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WARSAW
HUMAN DIMENSION CONFERENCE
2026

ANNOTATED AGENDA

5 – 15 OCTOBER 2026 | SOFITEL VICTORIA, WARSAW

Monday, 5 October

Plenary Session 1: Humanitarian Issues I, including:

- International Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law
- Humanitarian challenges, incl. in the context of armed conflict

Moderator: Andrew Gardner, Deputy Head, ODIHR Human Rights Department

Human rights are universal, inalienable, indivisible, and interdependent. They apply at all times, including in situations of armed conflict, as affirmed in OSCE commitments. Protections provided by international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) must always be respected. OSCE participating States have committed to upholding IHL, including their obligations under relevant international instruments, in particular the four Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, and to "respect and ensure respect for general international humanitarian law" (Budapest 1994). They have also stressed the importance of accountability for violations of international law (Stockholm 1992).

During armed conflicts, the risk of grave IHRL and IHL violations is particularly acute. Violence, disruption of the rule of law, and weakened institutions can expose civilians to killings, torture and sexual or gender-based violence. Displacement and the disruption of essential services can further deepen humanitarian and human rights challenges.

Ensuring accountability for international crimes and violations of IHL and IHRL is crucial to providing justice for victims. In the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, monitoring and documentation mechanisms have contributed to establishing facts and preserving evidence. Efforts towards establishing and operationalizing the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine further illustrate the development of mechanisms that seek to address accountability gaps. These experiences may offer useful lessons for accountability efforts in other contexts.

This session will examine how international organizations, civil society, and States can uphold IHRL and IHL during armed conflict. It will explore States' obligations and the role of relevant international mechanisms in ensuring accountability for violations. Participants will be invited to share approaches for strengthening national and international mechanisms, and to discuss how the OSCE can support respect for IHRL and IHL and the pursuit of justice for victims of core crimes and other serious violations.

Tuesday, 6 October

Plenary Session 2: Rule of Law I, including:

- Prevention and eradication of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- Exchange of views on the question of the abolition of capital punishment
- Protection of human rights when combating terrorism

Moderator: Johannes Heiler, Senior Human Rights Advisor, ODIHR

The absolute prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is a fundamental principle of IHRL. States have committed not only to prohibit torture, but to prevent it through effective legal, institutional and practical safeguards (Tirana 2020). These include access to legal counsel, judicial oversight, independent monitoring of places of detention, effective investigation, and professional, non-coercive interviewing practices.

Torture prevention and the application of the death penalty intersect, particularly with regard to safeguards throughout criminal proceedings. Where the death penalty is imposed, violations during investigation, interrogation or trial can have irreversible consequences. While holding different positions on the question of the abolition of capital punishment, OSCE participating States have committed to respecting applicable international safeguards and to exchanging information on this issue (Copenhagen 1990).

Efforts to prevent and combat terrorism and violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism (VERLT) must, likewise, be grounded in respect for human rights and the rule of law (Vienna 2012). Counter-terrorism measures, including the unregulated use of rapidly developing technologies in national security and law enforcement contexts, can pose significant challenges to the protection of human rights, especially where adequate legal frameworks, oversight and safeguards are lacking. Particular concerns arise where vague laws and policies targeting terrorism or “extremism” are applied in ways that unduly restrict freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. Inclusive, safe and meaningful engagement between governments, civil society and intergovernmental organizations, alongside accountability and independent oversight, are therefore essential to uphold human rights while countering terrorism and preventing VERLT.

This session will examine how legal and institutional safeguards can strengthen the protection of human rights across criminal justice and security contexts. Building on the commitments set out in Tirana (2020), the discussion will also identify practical measures that States can adopt to strengthen safeguards throughout the criminal justice process. It will provide space to exchange views on torture prevention, the abolition of capital punishment and human rights-compliant approaches to countering terrorism and VERLT.

