



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to ODIHR Director on Follow-up to the 2015 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 29, 2015

We thank Director Link for his presentation on this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. We also would like to once again thank Poland for hosting the HDIM.

Once a year, we spend a significant amount of time and resources to conduct a comprehensive review of how all OSCE participating States are doing in implementing the commitments we have undertaken in the human dimension. It is our responsibility as participating States to implement our commitments, and also our responsibility to hold one another accountable for implementing them. In Moscow in 1991, and again in Astana in 2010, we agreed that the "commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the OSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned." We agreed to this because the extent to which any one of us is, or is not, implementing our common commitments affects the security of our own citizens and those of other countries in the OSCE region. As President Obama said in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on September 28, "internal repression and foreign aggression are both symptoms of the failure" to provide a strong foundation for the strength of nations, based on "individual rights and good governance and personal security."

The United States and other countries raise specific concerns and cases at HDIM because, when concrete concerns are raised, concrete solutions can be found. We owe it to one another to address the issues raised by other participating States about failures to uphold our OSCE commitments. In response to questions from participating States at HDIM regarding the deaths of African-Americans in encounters with police, the United States provided on October 19 a briefing on how the U.S. Department of Justice works to ensure policing is carried out in accordance with our Constitution, and how it works to address shortcomings. The presentation included an overview of publicly available reports on findings of discrimination by law enforcement agencies in Ferguson, Missouri, and other U.S. jurisdictions. We hope that other participating States will take seriously concerns raised at the HDIM, take steps to address them, and explain these steps to the rest of us.

At the 2015 HDIM, participating States expressed concern about Russia's aggressive actions against its neighbors and about repression in Russia. Russia's misuse of vague "anti-extremist" laws is contributing to a chilling effect on freedom of expression, stifling any type of independent criticism of the government. We are concerned that Russians who seek to freely express their opinions may face criminal charges, such as Yekaterina Vologzheninova, who simply shared links on social media related to Ukraine and now faces up to four years in jail on spurious charges of "inciting ethnic hatred."

During HDIM, we heard concern expressed about people imprisoned in Azerbaijan for exercising their fundamental freedoms, and we heard Azerbaijan deny this was the case. The United States again urges the authorities in Baku to release all such persons.

During HDIM, we heard concerns expressed about the severe limitations placed on the political opposition, media, and civil society in Belarus. We urge Belarus to repeal article 193.1 of the Criminal Code that criminalizes public activities undertaken without official permission and implement the long overdue electoral and media reforms that would allow for true competition and informed voter choice.

We welcome Turkmenistan's engagement at HDIM this year. We took note of the statement made by Deputy Foreign Minister Hajiyevev in which he said Turkmenistan has given information to the United Nations and the European Union about half of the individuals on the list of persons who have disappeared in Turkmenistan's prisons. As follow-up to HDIM, we request that Turkmenistan provide participating States with the same information.

At HDIM, we heard concerns about the state of democracy in Hungary, in particular unwarranted investigations of watchdog NGOs. We also heard concerns about anti-migrant rhetoric, the treatment of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, and school segregation of Roma, and we look to the Hungarian government to address them.

As has been the case in previous years, at HDIM we heard concerns about the continuing rise across the OSCE region in hate crimes, intolerance, and discrimination against members of ethnic, racial and religious minorities, LGBT individuals, migrants and persons with disabilities. ODIHR's work in this area has never been more necessary, and we urge participating States to provide ODIHR with information and data on hate crimes fully and systematically. We welcome the input of civil society in that effort.

We again stress the important role of civil society at HDIM, where activists come - sometimes at great personal risk - to raise concerns with the goal of strengthening their country's adherence to its human rights commitments. We recall that several members of civil society were prevented from participating in this year's meeting, including Khadija Ismayilova and Rasul Jafarov, who are imprisoned in Azerbaijan on spurious charges. Members of peaceful opposition groups were also precluded from attending, including Zarafo Khujaeva, who remains in detention along with fellow members of the now banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan and may have already been subjected to severe torture and other ill treatment.

Mr. Chair, as we work on draft decisions for the upcoming Ministerial Council, we should keep in mind the concrete concerns and cases that were raised during our two weeks in Warsaw. The decisions we take in Belgrade should reinforce the human dimension commitments we have already made, and move us forward to better promote human rights and fundamental freedoms and to combat intolerance, discrimination, and hate crimes.

In closing, let me again thank Director Link and ODIHR for organizing HDIM, and for their work throughout the year to assist all participating States in upholding the OSCE commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.