

# 1196<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Permanent Council

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Address by

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for this opportunity to address you here today to present the report of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting - held on 10 - 21 September 2018 in Warsaw. This was my second HDIM which, as opposed to last year when I had just arrived, gave me more time to follow the discussion taking place.

I found many topics and discussions very interesting and informed, further convincing me of HDIMs great importance, with issues raised and discussed in a professional manner and where civil society has the possibility to raise issues directly with governments; speak truth to power.

To me it is clear; the HDIM provides a platform for dialogue presenting an opportunity for participating States, civil society, international organizations, the OSCE and its institutions to meet and discuss the commitments undertaken by participating States. This is unique.

The HDIM is also an important platform for all of us working at ODIHR. The opportunity to meet you all and civil society is extremely valuable, and I encourage you all to continue the practice of reaching out to my colleagues during upcoming events and next year's HDIM.

But let me now turn to the Human Dimension meeting, expressing my sincere gratitude to Poland for once again hosting the HDIM and providing necessary support in relation to this event, and the CIO, for excellent cooperation in organizing this year's event. The time and effort that goes into organizing and implementing the HDIM deserves recognition and appreciation.

We introduced a new registration system just ahead of HDIM and I want to thank participating States who contributed financially to this. We experienced some initial problems with the registration and the deadlines were rather tight but still 1435 registered and took part in the meeting which is an increase from last year. This increase was reflected rather equally between participating States, civil society organisations and other participants.

Noteworthy is that we had more media outlets visiting HDIM which is something I will be looking into ways of further increasing. It is important that our discussions reach a wider audience, not least considering that OSCE human dimension commitments and their implementation is of direct relevance to the general public in participating States.

Of the 1435 registered participants, there were 487 representatives from 54 participating States. We had 6 participants from partners for cooperation, 32 from international organizations, 93 from OSCE bodies, 25 national human rights institutions, 42 media representatives and altogether 750 representatives of 494 NGOs.

Our outreach on social media should also be emphasized. During the HDIM we see significant increase of traffic on our website and the number of viewers of the live streaming

of session's increases year by year. This is also something I want to build on as a way to enlarge our constituency.

As in previous years, to facilitate a lively and dynamic discussion, the upper limit for the speakers list was set at 50 and that number was reached in a number of sessions.

Again, as per the established practice of previous years, expert introducers opened each working session with valuable and often thought-provoking input. Input by introducers is something I highly value and I believe this practice should be continued. But I will, together with my team, have a discussion on how we can ensure a clearer link between introductions, statements and consequently the feedback from introducers to the plenary. I see some room for improvement in this regard and would also appreciate your suggestions.

Almost 100 side events were organized, providing opportunities for all participants, including participating States, to break out of the strict procedures of the plenary sessions and have a more informal and lively discussion.

Now, let me turn to the working session of the two weeks in Warsaw.

According to the modalities my full written HDIM report will be submitted and tomorrow and the statements and conclusions of HDIM have been already distributed so I will not go into them at length.

There are, however, a few issues I would like to touch upon from the various sessions, fully aware that I am not doing justice to the variety of views and input to the discussion.

One area that I pay a lot of attention to is the quality of our democracies which I unfortunately see deteriorating in some places. The session on *Democratic institutions, including democracy at the national, regional and local levels, and democratic elections* confirmed that we need to continue paying particular attention to this, not least to the quality and strength of democratic institutions and elections.

Many participating States referred to increased challenges when it comes to elections in the OSCE region in terms of freedom of media, transparency, financing of campaigns and participation of women, youth, minorities as well as persons with disabilities.

The importance of follow up to electoral assessments and recommendations was raised and is something we continue to pay particular attention to.

The introductory remarks in the rule of law session highlighted that a pre-requisite for democracy is the rule of law and that there are worrying trends in the OSCE region in this regard. The importance of the independence of the judiciary was reiterated again and again during this session, for a good reason.

The Representative on Freedom of the Media, Mr. Harlem Désir, underlined that pressure, threats and attacks against the media continue to be a common – even daily – occurrence in the 57 OSCE participating States.

The sessions on tolerance and non-discrimination, including on Roma and Sinti issues highlighted that there are unfortunately still many serious challenges that we need to deal with in terms of discrimination and exclusion but also deadly violence. I encourage you all to pay more attention to this issue. Anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief, including against Christians and Muslims, is sadly also something that we see continuously present in our societies.

Last year's HDIM clearly revealed that the space for civil society and human rights defenders in the OSCE region is shrinking. Unfortunately, the message from this year's HDIM paints an equally grim picture. The pattern continues whereby civil society and human rights defenders face intimidation, are discredited, targeted by unnecessarily burdening administrative procedures and become victims of smear campaigns to obstruct their work. I fear that the situation is further deteriorating.