Wednesday, 7 October

Plenary Session 3: Fundamental Freedoms I, including:

- Freedom of peaceful assembly and association
- Human rights defenders
- National human rights institutions
- Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief

Moderator: Susan Kerr, Head, ODIHR Human Rights Department

OSCE participating States have committed to respect the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, as well as freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and to ensure that any restrictions are prescribed by law and consistent with their OSCE commitments and international human rights obligations and standards (Copenhagen 1990). Participating States have also emphasized the need to protect human rights defenders (Budapest 1994).

However, the exercise of these rights faces growing challenges across the OSCE region. So-called "foreign agent" and similar laws have been introduced or proposed in a number of participating States, imposing reporting, disclosure and other requirements on associations, including justified by governments on grounds of transparency and national sovereignty. Where such laws or related measures unduly restrict freedom of association or stigmatize civil society organizations and human rights defenders, they can seriously hamper their ability to operate effectively. In addition, restrictions on peaceful assemblies are increasingly justified on grounds of national security or public order, raising questions regarding their legality, necessity and proportionality. The use of surveillance technologies in the context of assemblies also raises concerns regarding privacy, transparency, accountability and effective safeguards.

Similar concerns arise where individuals and communities face restrictions or adverse treatment on account of their religion or belief, including through overly broad or vague definitions of "extremism". Measures taken to address legitimate security concerns must remain consistent with freedom of religion or belief and other fundamental rights.

Human rights defenders may also face threats, harassment or other pressures that compel some to relocate, including across borders, in order to continue their work. While various national human rights institutions successfully use their mandates to protect human rights, many such institutions also face increasing challenges, such as insufficient resources, inadequate follow-up on their recommendations, interference with their independence, or even threats and attacks against their staff.

The session will explore current challenges affecting civic space, human rights defenders and national human rights institutions, and the protection of fundamental freedoms across the OSCE. It will examine the exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, the use of surveillance and other technologies, developments relating to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and measures to strengthen an enabling environment for the exercise of these rights.

Thursday, 8 October

Plenary Session 4: Tolerance and Non-discrimination I, including:

- Addressing racism, xenophobia and discrimination, anti-Semitism and intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions

Moderator: Pierre Baussand, Head, ODIHR Tolerance and Non-discrimination Department

Many times, OSCE participating States have recognized tolerance and non-discrimination as essential to the promotion of human rights, democratic values and comprehensive security (Porto 2002, Maastricht 2003, Sofia 2004, Ljubljana 2005, Madrid 2007, Athens 2009). Despite progress in implementing these commitments, manifestations of intolerance and discrimination, including hate crimes, remain a serious concern across the OSCE region, with marginalized and vulnerable groups often disproportionately affected. Polarization, social fragmentation and hostile public discourse can exacerbate these challenges, while digital platforms have created new avenues for harmful narratives to spread.

Participating States have the primary responsibility of preventing and addressing racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance and discrimination. Governments should also create an enabling environment for contributions from civil society, religious or belief communities and relevant international organizations, recognizing their complementary role in addressing these challenges. At the Chairpersonship Conference on “Combating Anti-Semitism: Addressing Challenges of Intolerance and Discrimination”, held in St Gallen on 9-10 February 2026, participants underlined the need to reinforce responses through a whole-of-society approach in addressing prejudice, discrimination and hate. OSCE commitments underscore the important role of civil society organizations in monitoring and reporting bias-motivated incidents, supporting victims and promoting mutual respect and understanding, as well as the importance of co-operation between State authorities and civil society in these efforts (Brussels 2006).

This plenary session will focus on progress made by participating States in implementing their commitments on tolerance and non-discrimination. The discussion will consider remaining implementation gaps, lessons learned and promising approaches to preventing and addressing manifestations of intolerance and discrimination. Participants are invited to identify practical recommendations that can strengthen implementation of OSCE commitments.

