

**OSCE / 1st Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on
Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association with emphasis on
Freedom of Association**

16 – 17 April 2015

Opening Statement by Switzerland

- First of all, I would like to thank and congratulate the Serbian Chairmanship for organizing the first SHDM of the year on this very important human dimension topic.
- The right to **peaceful assembly and freedom of association** are fundamental human rights and essential components of every democratic society. These rights are also indispensable to the full enjoyment of other human rights norms and standards.
- Today's and tomorrow's discussions come very timely, as we are witnessing ongoing **violations** of freedoms of peaceful assembly and association in the OSCE area – as well as unfortunately **shrinking space for civil society**.
- These **violations** take several forms; from limiting the access to funding for NGO's and imposing hurdles to official registration, to harassment or prosecution of human rights defenders.
- All these limitations undermine the ability of a truly independent civil society to operate freely. Violations of the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of association prevent civil society to comply with its inherent function of engaging critically and constructively with the governments, notably in the promotion and protection of human rights.

- The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association are guaranteed by a number of international human rights instruments such as the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** and are deeply rooted in OSCE human dimension commitments, most significantly in the **1990 Copenhagen Document**.
- Switzerland is convinced that the full enjoyment of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association require both an adequate legal framework at the international level as well as continuous efforts for its **effective implementation** at the national levels. Therefore, Switzerland and Serbia have defined strengthening the implementation of existing human dimension commitments as one of the key priorities for the two **consecutive Swiss and Serbian Chairmanships** and we hope that this endeavour will stay high on the agenda in the future. We call upon all participating States to continue their efforts and dedication towards this goal.
- Switzerland has traditionally been very active in promoting freedom of peaceful assembly and association at the multilateral and bilateral level.
- A strengthened systematic involvement of civil society in all OSCE affairs was a cross-cutting priority of the 2014 Swiss OSCE Chairmanship.
- These fundamental freedoms were also discussed during the **Human Rights Defenders conference** that the Swiss Chairmanship organized in Berne last year. The conference offered a dialogue-platform on how participating States, supported by the OSCE and in particular by the ODIHR, can best provide support to human rights defenders in line with OSCE commitments to further promote human rights and fundamental freedoms – including the right to peaceful assembly and the freedom of association.
- In the framework of the **UN**, Switzerland was a driving force behind the **resolutions on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context**

of peaceful protests adopted in the Human Rights Council in the past years. We also collaborate closely with the **UN Special Rapporteur** on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

- Finally, let me just reiterate my country's strong support for **ODIHR** and its mandate to support participating States in the implementation of human dimension commitments, including in the field of freedom of assembly and association. The **Guidelines on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**, which are already published in their second edition, are a very useful source of best practices and practical recommendations for the management and facilitation of peaceful assemblies. These guidelines are now supplemented with the recently published **Guidelines on Freedom of Association**, providing legislative assistance in matters pertaining to the right to freedom of association. In addition, the **Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders** launched during the conference in Berne last year, are also relevant and complementary to these guidelines. Switzerland commends ODIHR for its excellent work and will continue supporting it.
- Thank you, Madam Chairperson.