



Delegation of Canada
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2017
Opening Statement by the Delegation of Canada, delivered by Ambassador
Natasha Cayer, Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE
Monday, September 11, 2017

Madam Chair,

Let me congratulate you, along with the other three heads of the executive structures, on your appointments.

Excellencies, colleagues, and representatives of civil society,

As Canada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the OSCE, I can assure everyone gathered here of the great importance that we place on this meeting and the opportunity it represents. Canada fully supports HDIM and the integral role it plays within the Human Dimension at the OSCE.

We believe that civil society plays a vital role in fostering pluralistic, inclusive, and democratic societies. As one of the few fora in which civil society is able to interact in a constructive manner with participating States, we regard HDIM as a unique and necessary exchange, even when – and most particularly, we are told things we would rather not hear. At HDIM, civil society should be able to share their experiences and insights with us and to encourage and promote progress on the implementation of our shared human rights commitments – and all participating States are the better for it. They should not be censured or suffer retribution for coming to this meeting.

Madam Chair,

HDIM's relevance is further magnified as the shrinking of civil society space continues throughout many parts of the OSCE region. While there has been progress in the advancement of human rights and fundamental freedoms in many areas, we must also soberly reflect upon and address those areas where they face continuing and significant challenges and where human rights are being actively undermined. Worryingly, we have seen an overall trend over the last several years towards the erosion of democracy worldwide, with an accompanying growing threat to civil society and the fundamental freedoms they defend. Although welcomed as a means to encourage the free flow of dialogue and knowledge, we note that the internet has also led to an increase in hate speech and other abuses, has been used to repress and persecute independent voices, and has at times resulted in the undermining of social cohesion and the polarizing of societies.

During these two weeks, you will hear us repeat that Canada has found that we are stronger and more prosperous as a society when we respect our diversity and promote inclusion. Abuses and violations of human rights not only contravene international norms and commitments through the inequality, injustice, and deprivation they cause, but they also impede development, peace, and security. Experience shows that pluralism and respect for diversity strengthens societies and economies. When we respect and empower women, children, LGBTI persons, indigenous people, and minorities; when we respect the freedom to believe or to not believe, to peacefully

assemble and associate, to express ourselves without fear of state reprisal; when we do these things we are not only doing what is morally and ethically right, we are also profiting from the positive effect that respecting fundamental rights has upon society.

So when we call upon all participating States to uphold and advance their human rights commitments, it is not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is the only rational thing to do. Canada will continue to work hard to uphold ours.

In conclusion, I encourage every participant over this two week span to work together constructively, openly, with respect, and with an objective of discovering the concrete ways that we can all work towards better implementation of our shared commitments in the Human Dimension.

Thank you.