Friday, 9 October

Plenary Session 5: Rule of Law II, including:

- Independence of the judiciary
- Right to a fair trial
- Democratic law-making

Moderator: Konstantine Vardzelashvili, Head, ODIHR Democratization Department

Independent and impartial courts, fair-trial guarantees and democratic lawmaking are mutually reinforcing elements. Together, they safeguard individual rights, promote accountability and transparency, and strengthen trust in public institutions. The commitment to upholding the rule of law has been repeatedly affirmed by OSCE participating States through multiple commitments, including with respect to the importance of an independent and impartial judiciary, the right to a fair and public hearing, and access to legal representation (Copenhagen 1990).

Participating States have further committed to ensuring that laws are adopted "as the result of an open process reflecting the will of the people" (Moscow 1991), and "with maximum transparency and broad participation" (Helsinki 2008). These safeguards are particularly important where democratic institutions come under pressure. Within the broader rule of law framework, the manner in which laws are developed and adopted is critical. Concerns persist around lawmaking practices, including the frequent use of expedited legislative procedures. Laws adopted without clear justification, in the absence of meaningful public consultation or with limited transparency, undermine respect for the rule of law, as well as the quality and legitimacy of the legislation itself.

This plenary session will facilitate a discussion on key challenges and good practices in implementing OSCE commitments related to judicial independence, fair trial guarantees and democratic legislative processes. Participants can reflect on safeguards against political interference in judicial processes, the role of effective oversight and checks and balances, as well as ways to strengthen transparent, inclusive and accountable legislative processes. The session will also consider how the quality and legitimacy of lawmaking can strengthen institutional accountability, public trust and democratic resilience, reinforcing the efficiency and independence of the justice system.

Monday, 12 October, morning

Plenary Session 6: Democratic Institutions, including:

- Democracy at the national, regional and local levels
- Democratic elections

Moderator: Meaghan Fitzgerald, Head, ODIHR Elections Department

OSCE participating States have committed to building and upholding democratic institutions based on political pluralism, transparency, and accountability, and to ensuring a conducive environment for elections by guaranteeing freedom of expression, media pluralism, and voters' right to information without interference. These commitments remain highly relevant in the digital age, in which the integrity of the political and information environment is increasingly central to democratic legitimacy (Copenhagen 1990, Paris 1990, Moscow 1991).

Elections are fundamental to democratic governance and are a vital part of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. In recent years, participating States have faced growing and interconnected challenges to democratic institutions and elections. These include disinformation, foreign information manipulation and interference, opaque political influence, online harassment, and pressure on civil society and independent media. While digital communication has created new opportunities for outreach and political participation, it has also created new vulnerabilities in campaigning and increased risks to information integrity and voter trust. These challenges are compounded by gaps in transparency and oversight, including in campaign and political finance, and online political advertising. ODIHR's election observation has consistently highlighted the importance of a pluralistic and accessible information environment for voters' ability to make informed choices and for public confidence in electoral processes and outcomes.

Conflict, emergency situations, and deepening polarization pose further challenges to democratic elections and the functioning of representative institutions. These developments reinforce the need for strong institutions, information integrity, societal resilience, and effective tools to anticipate, detect, and respond to evolving threats. Transparency of political parties and their financing, accountability of elected officials, and safeguards against undue external influence supported by effective integrity frameworks, such as codes of conduct, asset and interest declarations, lobbying transparency, ethics mechanisms and active engagement of civil society, can strengthen democratic institutions' resilience.

This session will explore challenges participating States face in meeting their commitments to democratic governance and elections in an evolving digital and information environment. It will provide an opportunity to exchange views and good practices on strengthening transparency and integrity in electoral and political processes, improving capacity to counter information manipulation and other forms of interference, as well as safeguarding political competition and pluralism.

Monday, 12 October, afternoon

Plenary Session 7: Humanitarian Issues II, including:

- Combatting trafficking in human beings
- Refugees and displaced persons

Moderator: Kari Johnstone, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

Protecting the rights of refugees and displaced persons, while recognizing that displacement significantly increases their vulnerability to exploitation and trafficking, remains a concern across the OSCE region. Participating States have long acknowledged the important issue of displacement in human dimension commitments (Helsinki1992). They have reaffirmed the right to seek asylum and the protection of refugees (Istanbul 1999), and have emphasized the importance of treating individuals who cross borders with dignity (Ljubljana 2005).

