



**Message to participants of the OSCE's  
2014 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
from Ms Isabel Santos, Chair of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's General  
Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions**

Warsaw, September 2014

Dear friends,

Having worked with many of you in the past, including in last year's HDIM in Warsaw, it is with regret that I cannot attend this year's event. The OSCE's HDIM has become an important gathering point for human rights defenders and governments interested in debating both substance and implementation of human rights in the OSCE region.

Since last year's HDIM, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and I have remained active on the issues that I discussed with many of you at that time. At a special panel discussion on political prisoners in February, parliamentarians from across the OSCE had the opportunity to hear from and engage with representatives of political prisoners and former political prisoners themselves. This public event was an important opportunity to lift the veil on this sensitive topic. I am a firm believer that we cannot hope to solve this problem if we are not willing to discuss it openly.

We should all be concerned that within the OSCE region there are still people incarcerated simply because they have the courage to speak out against the authorities currently in power. During the past year, I have continued to engage with countries where I perceive this to still be an issue. And while it is sometimes difficult to see, I feel that in some cases there has been progress – in at least one case, I have noted a greater willingness to engage in a constructive dialogue regarding people widely considered to be political prisoners. However, I have also noted, and publicly expressed, my serious concern where this is not the case. I am appalled that some countries continue to resort to administrative procedures and legislation to detain, imprison, intimidate or otherwise silence human rights defenders and critics.

I and my colleagues in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly remain committed to working with human rights defenders from across the OSCE to address concerns wherever they may occur. We have enjoyed a close relationship not only with NGOs, but also particularly with the OSCE/ODIHR. I was pleased to work closely with Janez Lenarcic, a strong advocate for civil society, during his term as Director of the OSCE/ODIHR. I look forward to continuing to work closely with Director Michael Link, who I trust will be a strong partner in favour of human rights and democracy.