



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Reinforced Plenary Session Final Remarks

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Michael Kozak
OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, October 5, 2012

We thank ODIHR and Poland for once again hosting the HDIM in this lively city of Warsaw. We are mindful that our annual meeting takes place in a country where freedom and democracy are not just words, but principles that men and women long dreamed of, and died for, before they could finally make them a reality. The people of Poland understand just how important it is to defend and advance these principles, and that is why their commitment to the OSCE, its Human Dimension, and to ODIHR is as profound as it is tangible.

Yet, in this meeting hall, in a free and democratic Poland, we have chronicled another reality for far too many men and women living within the OSCE region: countries in which individuals still are persecuted for what they believe or say or how they worship; courtrooms where justice is an empty concept; communities riven by intolerance where people are the targets of hate crimes for who they are, how they look, where they come from, or who they love.

This troubling reality has been brought directly to us by the invaluable presence here at HDIM of individual human rights defenders and civil society representatives who bear witness to the injustices I have cited. Their opportunity to participate in HDIM *on an equal basis* with governments in a thorough review of our shared human dimension commitments, and to share their recommendations with us, constitutes a unique and valuable contribution of the OSCE to multilateral diplomacy and the cause of human rights.

OSCE's Human Dimension, at its core, is animated precisely by *this* opportunity, *this* exchange, and *this* platform from which a range of voices may be heard that are otherwise censored or silenced.

Speaking about last week's adoption of a UN Human Rights Committee resolution on the importance of freedom of assembly and association, Secretary Clinton sounded a warning: "Over the last 18 months... we have seen governments constrict civil society activism and increase their attacks against civic-minded organizations and individuals. These crackdowns mark a disturbing trend that requires global leadership."

The OSCE, and this unique forum, the HDIM, have long pioneered the essential role of civil society and have a long history of defending embattled civil society representatives.

Unfortunately, attending the HDIM can be a risky and uncertain proposition for some civil society representatives. We heard many interventions concerning the case of Kazakhstani opposition activist Vladimir Kozlov, who is presently on trial for his support of striking oil workers who clashed with police in December of last year. Amongst other things, Kozlov has been charged with “inciting social hatred” amongst the strikers. Evidence presented against him includes his participation in the HDIM meeting last year.

On September 26, the Swedish and U.S Delegations hosted a side event focused on civil society and fundamental freedoms. The guest of honor was Belarusian electoral expert Viktor Kornienko. Mr. Kornienko had been invited to participate in the July supplementary human dimension meeting on elections. At the last minute – and following a search by police of his residence – Mr. Kornienko was prohibited from leaving the country. The fact that he was willing to attempt, yet again, to attend an OSCE event is testimony to both his courage and to the importance that he and so many attach to the OSCE as a forum for the promotion of human rights and the rule of law.

Other members of civil society have been conspicuous by their absence, including Belarusian human rights activist Ales Byalyatski. Last week, the U.S. Ambassador to Poland hosted an event in his honor. My delegation had the privilege of participating in this tribute. We again urge the government of Belarus to release and rehabilitate all political prisoners.

In this context, as we consider ways to strengthen OSCE’s human dimension activities throughout the year, we remain firmly committed to ensuring civil society’s access to and engagement in OSCE events, including the HDIM. In fact, the large number of participants in this HDIM – particularly from civil society – clearly illustrates that this meeting is not too long, as many sessions were tremendously oversubscribed.

For the remainder of this year, and building on the HDIM and the full cycle of human dimension meetings this year, the United States looks forward to working closely with the Irish Chairmanship and other participating States to strengthen the human dimension by advancing a Ministerial agenda in Dublin that aspires to the OSCE’s high standards and builds upon an already impressive acquis of human dimension commitments.

To that end, we hope that additional participating States will join the United States and 41 other countries in supporting a draft declaration on fundamental freedoms in the digital age. More and more frequently, we see that authoritarian governments seek to control or constrain civil society is by limiting the ability of individuals and members of non-governmental groups to exercise their fundamental freedoms of expression, association, assembly and religion in the virtual realm.

Several of the HDIM sessions, as well as many side events, highlighted the urgent need for renewed attention on the part of participating States to fulfilling the range of OSCE commitments related to tolerance. We heard eloquent first-hand testimony from Romani women and LGBT individuals about the impact of hatred and prejudice directed against them – whether by individuals acting on their own in violation of law, or by states using their authority to limit their rights.

As this meeting unfolded, anti-Roma prejudice was starkly manifested in the unlawful eviction by residents of Marseille of dozens of Roma from an illegal camp, which was subsequently torched. We discussed disturbing regional trends in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim prejudice and violence. My own delegation spoke about the tragic shooting of six Sikhs in Wisconsin and the ongoing struggle in the United States to fight prejudice and to identify and combat hate crimes more effectively. With the goal of better implementation of our agreed commitments, we welcome the Chairmanship's initiative to work toward a decision in Dublin to fight intolerance and xenophobia across the OSCE region.

We again congratulate the citizens of Georgia on their historic parliamentary elections this week. The prospect of a peaceful transfer of power should inspire other participating States in their efforts to implement democratic reforms.

We look forward to Ukraine's chairmanship in 2013, and pledge to work with it to protect the OSCE's founding principles and enhance the organization's effectiveness. We urge Ukraine to lead by example, and, as we have noted before, to bring an end to politically motivated prosecutions of opposition leaders, enhance media freedom, ensure the freedom of peaceful assembly and speech of all citizens, including LGBT individuals, and hold free and fair elections on October 28.

Looking beyond Dublin and toward the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2015, participating States must take stock of the progress made in implementing our shared human dimension commitments, and we must consider ways in which we can better fulfill, over the medium and long-term, the promise of Helsinki. We look to Ukraine, the upcoming OSCE Chair-in-Office, to build upon the good work of the Irish Chair by sharpening the OSCE's focus on tolerance, gender equality, and internet freedom, and to ensure that the independence of the OSCE's institutions – such as the High Commissioner for National Minorities, the Representative for Freedom of Media and ODIHR – is preserved.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.