



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE

OPENING STATEMENT

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is important. It is an interactive platform to receive feedback from civil society, and to exchange best practices on the implementation of our Human Dimension commitments. Moreover, the lessons learned and experiences exchanged here are preserved by ODIHR in its role as the steward of HDIM. This is but one aspect of ODIHR as an essential institution for the promotion of democracy, rule of law, human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination.

Democracy and the rule of law is under threat in our region. There are continuing signs of democracy being persistently undermined. Strong and viable democracies should be a hallmark of Europe and the entire OSCE region. That is why democracy is among the fundamental principles of the OSCE's Human Dimension.

Fully democratic societies require more than free and fair elections. Elections mean little when there is no real opposition. Democracy requires rule of law and effective checks and balances. An independent judiciary is essential. So too, are free media and a safe and enabling environment for the exchange of information and ideas. Threats against any of these are also threats against democracy.

Democracy requires the full and effective participation in public life of both women and men. The imperative of equality for all is necessary for the full realisation of the human rights. We must continue to stand up for equal opportunities, as well as the empowerment, inclusion and participation of women and girls.

When states are unable, or unwilling, properly to implement their human rights commitments, we need *autonomous institutions* to safeguard the rights of all individuals and support states in their implementation. The autonomy of ODIHR allows it to offer impartial, professional

advice and support, and to hold us to our commitments. The success of ODIHR depends upon participating States recognising the importance of protecting and maintaining its autonomy.

This year, *the safety of journalists* has been selected as a special topic for HDIM. We remain concerned about the negative trends in the working conditions for the media and sharp increase in hostile rhetoric, harassment, hate speech and attacks on journalists in a number of participating States. Journalists and media workers face great risks in order to disclose corruption and abuse of power, to expose violations of human rights, and provide the public with information. We must ensure that journalists are safe and enjoy rightful protection in the OSCE area. This is a prerequisite for the freedom of the media.

We value the presence of civil society organisations at this meeting. Human rights defenders help strengthen the respect for human rights in our region. Standing up for human rights in the face of danger and repression requires tremendous courage. Especially when governments - whose responsibility it is to protect and implement these rights - impose laws and policies that do the opposite. We commend and applaud the work of the human rights defenders, and look forward to hearing their recommendations.

However, some organisations are here for other purposes. Some use HDIM to reproduce propaganda under the guise of independence. Others express intolerant views under the guise of defending the principles of free expression, tolerance and non-discrimination. These insincere statements are easily recognised and they add nothing of value to our deliberations.

The voices of civil society truly speaking in defense of human rights and fundamental freedoms are as important as ever. They enable real debate on our efforts, or lack thereof, to implement all commitments in the OSCE's human dimension.

Thank you