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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to ODIHR Director Ambassador Janez Lenarčič

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Gary D. Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 15, 2012

Ambassador Lenarčič, we welcome you to the Permanent Council, and thank you for your comprehensive statement. The United States takes this opportunity to reaffirm our support for ODIHR and ODIHR's invaluable contributions throughout the OSCE region. You and your team, with your two comprehensive elections observation missions in Russia in December and March, showed us yet again that your efforts help make our democracies stronger.

We commend the close cooperation of ODIHR with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, as exemplified in the recent observation missions to Russia. We look forward to ODIHR's observation of U.S. elections this November, and assure you of our close cooperation in the development of ODIHR's elections observation mission in the United States.

Mr. Chairman, we also want to take this opportunity to encourage all participating States to take advantage of ODIHR's stellar contributions on elections and to give full consideration to ODIHR's advice and recommendations. We regret that events and processes in Turkmenistan this year could not support an elections observation mission during its national elections, and we call on national leaders in Ashgabat to focus their attention in the coming months on strengthening their electoral system in consultation with ODIHR's assistance.

We appreciate your comments regarding our Mediterranean Partners and the work that ODIHR has done to facilitate the development of civil society, democratic institutions, religious freedom and tolerance throughout the region. We commend your commitment to more engagement in the region, and, in this time of austere assistance budgets, we encourage ODIHR to work closely with other OSCE executive structures in order to maximize the impact of limited resources with our partners.

Coordination within the OSCE pays dividends. We hold in high regard the collaboration among ODIHR, the three Tolerance Representatives, the Secretariat's Gender Section and the Special Representative on Gender Issues. We also want to call attention to ODIHR's cooperation with the Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU), the Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU), and the Borders Unit. It is this cross-dimensional, multi-institutional perspective that allows us to fulfill the OSCE's comprehensive security concept.

Ambassador Lenarčič, we appreciate your recognition of the importance of all of the fundamental freedoms in this comprehensive concept to our shared security. We support your plan to reconfigure ODIHR's Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief. We express our gratitude to the experts, including numerous Americans, for their extensive service and dedication, and for their contributions to this organization. We commend your

initiative to make this panel even more effective and efficient, and we welcome your call for proposed nominees to the panel.

The United States strongly supports ODIHR's efforts to promote tolerance and non-discrimination. ODIHR's work against hate crimes is a cornerstone of this effort, and we urge all participating States to implement related commitments, including those contained in the 2004 Berlin Declaration on combating anti-Semitism. We also regard ODIHR's work with civil society on monitoring and reporting on hate crimes as a critical component of your contribution to the promotion of tolerance. We need a comprehensive picture of the prevalence and targets of hate crimes in order to eradicate those crimes.

We share your concern about the hate crimes targeted at Roma and Sinti and we appreciate the recent and compelling testimony of ODIHR's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues before the United States Helsinki Commission. We look forward to ODIHR and the OSCE's Contact Point raising awareness about the critical and long overdue work in this area. We also look forward to engaging with other participating States and civil society on the proposed topic of "Empowering Roma Women" at this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

Finally, Ambassador Lenarčič, we thank you for your comments on Human Dimension events. We expect—indeed, we welcome—vigorous debate in the Human Dimension Committee in the coming weeks on how to make Human Dimension events even more effective, more efficient, and more attractive while upholding the principles, commitments, and precedents of the organization. We have a special obligation to make the OSCE even more effective in bringing together representatives from civil society with government leaders in order to hold governments accountable and strengthen our shared commitment to democratic institutions that protect human rights, individual liberties, and fundamental freedoms.

We are confident that we can find agreement on a way forward that protects and strengthens the participation of NGOs at Human Dimension events while enhancing efficiency, follow-up, and genuine dialogue.

Ambassador Lenarčič, thank you for your report today and for your team's contributions to our community. The United States take this opportunity to reiterate our strong and unequivocal support for ODIHR, its direction, and its leadership.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.