



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič, Director of ODIHR on the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 27, 2011

We would like to thank you, Ambassador Lenarčič, for your comprehensive assessment of this year's HDIM. The United States strongly supports ODIHR, which has earned its place as the key institution in the OSCE's efforts to promote democratic development, human rights and free and fair elections. You and your staff play a critical role in assisting participating States to meet their human dimension commitments.

We share your assessment on the success of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw. The HDIM provides an important opportunity for civil society to join us at the table and to be heard. In some cases, this meeting represents the only time they are given a hearing by their own governments.

We commend ODIHR and the Lithuanian Chairmanship for ensuring NGO access to and participation in the HDIM. We look forward to continued high standards of openness and access at the upcoming Ministerial and at next year's human dimension meetings.

We are concerned about reports that two civil society representatives from Belarus experienced harassment after returning to Minsk. The harassment has the appearance of retribution for the views they expressed to representatives at the HDIM and the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw. We call on all participating States to take whatever measures are necessary to ensure that individuals may participate freely in OSCE meetings.

Ambassador Lenarčič, we likewise thank you for presenting statistics regarding participation in the Working Sessions at the HDIM and the comprehensive set of recommendations. As we have agreed, this data will guide the incoming Irish Chairmanship and participating States on priorities for the upcoming Ministerial Council meeting and the 2012 Supplemental Human Dimension Meetings. We share your view that the topics of Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief; Freedom of Assembly and Association; Tolerance and Non-discrimination; and Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Media should be given serious consideration as priorities within the human dimension for next year. We welcome written analysis by OSCE institutions and field operations of the comprehensive set of recommendations derived from the HDIM in assisting the Permanent Council in its follow-up deliberations.

Ambassador Lenarčič, we look forward to your presentation of proposals to the Permanent Council in January for the specific topics to be prepared for discussions during Working Sessions III – VIII of the second part of the HDIM next year. Your proposals will

undoubtedly take into account the results of the upcoming Ministerial Council meeting and this Permanent Council meeting.

As has been the case in previous years, the level of participation in most sessions of the HDIM was so high that the time allotted for interventions and replies had to be curtailed multiple times. Attendance at the diverse array of the 56 side events was broad and engaged. These indicators suggest that we should maintain, or even expand, this event, and we should seek ways to increase attendance by non-governmental organizations.

It will be up to the participating States to continue their review of existing modalities of human dimension meetings, and we can undoubtedly take steps to increase the meetings' effectiveness and attractiveness. However, my government sees no need for drastic changes to the modalities. Some among the participating States have recommended shortening the HDIM, and others have advocated limiting the attendance of NGOs and civil society advocates at the event. My government strongly opposes limiting the length of the HDIM, and we should not impose restrictions on the participation of NGOs at any OSCE human dimension meeting. The participation of NGOs on an equal footing with government officials is what makes the meetings so valuable.

Ambassador Lenarčič, we wish to thank you for presenting your response to the question of geographical balance in the representation of NGOs at the HDIM. We were glad to see more than 20 U.S. NGOs participate in the meetings. Their participation in the Working Sessions and numerous side events played an important role in the HDIM, even though some of their criticism was levied against policies of the United States Government. This is what makes this event so important; the NGO's make participating States accountable for the implementation of our shared commitments.

In conclusion, the United States retains full confidence in the vital work performed by ODIHR and continues to support unequivocally its current leadership and direction.

Also, we take note of your concerns – and the concerns just expressed by the European Union – regarding the accreditation of election observers. Please also note, Ambassador Lenarčič, that the United States firmly supports your efforts to ensure the broadest possible access for election observers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.