



**Opening Address by the
Head of the OSCE Task Force, Ambassador Dr Boris Frlec, at the
OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

Warsaw, 19 September 2005

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These are times of change.

We are witnessing shocking natural disasters, terrorism in our cities, and rising oil prices.

But we are also witnessing changes for the better – more attention is paid to alleviating world poverty and disease, spreading democracy, and rising consciousness about the need for taking global action to deal with global threats.

I speak on behalf of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Dr Dimitrij Rupel, who is at the time participating at the High-level Plenary Meeting of the UN General Assembly in New York. While such meetings have their limitations, one could not escape the feeling that the world is getting smaller and more inter-connected. We really do live in a global village.

What happens to one group of people living on this planet indirectly affects us all. Television, the Internet and the work of NGOs raise consciousness about events in far away places like Darfur or Zimbabwe, and bring the plight of the oppressed up the international agenda and onto our screens. The International Criminal Court and special tribunals have lengthened the arm of the law. It is getting harder for human rights violators to operate with impunity.

Yet, we should think globally and act locally. In these terms of human rights protection the OSCE is a world leader. Our standards and institutions are very progressive, and could be an example to other regions of the world.

The United Nations is grappling with the challenge of the responsibility to protect. How do we help people who are suffering at the hands of their own state?

As the UN high level panel report pointed out, “the principle of non-intervention in internal affairs cannot be used to protect genocidal acts or other atrocities, such as large-scale violations of international humanitarian law or large-scale ethnic cleansing”.

But what to do in such cases?

In the OSCE we have gone quite far. More than ten years ago, OSCE States took an important step and agreed to internationalize human rights. In the 1991 Moscow Document participating States – and I quote – “categorically and irrevocably declared that commitments undertaken in the human dimension of the CSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern

to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned". End of quote.

This means that in the OSCE context, human rights truly are everybody's business. States can no longer complain about external interference in their internal affairs when it comes to upholding human rights standards.

The challenge is to make this work in practice. To some extent, OSCE institutions are the guardians of OSCE commitments and are normative intermediaries who can assist States to live up to their commitments whether it be in relation to minority rights, freedom of the media or their general commitments on human rights and democracy.

The Secretary General and the field missions are also mandated to ensure the implementation of commitments.

And of course, like our predecessors, we have always understood the role of the Chairmanship as one of promoting progress in the human dimension. With the assistance of the Institutions, we will continue to inform the Permanent Council of serious cases of alleged non-implementation of human dimension commitments, in line with a decision taken at Budapest in 1994 which was designed to enhance implementation.

Participating states have the possibility – even the obligation – to hold each other to account for the promises that they have made.

- Take for example the Moscow mechanism. Once this mechanism is invoked, participating States are obliged to respond to requests for information on a human dimension related situation, and can be visited by a panel of experts whose mission is to facilitate resolution of a particular question or problem relating to the human dimension of the OSCE. This peer pressure is based on legitimate intrusiveness, and enables states to request accountability for others.

- The annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is another example of how, through an open forum, states are obliged to answer questions about their human rights record.

The purpose is not to name and shame. The purpose is to make sure that we live up to the standards that we have set, because those standards are the basis of our freedoms and the guarantors of human dignity.

We are united by common principles. Every time these principles are violated, the integrity of the perpetrators and the legitimacy of our collective system are compromised.

Through multilateral and co-operative approaches, we need to help states to honor their commitments. And we need to hold them accountable if that fails.

History shows what happens when human rights are violated on a massive scale and the international community does not react. The result is usually discrimination, hate, violence and war.

History also shows what happens when people stand up for their rights. This year we are marking the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that

we are celebrating what happened next. The Act itself was a major achievement – a trade-off of interests and commitments that established a link between security, development and human rights and opened a forum for dialogue.

