

OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting, 6-7 December 2011, Vilnius

Statement by H.E. Mr. Stefan Skjaldarson, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Iceland to the OSCE

Mr. Chairperson,

Allow me at the outset to congratulate you - and your highly capable and professional teams in Vilnius and Vienna, for the effective, prudent and productive leadership of the Organization during this year. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude for the hospitality bestowed upon us here in Vilnius.

Last year, in Astana, we recommitted to all the basic principles and commitments of the OSCE and pledged to work towards an OSCE-wide Security Community. The chairmanship program for this year, which has enjoyed wide and strong support, has taken due note of the Astana Commemorative Declaration, as well as the interests of all participating States and prevailing political realities. At the same time, the Lithuanian chairmanship has shown leadership, flexibility - and courage when needed. This approach has kept our co-operation on track, often under difficult circumstances, and resulted in a balanced package of draft decisions.

The Astana Declaration also tasked us with intensifying our work in the fields of conventional arms control and confidence and security building measures, and to update the Vienna Document of 1999. Iceland, as the first of the three chairs of the Forum for Security Cooperation this year, kicked off this work early in 2011, followed by Italy and Kazakhstan. This endeavour has now borne fruit in the adoption of the Vienna Document 2011. Although a positive achievement, we need to maintain the momentum and work towards a more substantive update of the Document. As regards conventional arms control, we can only regret that we have not yet been able to agree on a way forward.

Again we meet without much progress on resolving the protracted conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and concerning the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the resumption of the official 5+2 negotiations on the Transdnistrian settlement process offers some encouragement.

The alarming increase of violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular in one participating State, combined with the closure of the OSCE Mission in that same state, give cause for grave concern. The harassment of civil society and the imprisonment of human rights defenders and journalists must come to an end. I call for the release of all political prisoners and to allow OSCE presence again to help normalize the situation.

Fostering human rights, democracy, including free and fair elections and the rule of law is at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. The OSCE must play a strong role in promoting these values and all participating States must fulfill their commitments. In that context, allow me to commend the work done by all OSCE Institutions, Executive Structures and Field Missions. Their contributions cannot be overestimated. I would in that context express our strong support to Election observation activities by ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE.

Although Iceland is in favour of adopting a balanced package of decisions at this Ministerial, allow me to underline that Iceland attaches particular importance to adopting decisions regarding the safety of journalists, freedom of expression and pluralism in digital media, and fundamental freedoms in the digital age. This year, thousands of people came forward and claimed their rights and freedoms. Many used digital media to inform or receive information, inspire and mobilize others. Digital media has become a vital communications tool which individuals can use to exercise their right to freedom of expression and to exchange information and ideas. Developments in our partner countries in the Mediterranean show how powerful freedom of expression through digital media can be. I think we all saw how the exercise of these freedoms contributed to the Arab Spring. Fostering freedom of expression and pluralism in digital media is vital for individuals in exercising their rights and freedoms. And intimidation or outright killings of journalists and impunity for perpetrators of such crimes cannot be tolerated.

The fight against trafficking in human beings in all forms and manifestations is also a priority issue which affects all OSCE participating States. We highly appreciate the important work of the OSCE to combat this evil and welcome the Ministerial declaration on combating all forms of human trafficking. Particular attention must in this context be given to trafficking in children.

Before closing, allow me to express Iceland's support to the offer by Switzerland and Serbia to take on the important task of chairing the OSCE in 2014 and 2015 respectively.

And finally, to conclude, Iceland wishes Ireland every success in its role as the Chair of the OSCE next year. You can count on Iceland's full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.