

**Address by Katarzyna Pelczyńska Nałęcz
Under-Secretary of State
in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland**

**at the Opening Session
of the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
(Warsaw, September 24, 2012)**

*Mister Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

On behalf of Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, I would like to welcome you to the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw.

I would like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to the effectiveness of the Irish Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2012. I am very glad we have with us Mr. Frank Cogan, Head of Chairmanship Task Force. I wish you every success in keeping up your enthusiasm and dynamism right up to the Dublin Ministerial Council in December. Let me also thank the Director of ODIHR, Ambassador Janez Lenarčič and his team for their excellent job in organizing our meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Human Dimension is a key element of the OSCE's overall security concept. For the citizens of OSCE states, this is the best-known area of the Organization's activity. OSCE institutions and field missions deal with the real-life problems of ordinary people. For example, the presence of OSCE election observers is often seen as a chance to boost the credibility of election mechanisms and to curb election fraud – if not fully then at least partially. This potential of trust built up by the OSCE over the years gives it huge added value and is one of the main reasons why the Organization remains one of the most valuable and significant international bodies.

As a country rich in positive experiences stemming from political transition, Poland plays an active role in promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of

law. Our foreign policy in this field utilizes a wide range of instruments and mechanisms, including both global and regional measures, as well as less formalized means. The OSCE occupies an important place here. This is also because of the professionalism, efficacy and flexibility of the institutions set up in order to monitor and support human rights in the participating countries: ODIHR, High Commissioner on National Minorities, Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the OSCE field missions. I believe that the debates awaiting us – the exchange of experiences and ideas – will become an additional impulse and inspiration influencing the activities of these institutions.

The OSCE Human Dimension meetings are an important platform for discussion on human rights and democracy. They make it possible to conduct a comprehensive review how states fulfil their obligations in the human dimension framework. Important voice in this discussion comes from non-governmental organisations. They often possess full, direct data in this field as well as the experience necessary to correctly interpret them. In my opinion, NGO participation is key, and so I am extremely happy to see civil society turning out in strength at our Meeting today.

One of the topics we are focusing on this year is Human Dimension Meetings reform. We see the need for certain changes, but we believe that future solutions cannot limit our ability to conduct a critical analysis of participating states' observance of human rights and respect for democratic values and the rule of law.

For there is no doubt that the current state of human rights observance in the OSCE area falls short of our expectations. In this context, one must note the legal and administrative barriers to freedom of association and assembly, measures to limit freedom of speech – including to a great degree on the Internet – and an instrumental approach to the judiciary. What gives me particular cause for concern is the fate of journalists, who are suffering both physical violence and growing administrative and judicial pressure. Equally disturbing is the departure from democratic election standards.

We must also continue to be engaged as ever in combating the various forms of intolerance and fostering gender equality, as well as improving the socio-economic standing and inclusion of the Roma population. I am glad to see that the latter issue will be the topic of separate sessions at this Meeting.

Without a significant improvement in the observance of human rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law, it will be impossible to bolster stability and security in the OSCE. It would also be hard to expect greater understanding and mutual trust among nations. We therefore see much potential for the “Helsinki +40” initiative. It may become a strong political impulse to help improve OSCE effectiveness and renew commitments towards a comprehensive security concept. We hope that with the leading role of Ireland and future OSCE Chairmanships, “Helsinki +40” will become an initiative that will bring significant progress to building the Security Community, a key part of which will be recognizing importance of human rights and democratic principles. I am convinced that meaningful decisions at this year Ministerial Council in Dublin in area of human dimension would constitute a step in this direction.

I wish you all an inspiring and fruitful debate.

Thank you for your attention.