

**Check Against Delivery!**

**Closing Remarks by  
Ambassador Christian Strohal  
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and  
Human Rights (ODIHR)**

at the  
**12<sup>th</sup> OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
Warsaw, 5 October 2007**



Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This brings us to the end of two weeks which were rather full, very inspiring, controversial enough, yet sufficiently constructive, presenting concrete experiences and problems, often providing new insights and perspectives, and regularly making recommendations more than just useful. So we can go away with the clear feeling of having accomplished something, of having made a difference.

Can we really?

There are two elements measuring success: one is the extent to which we were able to facilitate meaningful dialogue, between all constituent parts of the OSCE family, and beyond, to our international partners, but, more specifically, between civil society actors and representatives of governments.

The other, even more important element, is the degree to which this specific dialogue with civil society, not often conducted in international fora, leads to a more pluralistic, a more participatory reality on the ground – an environment for effectively realizing the promises that governments have made in the OSCE, and other, commitments.

The area where these two elements most immediately and most significantly come together is the situation of human rights defenders. We have heard about some of the many problems they face in their work to know their rights and to defend them. There is

a pattern to these problems. It is a pattern of actions by authorities ranging from subtle means - selective law enforcement, 'checks' of compliance with otherwise rarely enforced regulations, tax inspections - to the toughest and most brutal measures, including physical attacks, torture, and even endangering survival.

We must stand up and speak out against repression. Here at our meetings, we must also stand up for the principles that have made the OSCE's human dimension meetings a success over the years: openness to civil society representatives, dialogue and a willingness to hear the views of others.

On the ground, the continuing trend of stifling human rights and fundamental freedoms, of curtailing media, manipulating elections, and denying justice is the wrong direction. The right direction is to strengthen and enhance our commitment to these freedoms, and to take active and concrete steps to make this commitment a reality. OSCE commitments are not merely high-sounding principles; they were adopted to prevent us from the destabilization and threats to our security which are inevitable if we were to close our eyes to legitimate concerns. Governments must face up to human rights violations, actively engage to rectify, and learn from mistakes to prevent future violations.

Civil society may sometimes appear weak; it may appear defenseless; but it remains indispensable, and works on steadily. It has one fundamental factor on its side that those merely using, or rather abusing, the means of authority do not: the power to convince others - despite the threats, despite the attacks, despite the fear - to act on the basis of international law and genuine conviction, and to stand together. Based on our mandates the

ODIHR will continue to stand with them, and will continue to build understanding between them and participating States.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The reason why we gathered here for the past two weeks was to review the human dimension, and to move forward in addressing shortcomings and new challenges. The purpose of this Meeting is not to name and shame. Its purpose is to make sure that we live up to the standards that we have set ourselves.

Since the Helsinki Final Act, participating States took an important decision: not only to internationalize human rights, but also to tie their protection even further to their collective security, opening what had formerly constituted their 'internal affairs' to collective accountability and peer review. This accountability, and this review, cannot be limited to the annual human dimension events. They are a daily challenge, and a common responsibility.

I will not attempt to summarize the summaries that the rapporteurs have just given. I will be reporting to the Permanent Council in a few weeks on the Meeting and its follow up. I will also report on our work in implementing our mandate and taskings, including Ministerial Council Decision 19/06, as I have done on previous occasions. Let me just note that it is all too easy to criticize others on what may be - and often are - genuine shortcomings in their compliance with commitments. Allow me therefore one recommendation to all participating States: let us endeavor to state honestly the weaknesses in our own record when we criticize others. Without this spirit of self-reflection, your words may have no lasting effect.

We are grateful for the many contributions you have made, both orally and in writing. We have again registered around 1000 participants. You have submitted more than 500 documents. And we have had over 6000 hits on our special English and Russian HDIM website. And you have made numerous recommendations.

The challenge we now face is to take these forward without reopening the existing *acquis* of our Organization. We can be proud of this *acquis*. However, there appears to be a tendency, on the part of some, to respond to the offer of assistance and support not by taking reform forward but, instead, by detracting the attention away from the issues and towards procedural and institutional questions.

This does not mean that we at the ODIHR do not listen to criticism or do not critically examine ourselves. Our *Common Responsibility* Report is witness to this. We work with you on the basis of principle, by engaging in open and transparent dialogue and activities, on the basis of sound argument. It is by engaging with us in this same manner, I would suggest, that States, institutions and people will gain the most.

To conclude, the answer to the question I have asked at the outset remains open: it depends on the follow-up which we all will give to our debates, on the changes we make, on the commitments we pursue. Next year's HDIM will again identify successes, and good practice, and, I am confident, more progress; but at the same time, I fear, it will also testify to the need to develop a stronger resolve to implement effectively, and to co-operate fully.

At the opening of my first HDIM, in 2003, I came to the following conclusion: “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.” This, I think, is more valid than ever.

Dear friends,

Before closing, let me thank the Spanish Chairmanship for their strong support. I also thank our partners in the OSCE family, the Secretariat and field operations, for their involvement and continuing cooperation. And let me thank you all. The discussions over the past two weeks were also a tribute to the excellent work of our own staff at ODIHR. All of them deserve to be strongly commended. After these two weeks, they can all be quite proud. I know they have also all reasons for being very tired.

Let me also once again thank our Polish hosts for their hospitality, not only during this Conference, but also for hosting the ODIHR here in Warsaw. We are grateful for the invitation to observe the forthcoming parliamentary elections and look forward to continuing our good relationship. On this note, let me also mention that we continue to look forward to an invitation to observe the upcoming Duma elections in the Russian Federation. In order to proceed in a meaningful way, we cannot afford any delays.

Final thanks go to the interpreters, for keeping up with a lively debate, and for working the extra time necessary on occasion to ensure that as many participants as possible could take the floor.

I look forward to working with you all, as we continue to develop our programmes and implement them together with you.

Farewell, safe journey and see you again.