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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 19 - 30 September 2016

Working session 2 &3: The International Covenants on human rights and their importance for the OSCE human dimension

Madam/Mr. Moderator,

I am honoured to speak on behalf of the EU and its Member States.

The European Union recognises that human rights and security under the rule of law are mutually reinforcing and is committed to protecting and strengthening both. They are the principles upon which democratic states are founded, embedded within the EU treaties, and which developing states increasingly recognise as fundamental to their long-term viability and stability.

Central to upholding these principles are the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR). This year marks the 50th anniversary since the Covenants were conceived; 40 years since they entered into force. In conjunction with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the Covenants marked a turning point in the formal recognition by states of the rights of the individual: that every person is born with equal rights to participate fully in the political, cultural, economic and social life of their country of residence, without fear of persecution or oppression.

The anniversary of the covenants is a time to take stock of the global human rights situation and to join our common efforts. There is worldwide a rollback of human rights and a hardening of position in some participating states, whilst the fight against terrorism, or cultural relativism, are used to justify human rights violations. In this context, our responsibility is to defend the universality of human rights enshrined in the international treaties we have freely committed ourselves to.



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The significance of the Covenants is self evident. Today, the most unstable and insecure regions around the globe are those where the principles enshrined in both ICCPR and ICESCR are either neglected or opposed; where inequality and prejudice are most prominent; and where oppression is rife. But in our increasingly interconnected, globalised world people are growing more aware, and more protective, of their universal rights. They demand accountability from their governments, and freedom and dignity for themselves. In times of upheaval, peace, security and stability require greater care and attention to ensure they aren't irrevocably eroded. And it is in these moments that the work of organisations such as the OSCE and UN, the Council of Europe, the EU and the African Union, really matters. These organisations enshrine and advocate the principles of ICCPR and ICESCR. We must ensure those principles remain at the forefront of everything we do.

But it is one thing to advocate human rights principles, and another to review and hold others to account. It is incumbent upon organisations such as ours to work with each other, national governments and civil society organisations, to help foster a secure global environment in which human rights can flourish. Security and human rights for all can only be achieved through a holistic approach to both. We must consider the best way of working with countries that are yet to sign or ratify the Covenants to persuade them that it is in their interest to do so. The application and implementation of commitments remain our core aspiration even fifty and forty years later, respectively.

We must look at our commitments through a 21st century lens to ensure that we remain relevant to our citizens and that we hold ourselves, and each other, to the highest possible standard, ensuring no dilution of the universal rights set out in international treaties. Enhancing state security must not come at the expense and sacrifice of human rights, since the promotion and implementation of human rights helps create stable, secure and prosperous societies.

Recommendations

- OSCE participating states must ensure that they fulfill all commitments already made under the OSCE framework and in line with the covenants.



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- Encourage all states that have not yet done so to ratify the covenants.
- We recommend that OSCE strengthens its links with OHCHR, to remain up to speed on developments in human rights understanding. This will ensure future commitments are in line with these and existing OSCE commitments, avoiding regressive steps being taken.

The Candidate Countries TURKEY, the FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO*, SERBIA* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND, LIECHTENSTEIN and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as UKRAINE, the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, ARMENIA, GEORGIA and ANDORRA align themselves with this statement.

* The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.