

Mr. Chairman,

- The Netherlands fully subscribes to the statement we have just heard by France on behalf of the European Union. Allow me to add a few considerations from the perspective of the Netherlands.
- Firstly, I would like to emphasize the continued importance the Netherlands attaches to the third dimension of our organization. As we navigate to Helsinki, we witness that the acquis of that dimension remains under continuous pressure.
- My minister of Foreign Affairs is a strong advocate of the notion that human rights apply to all people, in all places, at all times. The Netherlands has, since long, strived to make its contribution to spreading the concept of human rights, the rule of law and democracy in the world. We do so in the belief that only in this way we can live freely, secure and prosperous together.
- Among other issues, protection of minorities is an explicit focus of Dutch human rights policy; whether they be national minorities, Roma, Sinti or other minorities, victims of human trafficking or people with different religious convictions or sexual orientations. Therefore, the Netherlands continues to support the High Commissioner on National Minorities. The 15th anniversary of the Office of the High Commissioner in The Hague, earlier this week, marked the successes of conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy.
- Closely related to the matter of human rights in its broadest sense is the issue of international humanitarian law. Cluster munitions, which are still being used, are known to regularly cause unacceptable harm. Although there is no legally binding international instrument on cluster munitions yet, the Netherlands emphasises that the use of such munitions must always be in full conformity with international humanitarian law. As a general rule of international humanitarian law, parties to an armed conflict must always clearly distinguish between military targets and civilians. Even if an attack is aimed at a military target, parties must carefully weigh the use of any type of weaponry in order to avoid disproportionate loss of civilian lives. This fundamental obligation applies equally and, in the light of the ongoing international negotiations, even more so to the use of cluster munitions. The Netherlands urges all participating States to fully observe their obligations in this respect.
- Mr. Chairman, I would like to turn to a cross-dimensional subject. The OSCE still lacks international legal personality, legal capacity and privileges and immunities that are needed for a genuine international organization to do its work. Adoption of the draft Convention would respond to various problems our organization is facing, especially when it comes to the implementation of projects. We once again urge all participating States to agree on the adoption of this document, and we remain open to discussions on the possibility of a Charter or Statute, provided that this will not re-open the existing commitments which the participating States have voluntarily accepted since the very beginning of the Helsinki process.

- Finally, Mr. Chairman, the Netherlands remains convinced that the OSCE Ministerial Council offers a unique opportunity for an in-depth exchange of thoughts. It also offers the possibility of adopting ministerial decisions that indicate the way forward of the OSCE, in the spirit of Helsinki.

Thank you Mr. Chairman