



**Opening Statement**  
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**Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions**  
**and Human Rights**

to OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
Warsaw, 6 October, 2003

Mr Chairman in Office, Minister de Hoop Scheffer,  
Minister Cimoszewicz, representing our host country,  
Dear Friends and Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honor and a great pleasure for me to welcome you here today for the opening of this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Ever since I was asked to assume my function, earlier this year, I have been looking forward to welcome you here. This is the largest gathering of politicians, diplomats, and civil society activists in Europe devoted to what is at the heart of Europe's identity: the respect for human rights and freedoms, the rule of law and democracy.

That one of our greatest friends is not here with us fills me with immense sorrow. A friend who had gladly agreed to come and address you as a keynote speaker today, the late UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Sergio Vieira de Mello. He was a friend and a colleague to many of us. And, more importantly, he was a role model. Let us honor his memory and the memory of all our colleagues who have lost their lives in the midst of their work; let us honor all those who are killed in the pursuit of human rights and democracy - let me ask you for a moment of silence.

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The fresh memory of those who had devoted their lives to the cause of human rights and democratic ideals and who took risks to serve others, reminds us of the fragility of the societies we are committed to build; of the fragility of lives of individuals. The pain we feel over the loss of a friend brings home the conviction that human rights and freedom is not an abstract concept of intellectual debates and dusty international agreements. This is what drives us, and what, I know, brought us all here today.

To build the bridge from the general broad concept of the protection and promotion of human rights to the individual man, woman, and child has been an integral part of the Helsinki process from the very outset. Individual cases have occupied discussions among diplomats, politicians and civil society activists for three decades, if not more. But it was in the preparation, and in particular in the follow-up to the Helsinki Accords that the human rights of individuals entered the centre stage of relations between our States. It is the Helsinki Final Act and its spirit, which has provided hope and courage to countless individuals whose rights were in peril.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Helsinki Final Act acknowledges as one of its ten guiding principles the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. This constitutes a milestone in the history of human rights protection. For the first time human rights principles were included as an explicit and integral element of a regional security framework on the same basis as politico-military and economic issues. Human rights became not just an area of substantive cooperation among states, but an essential norm of relations amongst all States in Europe. This acknowledgement has been reinforced by numerous follow-up documents.

Unlike earlier UN pacts, the CSCE developed an institutional mechanism to hold signatory states publicly accountable for their human rights record: the participating states agreed to reconvene to review implementation of past commitments and consider further measures to advance cooperation. In addition, there is no hierarchy among these principles, and no government can claim they have to establish political or economic security before addressing human rights and democracy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the eighth time since 1993 that we convene a Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. As you know, this meeting represents our best opportunity to address all those issues - one by one - which we have identified as important for the implementation of our human dimension commitments. The first week will be devoted to democratic institutions including elections, as well as specific human rights issues such as the freedoms of expression and association, the freedom of thought and religion, and the freedom of movement. Tolerance and non-discrimination will be given special emphasis, as will the situation of Roma and Sinti, and gender equality. Rule of Law issues, including

fair trials, legislative transparency and the prevention of torture will also be discussed in detail. Finally, trafficking in human beings and migration related problems will receive substantial attention.

We have identified several specific challenges which we think deserve a particular focus in our work, and have therefore reserved three days for them: These are the Prevention of Discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia and Anti-Semitism; National Minorities; and Migrant Workers. We have also set aside a day to look at human dimension project activities of my office and of other actors.

During both weeks, we will have the opportunity to discuss specific issues more in depth at side meetings, most of which have been prepared by civil society organizations. It is extremely important for the international human rights community to sustain this valuable exchange between governmental and non-governmental actors and I am very happy to say that we have more than 200 NGOs present here. On Friday next week, we will all reconvene in a reinforced closing plenary session where we will present the results of our work, and develop ways to move forward. I appeal to you to come forward with concrete recommendations, recommendations that contribute to one of the OSCE's most significant achievements: its operationality.

To put this in other words: This is not an academic seminar, it is a reality check - how have we been faring in honoring our commitments, how have we to address remaining shortcomings, how have we to ensure that new challenges are effectively met?! These are our tasks, as we discuss human rights and freedoms, and the importance of democracy and an open society. In conclusion, I would again like to refer to Sergio Vieira de Mello, who, in a speech in February this year, found words for what many of us have felt over the past few years and which should inspire us during the following two weeks:

"It may sometimes feel as if we no longer have any stable points of reference to chart our way through the uncertainties of the world. But I am firmly convinced," Sergio said, "that a comprehensive strategy for security can and must be guided by upholding the rule of law and respecting human rights. The security of States flows from the security of the human being. This security, in turn, is guaranteed by the rule of law and respect for human rights, both of which form a unifying force, a force that can serve to chart a path across difficult terrains."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Likewise, I believe we need to reaffirm our common humanity and the dignity of all human beings. We should recognize the enormous progress we have made in this endeavor in our region since Helsinki. But we should assume all our responsibility at occasions like this meeting to benefit from each other's experiences, and to work hard to overcome the problems and to face the challenges.

The organization is currently finalizing a strategy on new threats to security and stability, such as terrorism and trafficking in human beings. We must not overlook continuing threats to human security, such as torture, discrimination and exclusion, corruption and impunity, or threats to the independence of the judiciary or media.

Democracy, the rule of law, human rights: they are always in danger, everywhere. This is the message from the Helsinki movement of civil society, governments, and international organizations. This movement has been the *avant-garde* in Europe, and beyond. We must strive to serve as this *avant-garde* again.

I thank you for your attention.