



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2018

Working Session 1 – Statement by the Delegation of Canada, delivered by Ambassador Natasha Cayer, Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE, Monday, September 10, 2018

Moderator,

The rise of populism, extremism, and xenophobia around the world and in parts of the OSCE area are challenging the central tenets of democracy, with fundamental structures underpinning democratic societies, such as a free media, vibrant civil society and civic space, increasingly under threat. The erosion of civil society space, in both digital and physical contexts, and the continued threats to the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly and association represent dangers to these vital aspects of democracy.

The undermining of democratic governance has been pursued through restrictions, often via legislation, harassment, or intimidation, and have often taken the guise of protecting citizens from external threats, be that terrorism, migration, or a malign foreign influence. The end result, however, has been a weakening of key elements of a functioning democratic society. We strongly believe enhancing security need not mean undermining freedom of assembly, expression, and association.

Democracy has also been increasingly threatened by the actions of governments to strategically shape foreign public opinion and perceptions through coercive, corrupt, and covert means: efforts intended to erode public confidence in the legitimacy of democratic norms and the rules-based international order.

Moderator,

Democracy has demonstrated itself as the best system to enable long-term stability and social cohesion, to protect human rights and the rule of law, and lead to sustainable and productive economies. We are committed to advancing democracy in Canada and championing the values of inclusive and accountable governance, peaceful pluralism, respect for diversity, and human rights around the world. We continue to monitor closely threats to our democratic institutions, and to work to maintain Canadians' trust in these institutions.

The defence of democracy cannot be limited to countries acting alone, however, and we must work with civil society, at home and internationally, with the UN and other treaty bodies, as well as with organizations like ODIHR, to ensure that the democratic values that we often take for granted are safeguarded.

Moderator,

As it is critical that OSCE participating States respect their OSCE commitments to democratic principles and pursue policies and programs that support civic space and democratic institutions, we offer the following recommendations:

- 1) That the OSCE and ODIHR continue to seek opportunities to support civic space and democratic institutions, ensuring the broadest participation of NGOs and other civil society representation from across the OSCE in their events.
- 2) That support for civic space and democratic institutions by the OSCE and ODIHR take into account technological threats as they emerge, and the means to address such threats.
- 3) That OSCE and ODIHR take into account foreign actors' efforts to undermine democracy, and the ways in which we can address such foreign threats, as part of their efforts to ensure free and fair elections can be protected across the OSCE.