

UK CLOSING STATEMENT – HUMAN DIMENSION SEMINAR

Firstly I think it worth repeating our admiration for the way in which the RFOM's office, ODIHR and the Chairmanship have managed to organize this event at such short notice. I mentioned in my opening remarks that now was the time to move on from the process of agreeing agendas to the substance of discussing our media freedom commitments. I think on the whole that the seminar managed to achieve that and I would like to offer particular thanks to civil society representatives for their contributions. Their factual reporting of the situation on the ground and their genuine expertise adds to the credibility and value of human dimension events and reminds us in national delegations of a simple truth of why the OSCE human dimension exists – namely to promote and protect the rights and interests of our citizens.

We were reminded by the Representative this morning of the need to take a more honest approach to media freedom records in our own countries. We also heard several speakers bemoan the so called "naming and shaming approach" It is of course at times uncomfortable to have shortcomings in our own countries identified whether by the Institutions or by fellow participating States. And most of us as public servants possess an instinctive trait that causes us to automatically defend the position of our governments. That will not change but what can change is for all of us to approach criticism, advice and recommendations with an open and reflective mind and to treat RFOM observations with the seriousness and respect that they deserve. Not because it is polite to do so but because it is we the participating States that have given the Representative a clear mandate to assist us in complying with the OSCE's freedom of media and freedom of expression commitments. So we owe it to ourselves as participating States and to our citizens to work constructively with the instruments that we have created. We should cherish the RFOM's mandate, use it as a tool and avoid in any way undermining it. We see no need to review, reopen or update it.

I said in my opening remarks that I hoped that we would have a substantive discussion on safety and impunity. I think we have heard enough this week including from the Representative this morning to confirm our fears that the trends in this field are negative across the OSCE area. In an organization that prides itself on its extensive body of norms, standards, commitments and principles, it is right that we often stress the need for better implementation of what we already have rather than expending too much time and energy on reaffirming existing language. But when it comes to ensuring the safety and protection of those bringing us news or expressing their views, we surely need to do better. It is unforgivable that there has been no OSCE commitment relating to the safety of journalists since 1994. If the record since then had been one of overwhelmingly positive achievement, we might justifiably argue that our commitments are serving us well. But what we have heard today and on many other occasions in OSCE fora confirms that this is far from being the case. We therefore encourage the Ukrainian Chairmanship to make tackling impunity a priority topic for this year's Ministerial Council.

Thank you