I can only reiterate my call from last year to participating States to live up to their Human Dimension Commitments and ensure that human rights defenders can serve their vital role.

The issue of our young people was mentioned in various sessions and it is clear that today's societies require us to pay particular attention to youth. No society will thrive if large groups feel excluded and not heard, particularly not if they are the future of our societies.

The sessions titled "*Combating racism, xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination*" addressed issues of increased racism, xenophobia, extremism and intolerance. Several participating States spoke out and welcomed that hate crime reporting and disaggregated data has improved over the years but that further efforts could be done. Many NGOs further emphasized the need for political will of Governments to improve hate crime investigation and reporting.

Women continue to be underrepresented in public and political life in the OSCE region. While we see very positive developments in some participating States in terms of women's participation in political life and decision making, including related to peace and security, we have in recent years also noted stagnation, sometimes a regression on these issues.

I would ask you to do more in this area. The OSCE commitments, as well as international conventions, UNSC resolutions and declarations provide a very solid base and guide for what needs to be done. We have to work harder on implementing what we have signed up to.

Finally, a special topic this year was the rights of migrants. It is clear that many participating States face challenges in meeting commitments and obligations in relation to the rights of migrants. The challenges are real and are likely to continue but rights need to be respected, including the freedom from discrimination. My office stands ready to support you in areas where we have a mandate to assist, such as on integration and in preventing and addressing hate crime.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 2018 HDIM, I believe, once again showed us the importance of this meeting, as a platform where participating States and civil society organizations can meet and exchange views and assessments. I was very pleased to see that two Central Asia States who did not participate last year decided to do so this year. At the same time, very much to my regret, one participating State decided not to take part.

I am fully aware that there continue to be challenges related to HDIM, perhaps most importantly relating to participation.

When I presented my report to you last year I warned that “differing views on processes of participation have at times threatened to overshadow not only the very important subjects of this meeting, but also the work this organization is doing in the human dimension”. I fear that this year this has to some extent become true.

While the resolution to this issue is mainly in the hands of participating States, my colleagues and I, in close coordination with the chairmanship, introduced some measures this year, in addition to the measures introduced last year. We introduced changes that lie within our mandate that aimed at improving both the system of registration as well as the respect for core principles during the actual meeting.

We also launched a code of conduct. I continue to believe that this is an important tool to ensure that speakers avoid the use of hate-speech. There is most certainly room for improving this document and I would encourage you to share ideas with us. However, the principles and guidance laid out in it, I believe, are very important.

The aim of all these efforts is for us to guard and protect the human dimension of security and our established review mechanisms. The focus of this meeting has to be the implementation of commitments and should not be overshadowed by procedural issues.

As you are all fully aware of this is your meeting; and this is your opportunity to engage in peer review of the implementation of OSCE commitments.

In this context it is important to highlight, as I also did last year, that ODIHR is bound by the commitments and consensus-agreed modalities when it comes to the conduct of the HDIM. The modalities for the meeting are clear; we must strive to have the meeting as open as possible and enable civil society participation. The modalities do not provide ODIHR with the means or justification to prevent registration or self-registration, ODIHR has no tools at its disposal to do background checks on participants; they register themselves, for the meeting and for side-events.

ODIHR does not have the discretion - or the capacity - to evaluate or judge if the participants have relevant experience in the topics discussed, let alone alleged criminal or terrorist affiliations.

The decision on whether to exclude certain NGOs or individuals from participation at HDIM and other HD events lies mainly with you, the participating States.

As already mentioned we have made efforts that lie within our mandate to improve the meeting. I continue to see further areas where we could improve and will be discussing this with colleagues in the office in the weeks to come. I am open to discussion on how to advance the meeting and make it more meaningful, and we welcome further proposals in that regard.

However, I have said it before and I will reiterate this again: that the only forum to discuss modalities of participation is here in Vienna, among you, the participating States.

I do welcome all efforts undertaken by participating States to find a solution to the issue of participation.

Having said this, I want to end with a positive reflection. Having recognized many challenges relating to the HDIM we mustn't forget all the positive things that happen during HDIM - the large number of civil society organizations joining forces with the participating States to discuss democracy and human rights. Including some of our most recognized and respected groups and individuals whose solemn interest lies in advocating for the upholding of human rights, democracy and rule of law. They come as they believe HDIM provides them with a useful platform.

Even more importantly, a lot of grassroots organizations and individual human rights defenders participate as this meeting gives them a rare opportunity to express their concerns to 57 State representatives. In modern society we too often hear people talk about "the political elite" that is distant from the general public.

We can truly say that this is not the case at HDIM as there we all sit around the same table, with the same right to speak. This is truly unique, and this nature of the meeting has to be preserved.

Thank you for your attention.