



United States Mission to the OSCE

Follow-up to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 30, 2003

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all I would like to thank Ambassador Strohal for the content, tone and spirit of his remarks which we thought were outstanding. The United States demonstrated its commitment to, and its belief in, the value of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting first of all by the make-up of our delegation, which was headed by Ambassador Pamela Hyde Smith and included four Members of Congress, our Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Lorne Craner, and numerous experts and public members, as well as myself.

I might say here that success of OSCE events often depends to a considerable degree on the level of our delegations and while many do an excellent job I think there's clearly a much greater need for uniformity in excellence in the level of the delegations that attend these events to reflect the level of commitment to OSCE issues and conferences.

We highly value the two weeks of debate on topics related to nearly every aspect of human rights and appreciated the opportunity, the unique opportunity really, to speak not only with officials from other governments, but also with other international organizations, human rights activists, and NGOs from throughout the OSCE area. This unique dialogue is one of the greatest strengths of the HDIM. This debate contributed to the strength and vitality of the first week of review in that discussions were open, and even when participants were starkly critical, it was still open.

Indeed, discussions during the first week were so lively that the allotted time proved insufficient to accommodate everyone, while discussions in the second week ended early. We may want to review the distribution of time for the sessions, perhaps lengthening the time allotted for those agenda items which are now addressed only in the first week. The Human Dimension Activities day could be shortened to a half-day and combined with the Closing Plenary.

That said, we value the opportunity to discuss special topics, with a view to developing OSCE commitments or activities. As we saw during the day on Racism, Xenophobia, Discrimination and Anti-Semitism, when a topic is well prepared, it is possible to use the discussions at the HDIM to make progress on items for the Ministerial. The HDIM discussions helped us take a step closer to gaining Ministerial consensus both on the German offer to host next year's conference in Berlin, as a follow-up OSCE conference on anti-Semitism, and on a separate follow-up conference on Racism, Xenophobia and

Discrimination. In that connection we need to continue this progress and to work hard to identify, before Maastricht, a suitable location for the second conference. We should also move forward on discussions of other possible Ministerial commitments such as collecting hate-crimes statistics, considering creating national or local human rights commissions.

Participating States will want to consider, early on, the topics for next year's HDIM, and Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings, as well as our ODIHR Seminar. For our part, we have suggested the topics of internally displaced persons, freedom of movement, the right to peaceful assembly, and access to government information. We have heard a number of other interesting ideas from other participants and will need time to further consider all of the possibilities, being mindful that our ultimate aim is improving implementation by participating States.

While on the topic of internally displaced persons, let me also express the hope that we have taken a step toward considering a Ministerial commitment welcoming the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as a useful framework for guiding the work of the OSCE, and the actions of participating States, in dealing with internal displacement. In this regard, we also welcomed Monday's Informal Briefing on the topic which I personally attended.

Mr. Chairman, there are a number of other issues which the United States believes require follow-up action. We applaud the work already done for the Ministerial on the Action Plan to Combat Trafficking, and we are committed to developing an appropriate mechanism to help states translate these recommendations into action. In this regard, I would like to highlight the failure of many source and destination States currently to cooperate constructively with one another and share information. This area represents a weakness in States' willingness to give practical meaning to their commitments.

The United States would like to have a high-level personality who can first raise the political profile of the trafficking issue. Second, garner senior political support from OSCE participating States. Third, coordinate work among OSCE institutions across all three dimensions, and fourth, serve as a single point of contact for other international organizations. In order to do this, we want a mechanism structured and placed in the OSCE in such a way as to promote maximum effectiveness and we appreciate the Dutch Chair's leadership in negotiating this concept, and we will continue to be most active in finding solutions to any remaining issues.

We will, likewise, work with other participating States to address any remaining issues with respect to the draft Action Plan on Roma and Sinti. We expect that the PC will adopt the Action Plan in the next few weeks, to forward to our Ministers in Maastricht. We thank the Romanian Ambassador for his leadership on this, as well as the ODIHR "Contact Point" Mr. Nicolae Gheorghe, for his sustained outreach to the communities affected by this initiative.

At the HDIM, the United States called attention to a number of cases in which participating States are using restrictive registration policies to limit freedom of religion and the practice of beliefs. We are very concerned over discriminatory registration policies toward religious communities, and we would like to see a review of the issue by the OSCE/ODIHR Advisory Panel on Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Mr. Chairman, let me turn to three other issues raised during the HDIM. First, the government of Belarus has made no substantive progress in addressing the criteria established by the OSCE over three years ago: ending repression and the climate of fear; permitting a functioning independent media; creating a transparent election process; and strengthening the functioning of the parliament. The OSCE Office in Minsk, ODIHR, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media all have a role to play in assisting Belarus meet these criteria. Ultimately, however, the potential for genuine, substantive progress requires the Belarusian government to make the right choices and genuinely support OSCE principles in its policies, practices and institutions.

Second, despite our disappointment that no Turkmenistan government representatives were present at the HDIM, we believe the meeting greatly benefited from the presence of Professor Decaux and Turkmen opposition leaders. We are profoundly troubled by Turkmenistan's new, repressive policies, which are often put in place solely through decrees by President Niyazov –who personally, *personally*, signed the Helsinki Final Act on behalf of his country.

Among the most alarming initiatives are the re-introduction of an exit-visa regime; proposed new and onerous registration requirements for religious groups; the “Betrayers of the Motherland” decree criminalizing criticism of the government; reports that ethnic minorities are being forcibly resettled against their will; and the radical restructuring of the education system to exclude those disfavored because of their ethnicity or their real or perceived political loyalties.

It is critical that the OSCE community remain focused on the concerns raised in the Moscow Mechanism report. We urge ODIHR to step up its efforts to engage Turkmen authorities in working to implement recommendations contained in the Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur's report, and we believe a visit by ODIHR Director Strohal to Turkmenistan would be a useful catalyst to moving forward. Moreover, we urge OSCE delegations to meet with Turkmenistan non-governmental representatives here and in other capitals, where and when the opportunity arises.

Third, Azerbaijan's presidential election, held during the HDIM, failed to meet OSCE standards due to serious irregularities. The United States will work with President-elect Ilham Aliyev and his government, but we believe that Azerbaijan's leadership missed an important opportunity to advance democratization by holding a credible election. The United States calls for an immediate, independent, thorough and transparent investigation of all election violations and for an end to what appears to be a wave of politically motivated arrests.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we very much welcome this PC discussion on follow-up to the HDIM. The ultimate effectiveness of the HDIM lies in the degree to which OSCE States improve implementation of their human dimension commitments. It is, therefore, up to all of us to take action. Thank you.