Conflicts and humanitarian crises continue to force people to flee, both internally and across borders. Across the OSCE region, estimates suggest that around 23 million people are displaced due to conflict, violence and persecution, many of whom are in need of international protection. 75 years after the adoption of the UN Refugee Convention, respect for international protection standards, including the principle of non-refoulement, remains essential. Yet, reports of pushbacks and other practices continue to raise concerns about violations of the rights of asylum-seekers and refugees. Investigations into alleged violations against migrants and refugees often remain ineffective, while accountability for those responsible is limited.

Amid growing challenges, displaced populations are increasingly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation, as noted in the 2023 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Vancouver Declaration and OSCE commitments (Athens 2009). In crises, traffickers target the most vulnerable, including women and children, forcing them into sexual and labour exploitation, criminal activities or other forms of exploitation. This underscores the need to integrate trafficking prevention into humanitarian co-ordination and emergency mechanisms, strengthen early identification systems, and ensure access to long-term, specialized services for victims and survivors.

To meet their commitments, participating States must protect the rights of migrants, refugees, and displaced persons, including trafficking survivors, by ensuring dignified treatment, safeguarding them in crises and transit, and supporting their integration. Civil society plays a key role as a first line of support and should be engaged alongside survivors, whose lived experiences offer vital insights into protection gaps and traffickers' methods.

This plenary session will highlight State efforts to protect the rights of displaced persons and trafficking victims, emphasizing the role of civil society, migrants themselves and survivor leaders, and exploring challenges, lessons learned, and opportunities for improved protection and anti-trafficking practices across the OSCE region.

Tuesday, 13 October

Plenary Session 8: Fundamental Freedoms II, including:

- Freedom of expression, freedom of the media
- Safety of journalists

Moderator: Barbara Trionfi, Principle Advisor to the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

OSCE participating States have long recognized freedom of expression and media freedom as fundamental human rights and essential components of democratic societies and comprehensive security. Beginning with the Helsinki Final Act, States committed to facilitating the freer and wider dissemination of information and improving the conditions under which journalists work (Helsinki 1975). Since then, States have further affirmed the right to freedom of expression and established that independent and pluralistic media are essential to free and open societies and accountable systems of government (Vienna 1997).

Independent and pluralistic media play a critical role in democratic societies. By providing reliable information, scrutinising power, and ensuring a diversity of viewpoints, such journalism enables meaningful participation in democratic debate and processes, and holds those in power to account. Yet, journalists and other media actors across the OSCE region continue to face intersecting physical, legal, economic, and digital threats. These include violence, arbitrary detention, surveillance, online harassment, legislative and economic pressures, and hostile rhetoric by public officials. Women journalists are disproportionately targeted by gender-based abuse, including through threats, doxing, and co-ordinated online harassment. Journalists reporting on armed conflict and public demonstrations face particular risks, while exiled media workers are increasingly exposed to transnational threats and restrictions.

Supporting media freedom requires legal, institutional, and practical safeguards and conditions that enable journalists to work safely, independently, and sustainably, including in restrictive environments. Journalists need protection from physical, legal, economic, and digital threats; they need to be assured that there is accountability for all attacks against the media; and they need to be able to continue to reach their audiences, including locally and from exile.

In a commitment on safety of journalists, participating States agreed to fully implementing OSCE commitments related to freedom of expression and media freedom, bringing laws, policies, and practices into compliance with relevant international obligations, and creating a safe, and enabling environment for journalists (Milan 2018). Nevertheless, a significant gap remains between these commitments and their implementation in practice.

