

**Check against delivery**

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**Opening Remarks by  
Ambassador Christian Strohal**

**Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and  
Human Rights (ODIHR)**

**At the  
11<sup>th</sup> OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

**Warsaw, 2 October 2006**



Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me welcome you all very warmly here to Warsaw, to the 11th OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Europe's largest annual human rights conference. Allow me to extend a special welcome to our guests of this opening session: Secretary of State *Didier Donfut* of Belgium, representing our Chairman-in-Office, as well as Secretary of State *Janusz Stanczyk* of Poland, our host country, the OSCE Secretary General, Ambassador *Marc Perrin de Brichambaut*, as well as the Heads of the other OSCE Institutions, Ambassador *Rolf Ekeus*, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the Representative on the Freedom of the Media, *Miklos Haraszti* and, most importantly, our keynote speaker, *Thomas Hammarberg*, Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe.

Before giving them the floor, allow me to briefly situate this meeting in its broader context. I would like to share five points with you.

First, this meeting has a clear task. It is to collectively review the implementation of commitments in the human dimension by the participating States.

More than 30 years after the Helsinki Final Act, the human dimension arguably remains the most crucial aspect of the Organization. It expresses its comprehensive security concept, and its direct link to all inhabitants of the region, its relevance to them. This has, however, occasionally invited the charge of contributing to a perceived 'imbalance' within the Organization's activities. These charges should

not dishearten us, to the contrary: this meeting, undoubtedly, will justify the importance of our work in the human dimension, and its direct relevance to the other dimensions. The meeting will document why our determination must be further strengthened in order to fulfill the promises OSCE participating States have made in their commitments.

Second, this meeting is also about presenting concrete recommendations as a consequence of the implementation review.

As you know, the ODIHR has been tasked to produce a report for this year's Ministerial Council in Brussels in December. The report will cover four main issues: the implementation of commitments, possible new commitments, ways of strengthening election-related activities and improving ODIHR's assistance to States. It is in particular on the issue of implementation that I look to the HDIM for concrete ideas and input.

Third, this meeting is about a responsibility shared.

Already in the Helsinki Final Act, participating States agreed that commitments should be implemented in good faith, bilaterally or through other international fora or instruments. Over the years, a large number of commitments have been adopted, including the commitment to implement. It is the shared responsibility of the OSCE family to ensure the necessary political will for this purpose.

Sharing responsibility is about holding each other accountable. It is also about taking stock of what has been achieved and about sharing good practice. For this, civil society is crucial. We are glad for the high interest and participation from NGOs from across the region, who I

invite to take an active and constructive part in discussions. Many of you participated in the SHDM in Vienna this spring on the topic of Human Rights Defenders - you will remember the many voices calling for an enhanced role of civil society in activities and meetings of the OSCE outside our traditional Human Dimension meetings. We at ODIHR are certainly ready to assist in this regard. Side events are an important tool to present experiences in more detail. We will be seeing more than 60 of such events in the coming two weeks.

The meeting's modalities have been adapted to keep related issues closely together. We will therefore start with Freedom of Media this afternoon and have our first special day on "trafficking in human beings" tomorrow. The second special day will be on Thursday and cover "Access to Justice" leading to the working session on rule of law. The third special topic "Promotion of Tolerance, non-discrimination and mutual respect and understanding" will be discussed on Thursday next week.

My fourth point is, that this meeting is also about following up on previous ones, and document who has done what in this regard. This includes, of course, the activities of us here at ODIHR, undertaken with a broad range of partners within the OSCE family and beyond, at the national and international level, many of whom participate in this meeting. I want to especially welcome the OSCE field operations present, who are so crucial in bringing our activities to the ground, and our partners from other international organizations. We will examine the concrete follow up from the most recent Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings since last year, including the SHDM we held last year in Tbilisi on the role of defense lawyers, as well as the Seminar we

held in Warsaw in May on Rule of Law in Criminal Justice Systems. I take this opportunity to thank the Belgian Chairmanship for the importance they attached to the Rule of Law this year.

I have already mentioned the SHDM on Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions held in Vienna this spring. Following the many calls for ODIHR to increase its capacity to support human rights defenders, we are now creating a focal point to work together even more closely with them. We have also submitted, in our budget proposal for next year, our plan to enhance our capacity to systematically work with NHRIs. We will provide more information on our plans during working session 12 next Tuesday.

We will also use the opportunity to present our new Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System. This website will give public access to collected information about tolerance and non-discrimination issues. It will contain links to hate crime legislation, statistics, reports, specialized institutions and initiatives. Equally, our first hate crime report will be published for that day, as will be a number of other papers for the different working sessions.

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You may have noted the wagon in front of the Hotel's entrance, brought here by the Roma Museum of Tarnow. It serves to remind us of the diversity in which communities in OSCE participating States express the right to choose their life style and residence. Some do so as Travellers or, in France, as *Gens du Voyage*. The UN World Habitat Day, every first Monday in October, is their day, too. I would therefore like to invite

you, together with our Contact Point, to an exhibition which will be inaugurated this afternoon, “*Prospects for equal access of Roma and Sinti to Legal Housing*”.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I come to the conclusion. We have now for a considerable period of time been going through a series of discussions on reform in our organization, discussions I welcome. We are always ready to further adapt and improve our work in order to enhance the sense of ownership for our activities with participating States, both among authorities and among civil society.

But we must not let discussions of how we go about our work become a distraction from the very reason why institutions like the ODIHR were created. If we want the OSCE to remain as relevant today as it was 30 years ago as CSCE, we must show that we are ready to tackle the many burning issues and problems we face in our region.

Above all, therefore, and this is my fifth and last point, this meeting is about concrete human dimension challenges.

We will be addressing many of them in the coming two weeks, and let me just mention a few examples:

- torture and the reappearance of arguments seeking excuses under heading ‘fight against terrorism’;
- inequality and discrimination, and an increase in racist and hate motivated violence;

- the stifling of media by authorities;
- continued trafficking in human beings, and inadequate protection of its victims;
- widespread suppression of human rights and harassment of human rights defenders;
- election fraud.

Given the long list of phenomena which continue to affect human security 30 years after the Helsinki Final Act, many will argue that we are witnessing an implementation crisis which could be indicative of a corroding political will in the face of new challenges. We must not allow such corrosion to set in.

Our organization is tasked to deal with these real problems. This meeting provides an extraordinary opportunity for a “reality check”.

This reality check should help us to focus our work. Only two weeks ago, at a meeting in Vienna, a State representative explained that the HDIM is chaotic and lacks sufficient “control”. I cannot agree with this view; I have found discussions here to be focused on real issues. I challenge us all to make sure this HDIM is not only an opportunity for an open exchange of views, so that we can take concrete results and recommendations for decisions forward to this year’s Ministerial Meeting in Brussels, and to every man, woman, and child throughout the OSCE region.

Thank you.