



## PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE DIRECTOR OF ODIHR,  
MICHAEL LINK

As delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna, 6 April 2017

Mr Chair,

My delegation welcomes director Link to the Permanent Council, unfortunately for the last time delivering the ODIHR annual report.

Director Link's report highlights some of the challenges our region is facing. The attempts by some participating States to silence criticism and prevent public discussion of political issues is deeply disturbing. A democratic society is characterised by a wide variety of opinions and interests being voiced and debated. Civil society organisations are essential. In too many countries we see governments prohibiting certain organisations, preventing assemblies and arresting participants in demonstrations. Freedom of expression, association and assembly are fundamental for democracy and are part of our common OSCE commitments. We commend ODIHR's important work in issuing guidelines for freedom of assembly and following up on protection of human rights defenders.

We welcome ODIHR's on-going work and reports on good practices for enhancing women's political participation, promoting women's participation in political parties and gender in security sector reform.

Mr Chair,

When confronted with the threat of terrorism, some governments have resorted to means that violate human rights principles. This is counter-productive. Respecting human rights and the rule of law is the best way of preventing exclusion, discrimination and radicalisation and thereby preventing recruitment to terrorism. ODIHR is doing valuable work in providing expert analysis and assistance to all of us in countering terrorism while respecting human rights.

Mr Chair,

We welcome the strengthening of ODIHR's work on torture prevention. ODIHR's support for National Preventive Mechanisms in participating States is a constructive approach in preventing torture.

ODIHR's election observation and advice on election legislation are fundamental in further strengthening democracy. My country is among the many to profit from this assistance.

We also appreciate ODIHR's work on monitoring and preventing hate crime.

Mr Chair,

If ODIHR is to continue meeting our high expectations, we as participating States must ensure sufficient funding through the Unified Budget. We must support their independent mandate, because this is in our common interest.

Mr Chair,

We commend ODIHR's efforts to support democratic reforms in Ukraine, and we have been pleased to contribute. We urge ODIHR to continue this work, and Ukraine to take advantage of their expertise. The joint report by ODIHR and the High Commissioner for National Minorities on the human rights situation in Crimea, including for Crimean Tatars, must be followed up.

Mr Chair,

Though we regret that director Link is leaving, we are encouraged to see that highly capable candidates for this position have been presented. The OSCE needs a timely decision on a new ODIHR director.

Mr Chair,

Under director Link's leadership, ODIHR has further strengthened its professional and unbiased work. Director Link, your active engagement has ensured a high level of activity and the highest professional standards. You have been outspoken and have brought breaches of commitments throughout the region to our attention. You have shown a clear understanding of and respect for ODIHR's mandate. We thank you for your dedication, inspiration and leadership under sometimes difficult circumstances and wish you all the best for the future.

Thank you, Mr Chair