



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### Opening Plenary Statement

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Michael Guest  
OSCE Review Conference  
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Mr. Chairman,

We welcome the start of this Review Conference. Looking to December, we believe a successful Summit in Astana must commit us to further progress in all three areas of our shared security. In the human dimension, we support measures to improve implementation of existing commitments, facilitate the timely exchange of information and provision of assistance, and ensure the relevance of our principles and commitments to the digital age. In the economic dimension, we support measures to improve transparency and consultations, in particular as regards energy security. On political-military issues, enhancing the OSCE's conflict prevent and crisis management capabilities and taking initial steps to update and modernize VD99 are important. OSCE also must intensify its efforts to resolve protracted conflicts, including through restoration of a meaningful, status-neutral OSCE presence in Georgia.

It is fitting that we begin this review process by examining how our shared commitments in the human dimension are being implemented. Much already has been said today about the 35 years that have passed since the Helsinki Final Act was adopted, and the 20 years elapsed since the Copenhagen Document and Charter of Paris were signed. The United States joins in saluting these milestones in the Helsinki Process. The commitments contained in these documents have been made by every state at this table – to each other, but also to each of our citizens. And that is how it should be. The rights and expectations outlined in these documents, after all, are integral to any democracy, in the true sense of the word. They are at the heart of the Helsinki Process, and they are core to the sense of shared security and community to which we all aspire.

We are here to review those rights and commitments. Our focus primarily will be on events since Istanbul, and particularly over the past year. But in this anniversary year, and with another summit on the horizon, our point of departure for these discussions must be deeper.

When national leaders met in Paris in 1990, they signed a Charter that saw human rights protections, democracy, vibrant civil societies and the rule of law as essential elements of this community of nations. These were the promises of a Europe whole and free. They were confirmed a year later in Moscow, where our leaders “categorically and irrevocably declare(d) that the commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension...are matters of direct and

legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned.”

This morning we have been reminded of the many democratic advances that have occurred across our region since OSCE’s founding. But 35 years from Helsinki, and two decades since the commitments we made in Copenhagen, Paris and Moscow, we must ask ourselves whether we, as a community, have done all we can to ensure that the human dimension obligations we hold – that all of us hold – are sufficiently engrained in law and practice.

Whether diplomats or members of civil society in this hall, surely all of us can agree that, at meetings such as these, too often there’s no real dialogue, and no real effort to engage in finding ways forward on the issues we, as diplomats, are called upon to address. But in this anniversary year, we can’t afford simply to check the proverbial review box. In the spirit of our community, we must look not only at the record, but at steps that are needed if Helsinki’s promise is to be realized, and if the Summit in Astana is to be the success we hope it will be.

In the Charter of Paris, our governments committed “to build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations.” And in this and other documents, the OSCE has recognized that freedoms of religion, and assembly, and association and expression are essential, even integral, to the very concept of democracy. These fundamental freedoms are irreducible and irreplaceable. Indeed, the Charter of Paris called “their protection and promotion...the first responsibility of government.”

The truth we face in this anniversary year is that of a clear and growing gap between these human dimension commitments, on the one hand, and realities on the ground. There are human rights defenders in this hall, from my country and others, who are here to bear witness to these realities, and to challenge our governments to minimize that gap. To them I say, thank you for coming. I myself am a former diplomat, now part of America’s civil society, and my presence as head of our delegation testifies to the importance my government attaches to ensuring that civil society remains at the center of the Helsinki Process, where it always has been. We want to hear from you, and we know we must. For if governments fail to respect and preserve the legitimate rights of their citizens, as embodied in the OSCE *acquis*, the upcoming Summit will showcase authoritarianism more than it will the genuine security and sense of community that the OSCE should embody.

Our governments, including my own, may not always agree with the views of some in the human rights community. But as President Obama said in New York last week, “The common threat of progress is the principle that government is accountable to its citizens.” Democracies allow all voices to be heard. They honor religious expression and activity. They support an independent, pluralistic media, and the free flow of information, even when that media and that information is critical of those in power. And no claim to democracy is credible where human rights defenders are jailed or murdered; where undue constraints are placed on peaceful assembly and free association, and self-expression; or where civil society is put at risk.

