



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to ODIHR Director Ambassador Janez Lenarčič

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 25, 2010

Welcome once again to the Permanent Council, Ambassador Lenarčič, and thank you for your comprehensive report and statement. As you know, the United States strongly supports ODIHR, which has earned its place as the key institution in the OSCE's efforts to promote democratic development. We very much appreciate all of your efforts to help us reach our human dimension commitments. You help us all keep in mind that the ultimate goal of these commitments is more accountable and responsive governments that empower all their citizens to reach their fullest potential. I think that the OSCE at its heart is an aspirational organization and you help us all, I think, become better. In a personal note, I was a worker in a poll in Montgomery County in November 2008 and an OSCE observation group came in. I was very thrilled when they came in. We welcomed you then and we will continue to welcome you in your efforts to help us all do better.

Regarding your report, we share your concerns regarding the dates and topics of the human dimension events for this year. The Chairmanship and the Human Dimension Committee worked hard to ensure that participating States reach consensus as soon as possible, and we will continue to work constructively to promote broad consensus that reflects the OSCE's core Human Dimension principles. We have voiced our concern regarding the substance of this year's events, but pledge to work with the other participating States, with the Chairmanship, and your Office to ensure that the implementation of all human dimension commitments are addressed. We highly value the peer review function in the human dimension and see it as a key mechanism for improving implementation. We also believe that the role of civil society in promoting Human Dimension goals is invaluable, and we will continue to stand for full participation by NGOs at Human Dimension events in accordance with OSCE modalities.

We support your call for strengthened elections observation follow-up and agree that election observation can only have a lasting impact if post-election recommendations are not only given serious consideration, but are in fact implemented to the fullest extent possible. We are open to ideas on how we might better institutionalize the peer review role, perhaps through the PC, as follow up to ODIHR's election recommendations.

ODIHR's well-deserved reputation for election monitoring is directly attributable to its well-known, objective criteria and procedures for election observation which are in adherence to the *Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation* and *Code of Conduct for International Election Observers*. We look forward to continued cooperation between ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in carrying out future OSCE election observation missions.

We welcome your initiative to tie the efforts of the Democratization Department into post-election follow-up and agree that election observation recommendations are closely related to the fields of democratic governance, rule of law, legal reform, gender equality and population registration.

While we are disappointed that we have been unable to come to consensus in holding an OSCE human dimension event on freedom of assembly and association this year, we do look forward to your online *Guidebook on Freedom of Association* and the *Handbook on Monitoring Freedom of Peaceful Assembly*. We encourage all of our colleagues here to utilize these forthcoming resources to ensure that these fundamental freedoms are fully respected in the OSCE area.

While we applaud ODIHR's work in the area of human trafficking, we also urge continuing coordination with the Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings to ensure that there are no overlapping areas or contradictory priorities in this important area.

The United States strongly supports ODIHR's efforts in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination. We particularly applaud your programs to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, Christians and members of other religions and other forms of intolerance and discrimination. We encourage continued cooperation with the Chairmanship's three Personal Representatives on Tolerance as well as the Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief in this regard. We also commend ODIHR's important efforts to deal with hate crimes. In our view, this work should focus on advancing:

- realistic, specifically targeted initiatives that will help address the problem of core definitions,
- model legislation to meet OSCE commitments,
- data collection methods,
- tolerance education tools, and
- a sharing of best practices.

We expect that such a program would be in the forefront of our common efforts to combat hate crimes and violent extremism while protecting the freedoms of expression, assembly and association.

We appreciate your remarks about the important work being done by ODIHR's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti issues. His stated priority to identify best practices to counter prejudices and biased portrayal of Roma in the media is especially timely given recent events in some participating States and even comments by some government officials about Roma and Sinti that reinforce unhelpful prejudices.

We especially support efforts to improve educational opportunities for Roma and Sinti through the OSCE and look forward to ODIHR's comparative report on the participation of Roma and Sinti children in early education later this year.

Let me just conclude by saying that the United States retains full confidence in the vital work performed by ODIHR and continues to support unequivocally its current leadership and direction.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.