

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2016
Opening Statement by the Delegation of Canada, delivered by Ambassador
Natasha Cayer, Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE
Monday, September 19, 2016

Opening Session

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, dear colleagues, and representatives of civil society,

It is with great pleasure that I attend today my first Human Dimension Implementation Meeting as Canada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the OSCE. I very much look forward to our discussions, as well as to meeting with members of the ODIHR team and civil society representatives who have gathered here in Warsaw from all corners of the OSCE region to share with us their experiences and their recommendations. I would also join others in welcoming the presence today of distinguished speakers from the Council of Europe and Human Rights Watch, as well as the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Mr. Chairperson,

As a democratic, bilingual, multi-faith and inclusive society, Canada attaches the utmost importance to inclusion, respect for diversity and the human rights of all, including underrepresented groups such as women and children, LGBTI persons, Indigenous peoples, and other minorities. We do so not only because abuses and violations of human rights contravene international norms, but because experience shows that inequality, injustice, and deprivation are serious impediments to development, peace and security. In the worst cases, they exacerbate tensions, and can be a leading precursor to armed conflict and forced displacement. By contrast, our experience shows that pluralism and respect for diversity strengthens us, and enriches the fabric of our societies by reflecting who we are.

In the OSCE region and around the world, we now find ourselves in a situation where respect for human rights is still facing significant challenges. Universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent human rights are not the only achievements coming under assault. Other principles of international law and OSCE commitments, such as the sovereignty and respect for the territorial integrity of States, have also seen severe breaches over the last few years. In this context, we reiterate that Canada does not and will not recognize illegal annexations, notably in Crimea.

Mr. Chairperson,

We believe that, thanks to its comprehensive approach to security with human rights at its core, the OSCE must play a key role in re-affirming these principles and commitments, provide a space for dialogue, and facilitate concrete solutions to allow for peaceful, stable and prosperous societies.

In this context, Canada would underscore the key elements required to have an effective international human rights architecture:

First, we need political will and action from governments and parliaments to implement their international human rights obligations and commitments. Canada firmly believes that our governments must be open to criticism, and be ready to listen when concerns are raised.

Second, we need cooperation between international and regional organisations to effectively advance human rights and security through mutually reinforcing mechanisms and initiatives. These tools must build the capacity of states to respect their obligations, but also to identify and respond to violations.

Last but not least, we need a vibrant and independent civil society that can engage with governments at the local, national and international level to identify challenges and propose solutions. To do so, it must be free to actively participate in debate without undue restrictions or fear of reprisals.

With these words, allow me to conclude by encouraging all in this room to make sure that HDIM 2016 can be such a forum and contribute to open, respectful and constructive dialogue on how we can better implement our human rights commitments. The Canadian delegation is so committed.

Thank you.