



Opening Statement
Ambassador Christian Strohal
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions
and Human Rights
to OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 4 October, 2004

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

New challenges

I welcome you very warmly here in Warsaw, at the 9th Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. It is always a pleasure to bring together so many partners, colleagues and friends at the seat of the ODIHR. For us, this is the most significant single event during the year, and we are, as always, particularly grateful to our Polish hosts. This year we meet on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, and several other important anniversaries, and in a time of heightened attention to human dimension issues across our region. It is my special pleasure, and honour, to welcome our key-note speakers for this opening session: our Chairman-in-Office, Minister Solomon Passy, Minister Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz representing our host country, Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly Gert Weisskirchen, and the Ombudsman of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Lukin.

As always, we have also numerous representatives of NGOs present, sitting at the same table with those from governments, from intergovernmental organizations, and specialized institutions – I invite you all to contribute to the success of this meeting. Not just to deliver criticism, but also to show where good practices exist, where solutions to problems can be found, and have been found. This approach should also characterize our side-meetings. NGOs, together with Governments, have the opportunity to show that implementation of human dimension commitments often requires interaction and shared responsibilities. This was one of the main thoughts expressed at the HD Seminar last May, that both Governments and civil society achieve better results if they approach each other in a constructive spirit, and establish partnerships to achieve concrete tangible results in society.

Since last year's HDIM, we have had an especially busy year, the fruits of which I hope will be brought to this meeting. Most importantly, a number of new areas have been added to our long list of human dimension priorities. They are of course not really new areas, as they all emanate from the basic commitments to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and have also been addressed earlier. But the new **Action Plans** on Roma and Sinti and on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as the **decisions on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination** in Maastricht, further elaborated in Berlin, Paris and Brussels, do represent a significant '*plus*' in terms of commitment, of focus, and, hopefully, of determination to promote change.

These areas are not only an expression of the organization's capacity to respond rapidly and forcefully to priority challenges – they are also significant as they all clearly relate to all of the participating States. This is important because the OSCE should matter for all 55 States. Some have perceived a trend of the OSCE away from issues concerning all of us to the specific challenges of a few. I do not need to recall in detail, to a forum such as this one, the continued relevance of the fundamental commitments of the OSCE community, namely that all participating States “will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms” and “will promote and encourage the effective exercise of civil,

political, economic, social, cultural and other rights and freedoms all of which derive from the inherent dignity of the human person.”

New realities and the need to remain credible

This is the first time that the HDIM takes place within the European Union, after our host country, together with nine other participating States, has joined the EU last May. While the European Union has expanded to 25 members and has, in the process, promoted tremendous improvements on human rights, the rule of law and democracy, the OSCE remains a crucial forum for reviewing and renewing commitments in these fields, and ensuring their continued implementation in practice. This also means, of course, that the Organization’s bodies and institutions, including the ODIHR, will continue to serve *all* participating States and offer assistance and advice.

In this context, I would like to mention that we have been observing, as highlighted by the Human Dimension Seminar in May, an increasing disenchantment with politics across our region. The issue in question here is the **credibility** within our own societies, the credibility of traditional structures and processes towards the public at large. It gives us reason to pause if we see that, time and again, records in low participation are broken, and groups using extremist or radical nationalist rhetoric receive significant support. In many areas, governance is increasingly perceived as distant, and not based on deliberative processes and true democratic ownership. This may, in the long run, endanger achievements made in building and consolidating democracy as the sole form of government in our region.

Also towards the outside world, it is fundamentally important that we remain credible, true to our commitments to act in line with human rights and the rule of law, including international humanitarian law. The States assembled in the OSCE can only take the lead in the wider global movement towards human security based on human rights and democracy if they are perceived to be credible.

As you all know, in a few days, our Cooperation Partner Afghanistan will hold its first election after many years of chaos, war, and centrifugal tendencies. Together with the Secretariat, and thanks to their continuous and generous support, we have been able to send a team of experts there to assist the Afghan authorities and our international partners in their efforts to sow the seeds of democracy. For us, this confirmed what responsibility we have in the OSCE towards the wider world, and how we can assist and guide others in difficult moments. It will take concerted and concentrated long-term efforts of all of us to see this through. We have to see to it, however, that our own region retains the lead position on human rights, the rule of law, and democracy.

This year we were reminded with terrible images from Abu Ghraib about the fact that we do not live in a world free from torture. But the lasting lesson should not be this realization that torture exists, for this is something that we all know, even if we do not address it always strongly enough. No, the lasting lesson is and should be that *all* torturers *everywhere* should *always* be held fully accountable. We should all join in decisive action against impunity for those responsible for serious human rights violations within the OSCE region; action against impunity is one of the measures contributing to effective prevention of torture.

Human dimension commitments and reform

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

We have all welcomed the call from our Chairman for reform of the Organization. Issues debated so far range from the ‘balance of dimensions’, to location of meetings, and to the role of various actors within the Organization. While this debate is of course led and conducted by participating States, the ODIHR has been asked to contribute also from its own institutional point of view. The ODIHR can only reiterate the importance of human dimension and related commitments which provide the mandate and guidance for the ODIHR. We support strengthening of other parts and dimensions of the Organization, and I have made it clear from the beginning of my tenure that cross-dimensionality and effective links between the human dimension and the politico-military and economic dimensions are important not only for the goals and objectives of the human dimension

itself, but for the success and relevance of the entire Organization. I have therefore spoken at the Annual Security Review Conference and the Forum for Security Cooperation, and the Economic Forum. The human dimension commitments constitute a crucial ‘acquis’ of the whole organization, and a measure of its continuing success.

With regard to the institutional set-up of the Organization, we have welcomed efforts and progress made on behalf of the Secretariat to strengthen the administrative-operational backbone of all parts of the Organization. And we welcome the ideas put forward to strengthen the Secretary-General and enhance his or her profile; at the same time, we do not lose sight of one of the specific comparative advantages of the OSCE – the autonomy of its institutions, as important element to hold up the professionalism and credibility of its activities.

The ODIHR

The ODIHR is the OSCE’s largest institution. It has the challenging and honorable task to serve as the OSCE’s main institution in the human dimension. It has a distinct mandate, and is autonomous in its professional decisions and findings. The ODIHR is an institutional memory of the OSCE. We respect the letter and spirit of our mandate, we evolve with it, and we act in the long-term interest of the Organization as a whole. This also guides us at this meeting.

The HDIM is reviewing implementation. Our Chairman-in-Office has declared this year the year of implementation. Our meeting will, I trust, provide an answer how we have fared over the last year, identify successes as well as the need for further efforts. It is thus an important step towards the forthcoming Ministerial Council in Sofia. It is a great opportunity for us to interact with all of you who come here from within the OSCE family as well as from outside. We will present the results of our work, as well as plans for future activities. The meeting also helps delegations to discuss with all of us here at ODIHR, a communication which is not always as immediate and complete as I wish it to be.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I wish us all two inspiring weeks; detailed information about the organization of our discussions will be given later today. I would now turn to our Chairman-in-Office to open the meeting. I use this occasion to thank him once again for the continuing support we receive from the Chairmanship.

Thank you.