



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

### **Response to the Director of ODIHR, Christian Strohal**

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
June 12, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ambassador Strohal, for your final report to the Permanent Council on ODIHR activities. It seems totally inadequate to say simply that we commend you for your dedication and exceptional leadership during your tenure as director of ODIHR. You deserve so much praise and thanks. You leave us an institution of global renown and admired as the premier advocate for human rights and democracy throughout the OSCE region.

We congratulate you for your work to ensure that ODIHR's election observation methodology remains the unrivaled standard for election monitoring around the world. ODIHR's well-known standards and election observer procedures deserve our full support. You are to be congratulated as well for your effort to make sure these standards are not watered down, and in this regard we look to your successor also to resist any effort to undermine ODIHR's autonomy in this area or to turn back the clock on the progress made in democratic practices within the OSCE region.

While the projects implemented by the Democracy Unit have helped many OSCE States improve their respect for rule of law and democratic governance, the continued difficulties faced by human rights defenders in exercising and protecting the freedoms of association, expression and assembly merit continued attention and focus. Unfortunately, some countries have abused the consensual decision-making processes of this Organization to repeatedly block attempts by the OSCE to focus greater attention on this problem or even discuss it openly in our human dimension meetings.

Combating intolerance and discrimination remains a very important issue in the OSCE region. The tolerance and non-discrimination unit established during your tenure can play an instrumental role in this effort. To do so, it needs to focus on themes that the participating States have agreed should be the central point of our work - combating anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, Christians and members of other religions, and racism, xenophobia and related intolerance. Expansion of OSCE commitments beyond these priority areas to those that cannot clearly be identified as threats to security in the region is likely to dilute OSCE tolerance programs and projects and must be resisted.

We thank you for your tireless efforts to promote human rights and democracy throughout the OSCE region and for helping participating States strengthen the implementation of our OSCE Human Dimension commitments. We applaud ODIHR for its excellent work and wish you all the best in your next leadership responsibility.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.