



Parallel OSCE Civil Society Conference, Vilnius 5 December 2011

MAKING COMMITMENTS COME TRUE

Concluding Remarks by Brigitte Dufour, IPHR Director

In the presence of OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Ažubalis

Excellency, Mr. Ažubalis,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Colleagues,

On behalf of civil society representatives from across the OSCE region, who attended the Parallel OSCE Conference, I wish to reaffirm our strong commitment to the Helsinki Process, and our belief in the common responsibility of all OSCE participating States to ensure the implementation of human dimension commitments in the entire region.

To this end, all human rights organizations present here today have been working hard on developing a set of recommendations, as a follow-up to the civil society conference that took place in Astana last year. I was invited to summarize the outcome.

But first of all I would like to take this occasion to announce the establishment, on December 3, of an OSCE-wide international "Civic Solidarity" platform, which aims at mobilizing civil society organizations from Vancouver to Vladivostok for the purpose of advancing common positions on human dimension issues.

Excellency,

Unfortunately, in many OSCE States it is becoming increasingly difficult for civil society groups to organise and operate. The OSCE should do more to promote freedom of association, to protect human rights defenders and to improve freedom of movement.

Most importantly, OSCE participating states should demand the **immediate release of all individuals unjustly imprisoned for political reasons in the region**, including our colleagues, human rights defenders Ales Bialiatsky (Belarus), Evgeniy Zhovtis (Kazakhstan), Vidadi Isqenderov (Azerbaijan),

Azimzhan Askarov (Kyrgyzstan), Dilmurod Saidov and Solidzhon Abdurakhmanov (both from Uzbekistan), who have all been promoting OSCE values in their work.

Concrete measures should include elevating OSCE's work on Human Rights Defenders beyond the ODIHR Focal Point by creating an institution of the OSCE Representative on Human Rights Defenders; and strengthening the OSCE capacity for rapid response in cases where human rights defenders are in danger.

In line with the spirit and commitments of the 1975 Helsinki accords, participating States should ensure a progressive liberalization of visa regulations, in particular to enable active involvement of individuals, groups, organizations and institutions from across the OSCE states in fulfilling the human dimension commitments and in furthering conflict resolution.

Conference participants noted with concern the limitations imposed on independent **election monitors** in a number of countries in the region. Unhindered participation of independent observers of the electoral process should be made a mandatory condition for recognizing elections as legitimate.

Respect for **minority rights** is a key for the prevention of violent conflict. The OSCE should strengthen its ability to respond to early warnings and escalation of crises through increasing civilian observer capacity in connection with early warnings by the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Conflict Prevention Centre.

The Chairman-in-Office should dispatch high-level special envoys to OSCE States where there are allegations of **serious violations** of human dimension commitments.

Participating states must do more to **protect journalists and civic and political activists** from murder, physical attacks, harassment and intimidation, and end impunity for such crimes by conducting effective investigations, the results of which should be made public.

In the field of freedom of expression, all states from Vancouver to Vladivostok should also decriminalize libel, if they have not yet done so.

We raise our concerns over the **limitations imposed on the freedom to receive and disseminate information through the Internet** under the pretext of the "war on terror", extremism and regime change threat.

As we have seen in the Arab world this year, the internet can play a crucial role in empowering citizens to exercise their fundamental rights. It is therefore particularly important that the OSCE condemns restrictions imposed by participating States in this regard. The conference is also urging the OSCE Ministerial Council to endorse the Declaration on Fundamental Freedoms in the Digital Age, as proposed by the Lithuanian Chairmanship.

Excellency,

Thank you again for your attention to these issues of great concern to civil society groups in the OSCE territory. We wish you success in your discussions at the Ministerial Council.

I will now give the floor to my colleague Yuri Dzhibladze.

Thank you.