In the day-to-day, segregated reviews that our conference agenda requires, we may not notice how individual freedoms, individually ignored, are part of a larger and disturbing pattern.

It's up to each of us to step back, to connect the dots into that pattern, and to Helsinki's larger purpose.

As an example, why is the OSCE concerned about the North Caucasus region? Each extrajudicial killing, each politically motivated disappearance, and each murder of a human rights defender is, of course, an individual human tragedy – and these will be discussed in the coming days. But it's the repetition of these crimes, the pattern of violence that emerges, that has led to a climate of fear that impacts everyone in and around that region.

Or why are we concerned about Kyrgyzstan? Facts and judgments will emerge about how that conflict began, and who is at fault for what. But the bigger picture that this organization must think about is that governments are at risk when they are neither representative, nor pluralistic, nor accountable. We hope, indeed, that the coming parliamentary elections will help Kyrgyzstan move forward again as the Central Asian region's first flourishing parliamentary democracy, and that tensions will not adversely affect stability in the wider Ferghana valley.

Why do we care about the Western Balkans? Because 15 years after the Srebrenica massacre, individuals who have been indicted have not been captured and judged for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide – making it hard to put this egregious past behind us. And we care that Kosovo have a seat at this table to answer to issues and events within its borders, as measured against OSCE commitments.

Across the OSCE space, when public officials sanction brute force against citizens who do not pose a security threat – when civil society assemblies are denied permits on spurious grounds, or police allow bigots to attack gay pride parades – when human rights defenders are victims of targeted attacks – when women and girls have fewer opportunities than do men and boys – when journalists who write uncomfortable truths are imprisoned – when minorities like the Roma and Sinti are marginalized, or even deported without legal recourse – we as a community are right to express concern, because these are attacks on the values that each government here has pledged to uphold. We cannot look away.

I do not raise these issues to point fingers. Nor do I claim that any of us, including the United States, is perfect. My country has struggled with racism, a legacy of slavery, for many decades. Equality under the law continues to elude those of us who are gay or transgender. Our “gender gap” has narrowed, but the treatment of men and women is not yet equal. And we continue to struggle, as many countries represented in this room do, with questions of immigration and migrant rights. We are committed to examine, in partnership with you, the efforts being made to tackle these issues – to confront intolerance, build the rule of law, provide equal opportunities, and foster the transparency in which our shortcomings can be addressed.

The countries gathered here today represent a community. We are in this together. And every person in this room, every government representative but also every individual citizen, every human being, has a shared interest in seeing the OSCE's commitments fulfilled. We want to discuss our differences in the spirit of partnership. And we have to accommodate those differences in ways that respect, fully and completely, the obligations we have freely accepted.

It has been two decades since Paris, almost twice that since Helsinki. A generation has changed. We must take action to move forward.

I say this knowing that democracy is not easy. In my own country, surely President Obama cannot relish some of the verbal attacks made against him – but he knows that each citizen is entitled to his or her voice and belief. Marches and rallies on the mall against government programs, cannot be comfortable for those in power, but their views should be heard. And they are being allowed permits, so their voices can be heard. When plans are announced for a mosque to be built in an emotional location, near the site of a grievous terrorist attack on our soil, some may not like the idea – and indeed some might urge that it not be done – but we have to defend equal treatment under the law.

The United States has not always navigated, as well as we should, the passions unleashed by debates such as these. Nor have we, in this body, navigated similar passions, on a range of issues, as well as we might do. My delegation pledges to do its part to ensure that our discussions over the coming days are constructive, so that the preparations for Astana can be as productive as they need to be.

Mr. Chairman, I must make one last comment, and then I will stop. Three years ago we supported the Government of Kazakhstan's request to serve as Chairman in Office, based on commitments it made to all of us. More recently, we joined a consensus to hold a Summit in Astana later this year. We believe it important that every country represented here join in taking steps needed to ensure the success of that Summit. However, as leader of this organization, it is incumbent on the Government of Kazakhstan to uphold OSCE's principles, including those reflected in the commitments it made in Madrid. We urge that this be done, so that our discussion in Astana can look forward and the Summit can be the milestone that we all want it to be.

Thank you.