

Canadian Delegation to the
Organization for Security & Cooperation
in Europe



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Délégation du Canada auprès de
l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération
en Europe

**DELEGATION OF CANADA
STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE REPORT
BY THE DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE FOR
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS
AMBASSADOR CHRISTIAN STROHAL
685TH MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
1 NOVEMBER 2007**

Canada joins other delegations in extending a warm welcome to Ambassador Strohal to the Permanent Council. We thank him for his comprehensive report on the 12th Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. We also thank him and all his staff, as well as the Chairmanship in Office, for having organized a successful meeting.

Once again, the HDIM was a unique occasion for participating States, NGOs, and relevant international organizations to review the state of implementation of their OSCE commitments by participating States. The broad participation of NGOs from across our region again made this meeting very useful and informative. We regret, however, that some participating States were not able or chose not to send delegates.

In Canada's view, the inclusiveness of the HDIM must not be undermined. The principles for NGO participation in OSCE meetings, agreed at Helsinki in 1992, must not be compromised. We would risk depriving the HDIM of a key element of its usefulness – the interaction between States and civil society.

The meeting showed that serious democratic and human rights issues remain in the OSCE region. Areas of particular concern include: the rise in violent manifestations of intolerance, racism and hate; measures taken to muzzle human rights defenders and organizations; attacks on the exercise of the freedom of religion and the independence of the judiciary and the right to a fair trial. These worrying trends were largely corroborated by testimonies from participants of HDIM. The reports of ODIHR on Hate Crimes and Human Rights Defenders have served to illustrate and highlight these trends, and will help us to give a renewed focus on these areas. We thank the Ambassador and his Office for these initiatives.

Human rights defenders and independent national human rights institutions play a vital role in democratic societies. Their voices must be heard and we as participating States must live up to our commitments to let those voices be heard. In that regard, the OSCE is lagging behind. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders was adopted in 1998.

Yet, despite efforts deployed over the last few years, the OSCE has not been able to adopt a decision in this area. This, at a time when harassment of human rights defenders is on the rise. Canada believes it is high time for the OSCE Ministerial Council to adopt a decision on their protection.

In light of the rise in violent manifestations of intolerance and racism, the work of the tolerance and non-discrimination programme of ODIHR is all the more important and so is the role of the three Personal Representatives of the Chairmanship-in-Office. At the HDIM, the positive role Parliamentarians can play to combat intolerance and discrimination was emphasized. In this context, we would encourage greater participation by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at the HDIM in the future.

This year again, several participants, including Canada, called for a strengthening of efforts to achieve a better gender balance within our organization. Progress has been made in gender mainstreaming within the organization, but more efforts must be made to incorporate gender mainstreaming across the three dimensions of the OSCE mandate, to appoint women to senior posts throughout the OSCE, including as head of missions, and to modernize human resources management policies to make them more compatible with family life and obligations.

Finally, Canada believes that we must have a good look again at the format of the HDIM, and explore ways in which it can be made even more effective in reviewing States' implementation of their commitments. As we have suggested in the past, we should look into streamlining the number of issues addressed each year. Also, while having special days devoted to an issue is a useful way to focus discussions, we would also consider combining, during the two-week meeting, the HDIM itself with a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, seminar or another event.

In the field of elections, Canada is pleased with the way ODIHR has implemented Brussels MC Decision 19/06. Indeed, the Ambassador has provided an impressive list of measures taken to respond to the taskings given by Ministers. With respect to the training of observers, we would encourage participating States to take full advantage of this opportunity and to nominate those who have been trained for election observation missions. We fully support Ambassador Strohal's call on States to engage in a substantive post-election dialogue with ODIHR, to fully take advantage of its assistance and recommendations. Canada also fully endorses the call for issuance of timely invitations to observer elections. Undue delays in issuing invitations undermine the very purpose for which the 1990 Copenhagen commitments were made.

We would like to thank Ambassador Strohal for his tireless efforts over the last five years. That ODIHR is recognized as a leading institution in its areas of specialization, and particularly in elections monitoring, is a testimony of the dedication and excellence he and his staff have displayed. We wish him all the best as he continues his mandate.