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## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to Report of ODIHR Director, Ambassador Janez Lenarcic**

As prepared for delivery by Chargé d'Affaires Carol Fuller  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
October 29, 2009

We would like to thank you, Ambassador Lenarcic, for your comprehensive statement. The United States strongly supports ODIHR, which has earned its place as the key institution in the OSCE's efforts to promote democratic development, human rights and free and fair elections, and of course, to assist participating States in meeting their human dimension commitments.

First, we share your assessment as to the success of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw. There are, of course, other times during the year when human rights issues should be discussed in Vienna, but the HDIM provides a unique opportunity to look at these issues comprehensively.

The HDIM also provides an important opportunity for civil society to join us at the table and be heard. Human rights groups play an important role at the implementation meetings – we count on them for their candid assessments. In some cases, this meeting represents the only time they are given a hearing by their own governments.

We commend ODIHR and the Greek Chairmanship for ensuring NGO access to and participation in the HDIM. We look forward to continued high standards of openness and access at the upcoming Ministerial and at next year's human dimension meetings.

We are concerned about reports that two NGO representatives from Kyrgyzstan experienced harassment after leaving Warsaw, in what could be acts of retribution for the views they expressed at the HDIM. We believe all participating States should take whatever measures are necessary to ensure that individuals may participate in the HDIM safely.

There are a number of areas where we believe the OSCE could usefully focus additional attention next year. First, we would welcome the possibility of supplemental human dimension meeting on national minorities and a high-level meeting on anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. Other issues that we believe deserve additional attention, either in the form of a SHDM or as one-day topics at an implementation review meeting, include issues related to the Roma, the media and freedom of expression, the role of civil society in promoting human rights, and freedom of religion.

Although SHDMs are, as a rule, held in Vienna, we note that many ad hoc or extraordinary human dimension meetings have been successfully held outside Vienna. We also believe more consideration should be given to holding human dimension meetings in diverse locations, to make the work of the OSCE accessible to a larger community of people.

With respect to the organization of this year's HDIM, we regret that the time available in many sessions was inadequate for the number of people who wished to speak. Perhaps next year those topics could be allotted more than one session. The HDIM allows us to reflect on our progress, or in some instances, areas which need more progress, regarding our human

dimension commitments over the year. It is an opportunity to learn from each other, from each other's best practices, and from subject matter experts in the field. Perhaps even more importantly and substantively, it provides us an opportunity to hear from NGOs and civil society representatives directly affected by our action or inaction.

As you aptly noted, it is up to the participating States to review existing modalities of the HDIM, and improvements can undoubtedly be made. But my government sees no need to drastically change the modalities. Some have recommended shortening the event and others have advocated limiting the attendance of NGOs and civil society advocates at the event. My government strongly opposes limiting the participation of NGOs at the HDIM. The participation of NGOs on an equal footing with government officials is what makes the HDIM such a valuable forum.

Mr. Ambassador,

We wish to thank you for presenting your detailed response to the question of geographical coverage of election monitoring activities. We believe the list stands by itself in showing the diversity in ODIHR's coverage and are confident this trend will continue in 2010.

Likewise, noting that representatives from 52 of the 56 participating States and 3 Partners for Co-operation have participated in election monitoring activities adequately demonstrates the worthwhile emphasis ODIHR has placed on diversity.

ODIHR's well-deserved reputation for election monitoring is directly attributable to its well-known, objective criteria and procedures for election observation. The United States has been, and will continue to be, outspoken in protecting ODIHR from political interference.

In conclusion, the United States retains full confidence in the vital work performed by ODIHR and continues to support unequivocally its current leadership and direction.

Thank you Madam Chair.