This plenary session will examine how participating States can close the implementation gap and strengthen support for independent and pluralistic media, particularly where media freedom is under pressure. It will provide an opportunity to exchange experiences, good practices, and practical recommendations on enabling media to contribute to democratic resilience, ensuring the safety of journalists, and making sure that OSCE commitments are translated into effective implementation.

Wednesday, 14 October

Plenary Session 9: Tolerance and Non-discrimination II, including:

- Rights of persons belonging to national minorities
- Roma and Sinti issues

Moderator: Beata Bislim-Olahova, Senior Advisor and Chief, ODIHR Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues

OSCE participating States have committed to protect the identity of persons belonging to national minorities and to intensify efforts to combat racial and ethnic hatred, xenophobia and discrimination, including against Roma and Sinti (Copenhagen 1990). States established the High Commissioner on National Minorities as an instrument of conflict prevention at the earliest possible stage (Helsinki 1992), and through the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area and subsequent steps, participating States have committed to address the structural exclusion faced by these communities (Maastricht 2003).

Exclusion, hate speech and inter-ethnic tension across the OSCE region deepen social divides, erode trust in institutions and undermine long-term peace and stability. In a complex security environment, it is important that legitimate security considerations are pursued in ways consistent with minority rights and effective participation. Language and education policy are particularly relevant in this regard, as their effective implementation depends on adequate methodologies, teacher training and inclusive participation.

Roma and Sinti communities continue to face persistent discrimination, anti-Roma racism, and barriers to equal participation. As highlighted in ODIHR's Fourth Status Report published in 2023, gaps between commitments and implementation undermine equal access to socio-economic rights and redress, while also limiting meaningful participation in public and political life. Roma and Sinti women often experience intersectional discrimination leading to heightened gender-based and racial violence, barriers to justice, and exclusion from decision-making. Young Roma and Sinti continue to report persistent discriminatory treatment in education, employment and civic participation.

This session will assess progress and remaining challenges related to tolerance and non-discrimination, with a focus on national minorities and Roma and Sinti. Participants are invited to exchange good practices promoting inclusive education, effective participation, and measures to strengthen socio-economic inclusion.

Thursday, 15 October

Plenary Session 10: Gender Equality, including:

- Equal opportunities for women and men
- Preventing and combating violence against women and girls
- Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality

Moderator: Lara Scarpitta, OSCE Senior Adviser on Gender Issues and Head, Gender Issues Pro-gramme

OSCE participating States have long recognized gender equality as fundamental to democracy, human rights, and comprehensive security. A broad framework of OSCE commitments sets out priorities and areas for action to advance gender equality, including the 2004 OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (Sofia 2004), commitments on women's participation in political and public life (Athens 2009) and preventing and combating violence against women (Milan 2018). These are complemented by commitments on Women in Conflict Prevention, Crisis Management and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation (Ljubljana 2005).

Women's participation, representation and influence in decision-making are essential to inclusive and effective democracies. Freedom from violence is fundamental to women's ability to exercise their rights and participate fully in all spheres of life. At a time of ongoing conflict and insecurity, women's contribution to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and decision-making is critical to sustainable peace. Advancing gender equality requires the engagement of all of society, including men and women.

Despite progress, important implementation gaps remain. Women continue to have unequal access to political and public life, particularly at leadership levels, while progress towards gender parity is slow and uneven. Targeted efforts are needed to address the additional barriers faced by women experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination. Similarly, women's participation and influence in security institutions and peace processes have yet to reflect the targets set by relevant Women, Peace and Security commitments. Violence against women and girls remains widespread, with technology-facilitated gender-based violence posing increasing challenges. Growing resistance to gender equality commitments risk weakening legal, policy and institutional progress.

The session will provide a platform to reflect on persistent and emerging challenges and examine what works to accelerate progress. Participants will exchange on the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, including good practices for strengthening women's representation and influence in political and public life, improving prevention and responses to all forms of violence against women, and advancing women's role in peace and security. Particular attention will be given to the role of institutions and to approaches that can make progress sustainable.