

## **Closing Remarks by Austrian OSCE Chairmanship 2017**

delivered by Ambassador Christian Strohal,  
Special Representative for the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship 2017

## **Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2017**

**22 September 2017**

Your excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear colleagues,

The HDIM is this rare occasion in our organisation, once a year to look at how we are doing. It is our reality check. Our principles, commitments, instruments, mechanisms and tools meet reality – reality as it is brought to us by civil society, first of all, but also by ODIHR, the other institutions and field operations, by our presenters and experts, and by us, government delegates ourselves. This reality often has names, names of individuals whose rights have been violated, and such violations, in turn, often demonstrate a recurring or systematic pattern. So our reality is quite varied: good and bad, beautiful and ugly, successes and failures, achievements and challenges. And it is up to us to ensure that tomorrow's reality is better than today's.

So: Together we have discussed a wide range of human rights and fundamental freedoms issues: Freedom of expression, free media, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of movement, freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, issues related to tolerance and non-discrimination, combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions, hate speech, hate crimes, issues related to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, Roma and Sinti communities, refugees, migrants and displaced persons, the challenges of combating trafficking in human beings, ensuring equality of opportunity for women and men, and the list goes on.

The challenges and problems raised in many interventions, particularly by members of civil society, are truly alarming. As OSCE Chairmanship we have carefully listened to all your points put forward in each and every session. We share your concern for the

unrelenting challenges for the respect and full enjoyment of our universal human rights across the OSCE region.

It is precisely for this reason, that HDIM occupies such a prominent place in the human rights landscape – a place which must be preserved and further strengthened. Regular critical dialogue among us is indispensable, all the more in such turbulent times. HDIM is indeed one of the few occasions where we all come together from all corners of our common region and all edges of society to inform and to be informed. It is an opportunity for us OSCE participating States, indeed, an obligation, to review the implementation of our own commitments, to be assessed, to be held to account, and to be provided with best practices and tangible recommendations in order to ensure, uphold and improve our overall access to human rights. It is also an opportunity for the NGOs to strengthen their networks, learn about the commitments, and engage with governments and each other, to share experience across borders.

Failure to uphold human rights and the discrimination and marginalization of certain individuals or groups are factors that contribute to instability and insecurity, and even lead to conflict. On the other hand, many measures we see adopted across our OSCE region are intended to tackle security threats, particularly transnational security threats, but often further clamp down on our rights.

In other words, we will not achieve sustainable security without the full respect for human rights! To relativise certain rights is not an option to enhance stability. This will be one of the key messages we should advance with from this year's HDIM.

A second key message, we have already emphasized at the end of the first week: All of us governments, international actors, civil society – or generally, all people – need to come together, to jointly guarantee that our universal human rights are protected, and enjoyed! For each and everyone of us!

Third, we have been reminded of the importance of conducting and continuing our dialogue. Despite the many different views and perspectives we have in our region, it is important to come together in a constructive spirit towards a deepened understanding of each other's perspectives and our common shared values. As

Chairmanship we are fully committed to ensuring a continued dialogue on areas within the human dimension and the commitments thereof.

Finally, we believe that the calls of civil society organizations and many participating States to strengthen our institutions must be taken seriously.

And all of this needs systematic follow-up.

It was of course us – the participating States – who had voluntarily signed up to a long list of commitments in the human dimension, dating back to Helsinki 1975 and Paris 1990. It was also us - the participating States – which mandated the ODIHR, the RFOM, and the HCNM monitor and assist us in our implementation of these commitments. We should be proud of these achievements, and live up to them! We believe that we all can benefit from making the best use of the wide expertise offered by the autonomous institutions of the OSCE. We thank all of them, especially as they all are under new stewardships. It is a recognition of the quality of our four new captains that it seems they have been with us for quite some time, while they have just started in their functions.

But it is not for this reason that the preparations of this year's HDIM were not without challenges. As previous Chairmanships we have been faced with the very late adoption of the relevant decisions. This continues to represent a great challenge for ODIHR and the Chairmanship in preparing the HDIM. And, of course, we are still ahead of our annual HDS and the last SHDM. We hope that such challenges can be overcome in the future.

This year ODIHR - with full support of the Chairmanship - have introduced a series of innovative measures, which we believe have helped to give the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting more structure, ensure more meaningful and pluralistic debates, and help us to meet our own personal obligations.

I am convinced that I speak on behalf of everyone here today, those that have attended HDIM over the last two weeks here in Warsaw and also those who followed it online, in conveying our sincere gratitude to Director Gisladdottir and the ODIHR staff; they have responded - with the vigour we have become accustomed to - to our

late decisions. Our gratitude also goes to the host country, Poland, for their active support and in finding a new venue for this year's HDIM.

Let me also thank all other colleagues who have been working behind the scenes and made this conference possible. And allow me a personal word of thanks to the chairmanship team.

I wish you all the best, good luck and a safe return home!