



United States Mission to the OSCE

Opening Plenary Statement

As delivered by Ambassador W. Robert Pearson
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, September 29, 2008

Thank you. Mr. Moderator, Madam Tiilikainen, Mr. Secretary General, dear colleagues, our meeting today goes to the very heart of what makes the OSCE unique -- the comprehensive concept of security, encompassing the military, economic and human dimensions, with a particular prominence given to respect for human rights as the bedrock of genuine security. The ideas of the Helsinki Final Act opened an unparalleled era of democracy, peace and unity in Europe. The participating States have had the benefit of mutually agreed principles and commitments to guide us. These OSCE commitments reflect universal principles and ideals, including those enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose 60th anniversary we happily celebrate this year. All of us are here today to renew and review our commitment to these principles.

Across the OSCE region today, we must continue to do more to uphold the principles of freedom of expression, including for members of the media, and freedom of assembly. We can do more to ensure that governments allow the free dissemination of information to their populations through the media, and above all protect against intimidation and violence against members of the media. We need to ensure that efforts to address offensive speech are consistent with our commitments on freedom of expression. Even in the case of hate speech, the United States strongly believes that only speech that presents a clear and present call to violence can be justifiably forbidden.

We must also ensure that governments are themselves active in promoting freedom. Freedom of assembly and expression are indispensable elements of democratic societies and must be treated as such in national legislation and judicial rulings. Freedom of religion and belief and the right to practice that belief should be fully respected everywhere. Election registration rules should promote, not limit, the people's choice, so that elections can truly channel the will of the people.

The United States strongly supports the tolerance work done by the ODIHR and the Chairman-in-Office's three personal representatives on tolerance. They are integral in assisting the participating States in implementing existing OSCE commitments on tolerance.

We appreciate the dedication of many in OSCE region to improving the lives of the Roma population and making them more a part of their countries' political and civil lives. Much more needs to be done, however, particularly in the area of providing the identity documentation that is the first step in obtaining access to health care and education.

Finally, Mr. Moderator, I must note that upholding human rights is not only a question of how governments treat their own citizens. Russia's invasion of Georgia last month was a sad reminder to us all that violations of key principles such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, and host country consent for the stationing of foreign forces often go hand in hand with brutal abuses of human rights. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has estimated that more than 192,000 men, women and children were displaced during the recent conflict –

157,000 within Georgia and some 35,000 who fled to the Russian Federation. These violations of civilized behavior are unacceptable. It is crucial that international monitors have full access to all of Georgia, including South Ossetia and Abkhazia, to investigate the humanitarian situation there. We welcome the arrival on September 26 of the first EU monitors, who join the OSCE monitors already on the ground. We call on the Russian Federation to join consensus with the other 55 OSCE participating States to allow deployment of the remaining 80 OSCE monitors.

Today is an occasion to reaffirm the long march of freedom. Our goal should be that the OSCE region become each year, in every participating State, more free. We must resist efforts to chip away at the freedoms and liberties that were so valiantly won over the history of the Helsinki process.

We fully support your statement, Mr. Moderator, that we should recreate the Helsinki momentum. It is in this spirit of positive but frank discussion that the United States approaches the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

We especially wish to thank our host, Poland, for its efforts and its invaluable support for this meeting.

Thank you for your attention, Mr. Moderator.