliaments also reduces the risks of civil war.³ Peace agreements negotiated with the participation of women are also likely to be more sustainable.

In terms of political violence, data has shown that the higher the proportion of women in parliament, the lower the likelihood of the state carrying out human rights abuses such as political imprisonments, torture and killings.⁴

The OSCE average of women MPs in the national parliaments is 27.5 per cent and as a region, OSCE participating States have failed to reach the 30 per cent target set by the Beijing Platform for Action which is considered the critical mass needed for women to make a substantial difference in politics. While we have definitely seen growth in terms of a number of MPs over the past years⁵, it is clear that we have long way to go.

Lastly, in light of International Women's Day, let me refer to the extraordinary and forceful #MeToo#campaign which has taken place in the past few months across the OSCE region. The campaign has created a momentum for all of us to reinforce our efforts to demonstrate to women that we will take measures to ensure that their working environment, in all sectors, is free from sexual harassment and other gender based violence. At ODIHR we will among other things continue our efforts to promote a professional working environment, including in our election observation activities.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ In 2007, an average number woman of women MPs in the OSCE region was 20.5 per cent according to IPU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In light of the current climate it is important to recall that the OSCE Human Dimension Commitments were developed jointly and adopted unanimously by all participating States. They establish, in the words of the Astana document, “clear standards for the participating States in their treatment of each other and of all individuals within their territories.” In essence, OSCE participating States have agreed through their Human Dimension Commitments that pluralistic democracy based on the rule of law is the only system of government suitable to guarantee human rights effectively. Participating States are “accountable to [their] citizens and responsible to each other” for the full implementation of their commitments.

Unfortunately, we at ODIHR have observed that 2017 was a year of increasingly shrinking space for civil society. We have observed this trend in all parts of the OSCE region.

It may be difficult to escape the pessimism that pervades current discussions of global affairs and the challenges to democracy—including resurgent authoritarianism, weakened liberal democratic values and rising populism.

While serious challenges remain, the quality of democracy has improved alongside with continued demand for democracy throughout the OSCE region. New technologies offer new opportunities for transparency and accountability as well as for participation of under-represented groups.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me turn now to my annual report. I will commence with the most visible part of our work: **Election Observation**. In the course of 2017, ODIHR deployed 20 election-related activities across OSCE region.

ODIHR Missions provided over 400 recommendations and ODIHR actively promoted follow-up to its electoral assessments and recommendations, seeing that as the essence of our work in assisting the participating States.

In 2017, ODIHR presented its reports to state institutions, political parties and civil society in 14 participating States: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Lithuania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Poland, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Tajikistan, the United States and Uzbekistan. During these meetings ODIHR provided technical advice to support electoral reform and the follow-up of recommendations.

In terms of quality of elections, there is progress in certain areas, but many challenges remain.

On the positive side, electoral laws continue to improve (often on the basis of ODIHR recommendations). OSCE participating States pay greater attention to women's participation and the rights of persons with disabilities. As the role of technology continues to increase, OSCE participating States rightly pay greater attention to possible benefits as well as challenges of introducing new technologies into the election administration processes.

At the same time, several aspects continue to pose challenges, such as lack of confidence in the impartiality and independence of election administration bodies, including concerns about undue influence by state institutions and political parties. We also remain concerned about the lack of a free campaign environment, especially the abuse of state resources in favour of incumbents. The space for civil society, including election observers, remains rather restricted in a number of States. This is sometimes due to the lack of legislation regulating observer access to all aspects of the electoral process.

ODIHR will continue its efforts to promote meaningful follow up to its recommendations and I would like to call on participating States to use the mechanism of voluntary reporting at the Human Dimension Committee. I hope participating States will not only increase their efforts to improve their elections but also to present these efforts to other participating States.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the field of **Democratization**, ODIHR promoted good practices and built capacity of governments and civil society to help states implement their human dimension commitments. With an emphasis on promoting gender equality and diversity, ODIHR worked to improve the political participation of under-represented groups, including women, youth, persons with disabilities and migrants.

In 2017, ODIHR published *Making Laws Work for Women and Men: A Practical Guide to Gender-Sensitive Legislation*, which provides

parliamentarians with guidance how gender-sensitive approaches can be integrated into parliamentary work.

ODIHR also contributed to strengthening democratic institutions by providing technical assistance for reforms of law-making processes and legislation, increasing the transparency and accountability. ODIHR assisted ten countries in improving legislative frameworks regulating money in politics and helping to build the capacity of bodies responsible for the implementation of those frameworks.

The Office worked to ensure the independence and diversity of judiciaries, fair trial rights, and public faith in the integrity of the courts. In 2017, ODIHR enhanced the capacity of legal and civil society professionals to better understand and apply judicial independence standards and ensure account.

When requested by participating States, ODIHR reviews draft or existing laws to assess their compliance with international standards and OSCE commitments, and provides recommendations for improvement. In 2017, ODIHR published 13 legal reviews, including the first-ever for Bulgaria, Iceland, Spain and Switzerland.

