

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesperson**

**For Immediate Release
2012/ T75-07**

December 6, 2012

REMARKS

**Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
At the Intervention at the OSCE Ministerial Council First Plenary Session**

**December 6, 2012
Royal Dublin Society
Dublin, Ireland**

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you very much and thanks to Foreign Minister Gilmore and the Republic of Ireland for hosting us today. We applaud your work as chair in office of the OSCE, to reaffirm this organization's core principles and strengthen its capacities to promote peace and security, champion democracy, and defend universal human rights and dignity. And we join with all members in welcoming Mongolia as the newest participating state.

As we approach the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, it is important to remember that those accords and this organization that sprang from them affirmed an inextricable link between the security of states and the security of citizens. They codified universal rights and freedoms that belong to all citizens, and those commitments empowered and encouraged dissidents to work for change. In the years that followed, the shipyard workers of Solidarity, reformers in Hungary, demonstrators in Prague all seized on the fundamental rights defined at Helsinki and they held their governments to account for not living up to the standards to which they had agreed. We are the inheritors and the guardians of that legacy.

This year alone, the OSCE sent observer missions to monitor 17 different elections, including in my own country. In May the OSCE's efforts to help dual national Kosovo Serbs vote in Serbia's elections helped ensure a largely free, fair, and peaceful process. When High Representative Ashton and I visited the Balkans in October, we heard about what a difference that made. The OSCE also supported a successful election and a peaceful transfer of power in Georgia. It is, as we have already heard, deeply engaged on Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, and Georgia. And throughout the region, the OSCE continues to advance a comprehensive approach to security that makes a difference in people's lives.

But I see a growing concern for the future of this organization and the values it has always championed. More than 20 years after the end of the Cold War, the work of creating a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace remains unfinished. I just met with a group of the Civil Society Solidarity Platform leaders from a number of member states. They talked to me about the growing challenges and dangers that they are facing, about new restrictions on human rights

from governments, new pressures on journalists, new assaults on NGOs. And I urge all of us to pay attention to their concerns.

For example, in Belarus, the Government continues to systematically repress human rights, detain political prisoners, and intimidate journalists. In Ukraine, the elections in October were a step backwards for democracy, and we remain deeply concerned about the selective prosecution of opposition leaders. In Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, there are examples of the restrictions of the freedom of expression online and offline as well as the freedom of religion. In the Caucasus, we see constraints on judicial independence, attacks on journalists, and elections that are not always free and fair.

And we have seen in Russia restrictions on civil society including proposed legislation that would require many NGOs and journalists to register as foreign agents if they receive funding from abroad. There are unfortunately signs of democratic backsliding in Hungary and challenges to constitutional processes in Romania and the ugly specter of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, discrimination against immigrants, Roma, LGBT persons, and other vulnerable populations persists.

So it is worth reminding ourselves that every participating state, including the United States, has room for improvement. The work of building a democracy and protecting human rights is never done, and one of the strengths of the OSCE has been that it provides a forum for discussing this challenge and making progress together. But there is even trouble here. This organization operates by consensus, so it cannot function when even a single state blocks progress. Forty-seven states have cosponsored the draft declaration on fundamental freedoms in the digital age, yet its path forward is blocked. The same goes for measures on media freedom, freedom of assembly and association, and military transparency.

The OSCE must avoid institutional changes that would weaken it and undermine our fundamental commitments limiting the participation of NGOs in our discussions, offering amendments and vetoing proposals to respond quickly to conflicts and crises, trying to exert greater central control over the field offices and field workers to curb their efforts on human rights, suspending implementation of treaties and agreements so there is less military transparency in Europe than a decade ago. These are not the way to progress in the 21st century.

The United States remains committed to the goal of a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace and to the OSCE whose principles are sound. We welcome any and all efforts to strengthen this organization, but that means empowering the institutions we already have to function free from interference, not curtailing them. And it means implementing the commitments we have made to one another and to our citizens, not undermining them. So as we approach the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, this is a time for the OSCE to once again take up the mantle of leadership, to push forward the frontiers of human rights and dignity, and to reaffirm the values and principles that have guided this organization ever since its founding. Thank you.

###