



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by ODIHR on this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 7, 2013

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Ambassador Lenarčič, for your comprehensive report on the 2013 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM). The United States strongly supports ODIHR, which has earned its place as the key institution in the OSCE's efforts to help participating States meet their Human Dimension commitments by promoting democratic development, human rights, and free and fair elections.

We agree with your assessment that this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting was a success. As you mentioned, the HDIM drew a record number of participants. The turnout clearly shows that the HDIM remains one of the most important events on the OSCE calendar.

As has been the case in previous years, the level of participation in most sessions of the HDIM was so high that the time allotted for individual interventions and replies had to be severely curtailed. Attendance and audience participation at the diverse array of side events also was broad and engaged. These indicators suggest that shortening the HDIM would prove unwise, unwarranted, and ill-advised.

As our Head of Delegation, Ambassador Robert Bradtke, noted, the HDIM is the place where we, the participating States, must face sometimes uncomfortable truths about ourselves. We hear about our shortcomings. We hear about restrictions of fundamental rights, flawed elections, intolerance, and other failures to live up to our commitments.

At the HDIM, the members of non-governmental organizations and civil society remind us why we should face up to those uncomfortable truths. We hear from the son who simply wants to know what happened to his father who disappeared after being taken into custody. We hear from Human Rights Defenders about politically motivated trials and unfair judgments. We hear from LGBT persons, Roma, Jews, Muslims, and members of other minority groups about the discrimination and violence they face. And we hear from those who help the victims of the horror that is modern slavery. The HDIM provides the opportunity for the most robust engagement by civil society with the OSCE across a broad range of issues. That is why shortening the HDIM or limiting the access of the NGOs would

be a mistake, especially at a time when civil society is under pressure in a number of participating States.

HDIM is also the one specialized meeting where any human dimension concern can be raised. The plenaries and “any other business” agenda items ensure participating States have the opportunity to raise issues of particular interest. The side events and bilateral meetings with civil society give depth to our knowledge of human dimension issues, and we encourage other countries to take greater advantage of this opportunity for government representatives and members of civil society to learn from each other. We greatly appreciated Switzerland’s side event previewing their ambitious goals for their Chairmanship next year and seeking civil society feedback.

Now that we have returned to Vienna we need to listen to our “conscience,” remember what we heard over the two weeks at HDIM, address any shortcomings of our own, speak frankly about the shortcomings of others, and exert the political will to close the gap between our commitments and our practices.

HDIM is not an easy two weeks – but it represents the most important two weeks of the year in the Human Dimension, and it gives us a compelling perspective on the hard work yet to be done as we look ahead to the Ministerial Meeting in Kyiv and our engagement in the Helsinki +40 process.

As we look to next year’s HDIM, I would like to make a few observations. First, the closing session of HDIM could be useful as a session for participating States to reflect on what they have learned over the two weeks, and to identify areas for action going forward. This is an implementation meeting, after all; we can make the closing session a kick-off as well as a coda. Second, I’ve heard some discussion from colleagues bemoaning the number of GONGOs participating at HDIM. Indeed, one colleague noted at the closing session that it was striking to hear civil society organizations repeating well-known talking points of States. In one side event I attended, a person who was registered as an NGO actually spoke on behalf of a participating State, saying: “We are happy to review your complaints about the new law we have drafted,” momentarily forgetting that he was supposed to be playing the role of an NGO. This is embarrassing for participating States. GONGOs are quite obvious much of the time. The solution is not to limit participation, but rather for self-respecting participating States to curtail their embarrassing use of GONGOs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.