But the implementation of the Final Act would not have been successful if it had not been for the brave dissidents – like our keynote speaker Ljudmila Alexeeva – who were inspired by and even risked their health and lives for the implementation of those principles dealing with human rights and fundamental freedoms. They helped to expose the lies of communism, and break through the fear and terror on which it was based.

There are still brave and often unsung heroes around the OSCE area fighting to defend human rights. They need our support.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The OSCE has a strong track record in the human dimension and this must be maintained.

Perhaps it can be further enhanced. As you know, the OSCE is strengthening its activities in promoting tolerance and combating discrimination. The implementation of the commitments in this field should be in the center of our action and this was discussed extensively in June at the “Cordoba Conference”.

Slovenia’s Chairmanship has put a strong emphasis on human rights education so that children will learn to understand and appreciate diversity rather than learn to hate.

I would like to see the OSCE do more to address the challenge of migration and integration, and these were the topics of the Economic Forum, the Human Dimension Seminar, and a recent meeting with Mediterranean Partners.

The OSCE is taking on a more active role in promoting restorative justice by monitoring war crime trials in Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, in co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia.

We should also look at how to do more to assist States integrate diversity in increasingly multi-cultural societies. There has been a lot of talk lately about preventing the opening of new dividing lines between states in Europe. We should also be careful to prevent the opening of dividing lines within our societies.

The OSCE has a well-deserved reputation for being Europe’s elections watchdog. Perhaps sometimes we could bark a little less loudly, and there may be areas (like electronic voting) where we could further develop our monitoring techniques. Recommendations have also been made for more effective post-election follow-up.

It would also be good to have election monitors to be as representative as possible of the OSCE’s wide geographic scope. I once again call on all participating States to second their nationals to the ODIHR’s observation missions and to contribute to ODIHR’s diversity fund.

In ensuring equal treatment we should not compromise professionalism and objectiveness. OSCE election monitoring must maintain its reputation as an impartial quality stamp, and here I would like to pay tribute to the outstanding work done by ODIHR on elections

throughout the OSCE area. Also in other areas, our main institution in the human dimension is contributing decisively to the Organization's success and relevance.

As part of the on-going process on strengthening the effectiveness of the OSCE, suggestions have been made to further improve the monitoring of the implementation of human dimension standards. The Panel of Eminent Persons report noted the sensitivity of this task and said that "to encourage equal treatment and improve transparency, OSCE monitoring should be done in an unbiased and more standardized way". One of their recommendations was to create a Human Dimension Committee of the Permanent Council to enable a more continuous peer review.

This meeting offers an excellent and timely opportunity to exchange ideas and proposals. I particularly encourage members of the NGO community to bring fresh thinking to this debate. I welcome the fact that this year over 260 NGOs have registered to attend this meeting.

Indeed, the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is a good example of how NGOs can have direct access and input to the OSCE process. It is a practice that should be considered in other areas of the OSCE's work in order to open our doors to those who are directly affected by the issues and commitments being discussed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our aim should be to work towards a better and safer world. We need to maintain our security. But in the process we should not undermine human rights. With the other words we should promote human security.

Security and human rights are inextricably linked. That has been the OSCE example for the past thirty years. And it remains relevant today.

For example, in Kosovo we can not talk about status without looking at standards. In Uzbekistan, we need to address security threats but we can not condone human rights violations. In the fight against terrorism, we have to square the circle between protecting ourselves and protecting our rights. These are highly relevant contemporary challenges in which the OSCE should play an active role.

In conclusion, the human dimension remains at the core of the OSCE's concept of security. Inter-state and intra-state relations should be governed by OSCE commitments.

Over the next two weeks you will have a chance to access the effectiveness of how all OSCE States are doing in terms of keeping the promises that they have made to their people and to each other. There are no taboos here, and no teachers and pupils.

I encourage you to be open and constructive in your engagement on the wide range of topics that will be discussed here, and seek to bring new ideas to further strengthen the OSCE's important work in building, consolidating and strengthening democracy.

Thank you for your attention.