

29 September 2016



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

OPENING STATEMENT TO THE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING 2016

As delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad,
Warsaw, 19 September 2016

Mr Chair,

In the OSCE context, HDIM is the most important arena we have for interacting with civil society. For some NGOs it is in fact one of the few opportunities they have to interact with their own governments. As government representatives, we need their insight and experience to improve our policies. We must be ready to listen.

Acts of reprisal against individuals or organisations who participate in HDIM are contrary to the very essence and purpose of this meeting.

Mr Chair,

This year, ODIHR can look back on 25 years of activity. ODIHR is the institution that can operationalise our promises to strengthen respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. They translate our words into action. ODIHR is professional and impartial. The staff demonstrate a high level of expertise, commitment and dedication. They work for all of us, and give advice and recommendations to every participating State. We must ensure they have the resources they need to fulfil their tasks.

Mr Chair,

Let me mention some of our priorities for this meeting. Freedom of expression and opinion, and free and independent media, are fundamental for the enjoyment of other human rights. We are greatly concerned that freedom of expression is suppressed in many participating States. This year, my government launched a strategy to support strengthening freedom of expression in Norway's foreign and development policy. This strategy has three basic aims: to strengthen support for independent media, provide protection for people who express opinions publicly, and improve public access to information.

Attacks on journalists are intended to stop information from independent sources and exposure of corruption and abuse of power. These attacks are a threat to democratic development and must be investigated and prosecuted.

Mr Chair,

Freedom of assembly and association is under pressure in many countries in our region. Human rights defenders are attacked, imprisoned or silenced. The abuse of the justice system

to stop criticism is particularly worrying. ODIHR's guidelines on protecting human rights defenders should be observed by all of us. My government has also developed guidelines for our further efforts to protect human rights defenders.

Mr Chair,

Gender equality continues to be a high priority for Norway. We hope it will be possible to agree on an addendum to the OSCE action plan for gender equality in Hamburg.

Mr Chair,

Norway hosted the sixth World Congress against the Death Penalty in June this year on how to move forward towards the abolishment of capital punishment. Norway opposes the death penalty in all cases and without exceptions. It does not deter crime or terrorism and makes miscarriage of justice irreversible.

Mr Chair,

In Ukraine, we have seen serious violations of fundamental commitments. Russia's occupation of Crimea and destabilizing of Eastern Ukraine has led to a breakdown of justice and grave human rights violations. We will continue to call on Russia to reverse its actions in Ukraine and renew its fundamental OSCE commitments in word and deed.

The OSCE must continue to support the reform process in Ukraine. Respect for human rights, an independent judiciary and fighting corruption must be priorities. All elections must be held in accordance with Ukrainian law, OSCE commitments and the professional standards of ODIHR to have legitimacy.

Mr Chair,

Let me conclude by commending ODIHR for organising this meeting. We will continue to support their work for the benefit of us all.

Thank you, Mr Chair