

2015 HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

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Warsaw



Opening remarks by

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Rights

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and a privilege to welcome you to the opening of the 2015 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw.

Let me start by welcoming our distinguished speakers and thanking them for accepting our invitation and being able to join us this morning.

First of all, it is an honour and a great pleasure to welcome the OSCE's Chairperson-in-Office, the Foreign Minister and First Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia, Mr. Ivica Dačić.

Next, we will have the privilege to welcome Mr. Grzegorz Schetyna, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of our host country Poland.

Our scheduled next speaker, Mr. Ilkka Kanerva, the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, is unfortunately unable to attend, but I want to stress the excellent co-operation with the OSCE PA.

Next to take the floor will be Mr. Gernot Erler, MP, the Special Representative of the Federal Government of Germany for the OSCE Chairmanship in 2016.

We will then hear the address by the Secretary General of the OSCE, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier.

Finally, we will hear the heads of the OSCE's autonomous institutions: Ms. Dunja Mijatović, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, as well as Ms. Astrid Thors, the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would also like to welcome all other representatives from our participating States, from OSCE Institutions and OSCE Missions, from the media, and, this is particularly important for us, from NGOs and Civil Society. It is a pleasure having you here. You are making this Human Dimension Implementation Meeting what it is, a unique forum for discussion about the state of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the OSCE.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have a long list of prominent and distinguished guests here today and I have no doubts that you are as eager as I am to hear their remarks. Please join me in welcoming our first speaker, Minister Ivica Dačić, the OSCE's Chairperson in Office.

[Speeches]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before we can proceed to officially announce the beginning of this year's Human Dimension Implementation meeting, allow me to say a couple of words myself.

We are gathered here in Warsaw in the year of the 25th anniversary of the Copenhagen Document and one year ahead of the 25th year of my Office's existence. While we are all looking forward to celebrating these important anniversaries in a time of increased international attention we have received in the recent past, we know that this increased attention comes with more responsibility.

2015 has been an extremely challenging year for us so far. We observed and are preparing to observe a record number of elections, we published an enormous number of reports and publications, and we have the privilege of hosting a record

number of almost 1400 participants at this year's HDIM. And while we were busy doing our work to the highest standards that we are expected to fulfil, we were also caught in a fascinating debate reforming of our organization, including the discussions stimulated by the Panel of Eminent Persons.

To the outside world, the OSCE in general and its structures, offices and institutions may have appeared as some kind of a sleeping beauty for much of the second half of the last 25 years.

Questions have been raised about the relevance and the effectiveness of the OSCE. But I would argue that this "crisis of relevance" of the last decade has been less of a crisis of the operative effectiveness of the executive structures, but has been in reality a crisis of political decision-making in our decision-making bodies.

During this time, the OSCE's executive structures, including ODIHR, have continued to develop as centers of excellence, enhancing their expertise, competence and ability to deliver a meaningful human rights impact in many areas.

The main reason the institutions have been able to further develop their capacities despite ever scarcer resources can be attributed to their status, which makes them autonomous in the execution of their mandates, as they can be tasked only by the participating States as a collective whole, and not by any single or group of States. It is therefore of utmost importance, not only for the Institutions themselves but for the OSCE at large, that this autonomy is maintained and operational ability strengthened, not weakened, through adequate resourcing. Given that the main challenge to the Institutions' operational capacity, including in preventing and responding to emerging crisis, rests with resources rather than mandate, the main question is how this challenge could be faced best.

For 40 years, the very corner stone of the OSCE as a regional security organization has been its comprehensive concept of security. The first security organization to put human rights and fundamental freedoms on par with principles on the inviolability of borders and territorial integrity, the participating States have committed themselves to protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms as the first responsibility of government and placing the human dimension at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. This fact makes the OSCE unique and sets it apart from other regional intergovernmental organizations, and it is precisely because all 57 participating States have both committed themselves to and repeatedly reaffirmed this, that no strategy for strengthening the OSCE will work unless this concept is at the core of the assessments and recommendations.

The importance of drawing upon all the tools the OSCE has at its disposal, and the comprehensive concept of security, was

demonstrated to its fullest last year by the Secretariat in Vienna, by the RfOM, the HCNM - and ODIHR - during the crises in and around Ukraine. The autonomous but coordinated human rights assessment mission of HCNM and ODIHR, the two election observation missions conducted by ODIHR, as well as the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, all these were complimentary efforts each adding value to the OSCE.

Despite decreasing resources, we will continue to work on becoming even more effective and even more reactive to address crises whenever they arise and prevent them whenever this is possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we speak, there is a new crisis confronting us in the human dimension of security: the Refugee and Migration Crisis.

In 2015 alone, more than 400.000 refugees from North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia have crossed into OSCE participating States, across the Mediterranean Sea and through the Western Balkan States. They are fleeing war, violence, poverty and prosecution in their countries of origin and are in search of international protection. All of them deserve human treatment, respect for their basic human rights as well as access to fair and efficient asylum procedures.

As the sheer numbers of refugees challenges the capability of some of our participating States to accommodate them, and as most are insufficiently equipped to adequately respond to this influx of refugees, it is the time for solidarity among human beings, but also among states, and also to fight the causes at the root of the refugee crisis.

It is critical that we all recognize that the obligation of governments to respect human rights does not apply only to

citizens of OSCE participating States, but to everyone, including migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Strengthening barriers at our borders will not make this crisis go away, we must instead focus on providing dignified treatment and protecting the human rights of all people in need. And, let me say that clearly, the EU cannot solve this crisis alone. The OSCE will be needed in this effort.

In Helsinki in 1992, the OSCE participating States recognized the need for international co-operation in dealing with mass flows of refugees and committed to ensuring the protection of and assistance to refugees with the aim of finding durable solutions. It is now the time to redouble our efforts to fulfill these commitments.

ODIHR stands ready to assist in fulfilling these commitments. In a combined effort of our Departments, we have developed a coordinated response to this crisis that I would like to share with you in its basic ideas. We are preparing to deploy monitoring teams to several places most affected by the influx of refugees and asylum

seekers to independently assess and report on the human rights situation. We will organize an expert panel meeting on the safeguarding of rights of asylum seekers and refugees in the OSCE region, bringing together representatives of the affected community, distinguished experts from OSCE structures and institutions, international organizations and our participating States. And we will publish our findings to make specific recommendations how to improve the implementation of the commitments in this field.

I know that we at ODIHR can only contribute a modest share to solve this crisis. But I can assure you that we will do our utmost and use our strengths to contribute to safeguarding the human rights and the dignity of as many refugees as possible while supporting participating States to manage this enormous challenge.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure that this topic will be intensely discussed in the two weeks to come. But there is an incredible wealth of other issues to debate about in the Human Dimension of Security. I encourage you to join us in as many sessions as possible, and in as many side events as possible. I can assure you, it is worth it. I wish all of us an interesting and eventful Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.