



**The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in co-operation with
the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the
Stolen Asset Recovery (StAR) Initiative of the World Bank and the UNODC**

**With support from the 2012 Irish Chairmanship of the OSCE and the Basel Institute on
Governance**

SEMINAR

“Identifying, Restraining and Recovering Stolen Assets in the OSCE Region”

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OPENING STATEMENT

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Your Excellency Ambassador O' Leary,

Dear Mr. Svilanovic,

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me, first of all, to convey the sincere apologies of Ms. Candice Welsch who was supposed to deliver this statement and who is not able to attend the seminar.

I would like, on behalf of UNODC, to thank the OSCE Secretariat for hosting this event and providing the logistical and organizational facilities for it, as well as the Irish Chairmanship for its political support in making this seminar a reality.

UNODC is among the co-organizers of this seminar and this is a demonstration of the high priority it accords to issues related to asset recovery. It is, further, a proof of the excellent cooperation of UNODC with the other key partners involved in the organization of the event:

First, with the OSCE Secretariat. Here the cooperation is extended in a much broader context covering different issues of the anti-corruption agenda; and this has been demonstrated once more this year through the joint efforts of the two Organizations within the framework of the OSCE Twentieth Economic and Environmental Forum dedicated to "Promoting Security and Stability through Good Governance", which will conclude its work, with the active support of the Irish Chairmanship, at its forthcoming meeting in Prague mid September 2012.

And, *second*, with the World Bank in the specific field of asset recovery, through the joint Stolen Asset Recovery (StAR) Initiative. The partnership aims at supporting international efforts to end safe havens for corrupt funds. Moreover, it focuses on lowering the barriers to asset recovery; building national capacity for asset recovery; and providing preparatory assistance in the recovery of assets.

The seminar is organized at a propitious time. Last week, the sixth meeting of the Working Group on Asset Recovery was held at the UNODC Headquarters. Let me recall, at this point, that the Working Group was convened in 2007 and has been performing its functions under the authority of the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Convention against Corruption. Its meeting last week served, among others, as a forum for discussions on practical aspects of asset recovery, including challenges and good practices.

The focus of the agenda of the seminar starting today here in Hofburg, and at least for its first two days of technical discussions at an expert level, is to examine legal and operational issues of asset recovery, as well as practices and lessons learnt, of relevance for the OSCE participating States.

From that perspective, we consider the obvious complementarity of the two events as an excellent opportunity to continue engaging in a constructive dialogue and exchange of views and experience in the field of asset recovery, with a focus – from today onwards - on a specific geographical – regional and subregional – context, as delineated by the OSCE membership; and, further, with the objective of targeting a specific group of experts/participants: not only representatives from OSCE delegations, but also senior officials from public institutions dealing with anti-corruption and anti-money laundering issues (anti-corruption agencies, FIUs, central authorities, audit institutions, investigators/law enforcement, investigating magistrates, prosecutors and legislators) from all OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation.

Personally, I would like to express my confidence that the discussions during the seminar will be conducive to a better understanding of the mechanisms that need to be in place for facilitating effective and prompt recovery of assets derived from such criminal activities as, for example, corruption and money laundering. In that sense, it is my strong belief that the seminar will contribute to establishing professional contacts among you and, further, sharing new knowledge of direct relevance to you and generally to practitioners who are working or may work to recover assets within their own jurisdiction or abroad. I am also confident that at its political segment, the seminar will produce a set of practical and action-oriented suggestions for follow-up action for consideration by the OSCE participating countries as well as by the supporting organizations.

As a conclusion, allow me, ladies and gentlemen, to underline another important issue which is linked to the implementation of the – for the first time incorporated in a global legally binding instrument – provisions on asset recovery of the United Nations Convention against Corruption. Some of the ultimate objectives of the seminar, namely the development of cumulative knowledge for capacity-building purposes and the promotion of ways and means of building confidence, including through facilitating the exchange of information and ideas on the expeditious return of assets and encouraging cooperation between requesting and requested States in the OSCE region, are of key importance for the preparation of OSCE participating States in view of the review of implementation of chapter V of the UNCAC during the second cycle of its Implementation Review Mechanism, due to commence in 2015. For this purpose, let me also note that the Working Group on Asset Recovery considered and adopted last week a multi-year workplan covering the period 2012-2015, focusing on specific themes each year with a view to advancing discussions on practical aspects pertaining to these themes. Having said that, I am confident that the fruitful cooperation between, on the one hand, UNODC and the StAR Initiative, if I may speak on behalf of my colleagues from Washington D.C. present here, and the OSCE Secretariat, on the other, aiming at removing barriers to asset recovery in the OSCE region will not restrict itself to this seminar, but will further continue consistently in future.

I thank you for your attention.