

**Closing Remarks  
by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič**

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

at the

OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on National  
Human Rights Institutions (ombudsinstitutions, commissions,  
institutes and other mechanisms)



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Vienna, 15 April 2011

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

two intensive days of discussions are coming to an end. Since moderators provided the summaries of each session, and we heard and saw the numerous recommendations which were brought forward by all participants, including NHRIs themselves, allow me to only briefly share some reflections from this SHDM.

Professor Burdekin's keynote speech set the grounds for excellent discussions. It elaborated the historical concept of NHRIs and placed the work of these institutions in a wider international and national human rights protection context, highlighting the role of NHRIs as advocates for the most vulnerable groups of society – the disabled, the elderly, children, migrants, refugees, etc.

His speech and many of the interventions made throughout the meeting have shown how much work is still ahead of us and outlined what are the main challenges we are facing.

I would like to highlight three issues at this stage.

First, NHRIs and the important work they do still need to be fully acknowledged. The lacking political will at the government level was pointed out in several interventions. In this SHDM we were being reminded that it does not suffice to establish a NHRI and to seek accreditation with the International Coordinating Committee. This

is only the starting point, from which the real work of building on interrelation between the NHRIs and its government, as well as between the NHRIs and the civil society is to begin.

Second, the independence of NHRIs is crucial for their effective work, and we have heard that often the question of whether this is really the case is being raised.

And third, I am pleased to note many good practices of existing institutionalized ways for NHRIs to engage and cooperate with governments on the one hand and civil society on the other. For example, the practice for the executive branch having to respond back to the parliament on the Annual report of the Human Rights Ombudsman; or the success stories we have heard from some institutions on how they have been able to contribute to shaping policies and legislation, by having power of initiative.

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I am glad that this OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting has been lively and productive and I am looking forward to all efforts towards further engagement in strengthening the important role NHRIs play in the OSCE area. Together with the OSCE Lithuanian Chairmanship we in ODIHR will contribute to this process by organizing a Conference on NHRIs in Vilnius in July.

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to the existing ODIHR tool 'Legislationline', a legislative database operated by ODIHR which

aims to assist OSCE participating States in bringing their human dimension legislation in line with international human rights standards. This tool has now been extended to the topic of national human rights institutions and would invite you to make use of this tool in the future by updating your relevant legislation. You can find more information about [legislationline](#) outside.

I would like to thank all of you for attending this OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting and for actively contributing to the success of this meeting. I would like to particularly thank our keynote speaker Prof. Burdekin for his inspiring speech, the introducers for thoughtfully framing the topics of discussion and the moderators, for guiding these discussions towards relevant messages and conclusions. Finally, I would like to thank the interpreters as well as my ODIHR Team for the work they have invested to make this meeting a success.

With this, I close the first OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting for 2011. Have a safe trip home or a nice weekend in Vienna.