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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to ODIHR Director Lenarcic

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 30, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ambassador Lenarcic for your comprehensive report. The United States strongly supports ODIHR, which has earned its place as the leading institution in the Human Dimension.

At a time when some OSCE participating States are increasingly calling into question their core human dimension commitments, we believe it is all the more important that ODIHR continue to focus on the core elements of its mission: election observation, promotion of human rights and support for the development of democratic institutions.

Next week, Americans will go to the polls in our 110th nationwide election since the founding of our democracy. Even in a mature democracy like ours, there remain areas for improvement in our electoral practices. We look forward to ODIHR's report, and will take its recommendations seriously. This is why we were also pleased to initiate a detailed review in the Human Dimension Committee of ODIHR's report on our 2006 elections. This was the first time that a participating State had taken such an initiative. We believe such reviews should become common practice for other countries as well.

ODIHR's enduring success is directly attributable to its well-known, objective criteria and procedures for election observation. All participating States have an interest in opposing any effort to undermine ODIHR's autonomy and impartiality, as well as any attempts to turn back the clock on the progress we have made in democratic practices within the OSCE region. The United States has been and will continue to be in the forefront of States protecting ODIHR from political interference. In this regard, we believe that the ODIHR has done an excellent job in fully responding to the taskings given in Brussels Ministerial Decision 19/06.

The Democracy program projects are well designed and implemented and provide emerging democracies with much needed technical assistance in promoting the rule of law, developing transparent legislative processes, and building civil society. We encourage you to get directly involved in promoting these quiet programs that may not win many headlines, but are very effective in building and strengthening democratic institutions and respect for the rule of law.

In our view, the Human Rights program should focus more on fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion. The Human Rights program should develop technical assistance and training programs for the emerging democracies on how to ensure that fundamental freedoms are respected.

ODIHR's tolerance work should focus on the priority areas of combating intolerance where the participating States have reached consensus - combating anti-Semitism, intolerance and

discrimination against Muslims, Christians and members of other religions, and racism, xenophobia and related intolerance.

In our view, the ODIHR effort to deal with hate crimes should focus on realistic, specific targeted initiatives that will help address the problem of core definitions, model legislation to meet OSCE commitments, data collection methods based on this model legislation, and a sharing of best practices.

Civil society participation is the foundation of the effective review of the implementation of human dimension commitments by participating States. ODIHR must set an example of inclusiveness of NGOs and transparency at all ODIHR-organized events and meetings and we applaud the Chairman-in-Office's strong support for NGO access.

We look forward to working with you Ambassador Lenarcic, and the participating States, in the implementation of our OSCE Human Dimension commitments. We applaud ODIHR for its excellent work, and you will continue to have our full support in the coming years.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.