

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2015**  
**Opening Statement by the Delegation of Canada, delivered by Ambassador Isabelle Poupart,**  
**Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE**  
**Monday, September 21, 2015**

Thank you Mister Chairperson, and thank you to ODIHR for delivering another great HDIM.

When we met last September, Russia's illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and support to illegal armed groups in eastern Ukraine figured prominently in our discussions. It will be the same this year as we keep hearing about the tragic consequences triggered by one participating State's decision to trample the very principles on which this Organization is based.

Over the past year, reports from trusted international organisations such as the UN and the CoE as well as from our own OSCE institutions have highlighted the tremendous human cost of Russia's ongoing aggression, in particular for those who find themselves caught in the middle of a senseless conflict, for the countless IDPs and refugees it has generated, and for those who resist, or simply belong to national minorities, including Crimean Tatars.

Canada has and will continue to stand with the Ukrainian people as they seek to build a democratic and united future. We salute the courageous work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine for its contribution to peace and stability, as well as the tireless efforts of all OSCE Institutions in supporting *inter alia* free and fair elections, independent media and national dialogue.

Mister Chairperson, colleagues and representatives of civil society,

In Canada's view, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are the anchors we must collectively rely on to see us through the challenges faced by the OSCE region.

Whether we are standing against military aggression, combating terrorism, crime and corruption, or seeking to protect the most vulnerable groups in our societies from violence and discrimination, our objectives can only be achieved by upholding our OSCE commitments based on universal values and human dignity for all.

Canada particularly looks forward to this year's discussion on freedom of expression and freedom of the media, as well as the special discussion on ensuring that all rights and freedoms are protected online as well as offline. Attempts by some participating States to apply old methods using new technologies to consolidate power and quash dissent must be unequivocally denounced.

As we strive to further the implementation of our commitments in the OSCE Human Dimension, all stakeholders must be allowed to speak out.

We need the voices of women and men united in the promotion of equal opportunities and participation in the political, economic and social fields; in denouncing violence against women and girls in all its forms, including domestic violence, sexual violence in conflict and child, early and forced marriage.

We need the voices of people of all faiths in defending the right to freedom of conscience, and freedom of religion; that is to say, the freedom to practice their faith publicly and privately; the freedom to worship in peace and security; the freedom to engage in missionary activity; the freedom to change their faith; and the freedom to hold no religious beliefs.

We need the voices of all those who believe in dignity for all to denounce violence and discrimination against targeted minorities, including members of the LGBT community, at a time when some States fail to address or, worse, create the very conditions that enable hate and violence against minorities.

We need the voices of free and vibrant civil society organisations, able to operate in a safe and enabling environment, free from hindrance and insecurity.

And, we need the voices of every citizen when they present themselves at the ballot box to democratically elect their representatives in what should be a free, fair and competitive electoral environment. With this in mind, we will be following very closely developments related to the October 10 Presidential elections in Belarus.

Mister Chairperson,

The OSCE's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting provides a unique opportunity for civil society representatives in the OSCE region to engage with participating States and to have their voices heard in the context of increased repression and retaliation by some participating States against activists, human rights defenders and journalists who have sought to hold their own government accountable or promote pluralism.

We look forward to hearing from members of the civil society in the coming two weeks. In the meantime, let me assure you that we have "heard" your silent protest this morning.

Participating States and civil society representatives both have important allies in this room when it comes to improving the implementation of OSCE commitments. These allies include the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the High Commissioner for National Minorities.

We take this opportunity to express Canada's full appreciation for their mandates and for their work in advancing democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law across the OSCE region and beyond.

Thank you.