Work on freedom of movement and migration focused on secure travel documents, migrant rights and integration. ODIHR continued to build the capacity of national authorities and civil society by supporting efforts to enhance their systems of migration governance. ODIHR delivered training for over 200 participants to develop the knowledge and skills on human rights, integration and gender-sensitive labour migration policies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In our report “The responsibility of States”, analysing the situation of human rights defenders in OSCE participating States, we discussed many challenges; threats, attacks and undue restrictions on the activities of human rights activists, often targeting those promoting the rights of women, discriminated minorities or LGBTI individuals. We also reported on positive practices. These include policies for the protection of human rights defenders and measures adopted by some participating States to support human rights defenders in other countries, for example through temporary relocation, or asylum. We observed public assemblies, analysing challenges and good practices in the policing and facilitation. The findings of these and upcoming assembly monitorings will be published later in 2018.

Human rights monitoring is an important part of our mandate, and I am pleased with the strong support of the vast majority of participating States for this work. Such support is needed, because human rights monitoring is not only important in its own right, but also a very important diagnostic and learning tool for us to devise our policy advice and capacity building programmes.

We will continue to work actively on the link between human rights and security. We have trained and facilitated exchanges among security and other government actors in many areas: mainstreaming of gender and human rights in the security sector; policing of assemblies; human rights in the fight against terrorism; freedom of religion or belief and security; torture prevention and the protection of persons deprived of liberty; and combating trafficking. We remain

committed to support you in delivering comprehensive and long-term security, which fully includes respect for human rights.

Our engagement with civil society and actors, such as National Human Rights Institutions, was another strong pillar of our human rights work. We have offered them capacity building, in the knowledge that they are a fundamental part of the human rights ecosystem and that they are often the first to react and to counter negative human rights trends. In 2017 we have seen how human rights activism, for example in the women's rights movement, has grown, gaining support among new parts of the population.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ODIHR's efforts to promote **Tolerance and Non-Discrimination** centre on collecting reliable data and working closely with participating States and civil society to strengthen their ability to counter intolerance.

Our reporting on hate crimes and hate incidents enables us to see how communities are affected differently, for example demonstrating how racist hate crimes vary from state to state or how women and men are affected differently. However, our numbers for 2016 show that while 45 states shared some information on hate crimes, only 20 provided us with police data that is disaggregated by bias motivation. ODIHR stands ready to work with states, and civil society, to improve both the quantity and quality of data reported to us.

ODIHR's reporting also informs our capacity-building. We work closely with local authorities in four states to identify new tools that support how criminal

justice systems counter hate crimes and develop an approach that will be applicable across the OSCE region. This complements our ongoing programmes to strengthen how prosecutors, law enforcement and civil society respond to hate crime.

ODIHR's work would be impossible without the contribution of civil society groups, who monitor hate incidents, support victims, and work with governments to improve responses to hate crimes. It is only through close co-operation with states and civil society across the region that we will achieve tangible results in our work against intolerance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the area of Roma and Sinti there is little evidence of actual improvements in their situation. There are improvements in school and university enrolment for Roma, yet they still face school segregation and low quality of education. Unemployment in Roma communities remains disproportionately high, and violations of the right to adequate housing and health remain evident in the OSCE region. Many Roma and Sinti communities are still faced with evictions, threats, and hate crimes.

Discrimination of Roma remains high. As surveys made by the Fundamental Rights Agency show, one in four Roma had an incident of perceived discrimination in the preceding 12 months. The multiple discrimination of Roma and Sinti women, require special attention.

In order to effect change it is necessary to tap into the tremendous potential of Roma and Sinti youth. No previous generations had such numbers of Roma and Sinti university students, but unless supported with equal opportunities, these efforts risk resulting in empty promises.

ODIHR can assist the participating States by creating and strengthening links with and among Roma and Sinti civil society organizations and by specific tailored interventions, such as training for human rights-based policing, regional expertise on civil registration and statelessness, and much needed focus on public and political participation of Roma and Sinti.

We also call for serious engagement at the political level for the protection and promotion of human rights of Roma and Sinti to counteract the explicitly anti-Roma platforms and language that we continuously witness by politicians as a mean of gathering votes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Turning to the **Human Dimension Implementation meeting** I sincerely hope that participating States will soon reach consensus in the ongoing process on the participation of civil society organizations. We need to be able to proceed with planning the HDIM in the autumn, as foreseen, to provide you with a platform where you can take stock of developments and exchange ideas with civil society and other international organizations. Time is of essence for planning purposes as well as to send a clear message that there is consensus on the concept of

comprehensive security, of which the human dimension is an essential component.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

History shows that protecting human rights makes our societies collectively stronger and is our safeguard against conflict and instability. This provides all of us with a sound argument to look at the common commitments in the human dimension as a unifying factor, to be implemented, for the good of our societies and security. In particular, I believe that we must counter any kind of polarization which in light of history carries with it tremendous risk to peace and security to the detriment of all.

I urge all of us to recognize the challenges ahead and embrace ODIHR as a partner in addressing these challenges.

Thank you