

**Closing Remarks by
Ambassador Janez Lenarcic
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and
Human Rights (ODIHR)**

**at the
13th OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 10 October 2008**



Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are now approaching the end of this Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. For the thirteenth time, and 15 years after the first HDIM took place, we have come together – governments, civil society, experts – to jointly review progress in putting the OSCE’s human dimension commitments into practice.

This may seem like a daunting exercise: the OSCE’s human dimension commitments now fill a 250-page volume and the *acquis* developed since the Helsinki Final Act covers a vast area of standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

And indeed, two weeks have been hardly enough to do this enormous task justice, even though these two weeks have been densely packed with working sessions, special focus days, and a record number of side events.

But I think it is fair to say that we have succeeded in what we came here for: to continue an open and honest dialogue about the state of affairs with regards to human rights and democracy in the OSCE region.

We have heard over the past two weeks, in the working sessions and side events, that much remains to be done in terms of implementation. I am not going to repeat what has been so aptly summarized by the rapporteurs.

Lack of implementation, drawbacks in some countries, new challenges emerging in others – certainly, the picture is not all rosy as we appear to

be entering more difficult times marked by economic downturns and increasing political tensions. This is why we all have to remain vigilant.

But we have come a long way since the Charter of Paris in 1990 heralded a new era of democracy, peace and unity. We may not have fully achieved yet what we expected, perhaps somewhat over-optimistically, in the enthusiasm that accompanied the end of the Cold War. But immense progress has been made nonetheless in strengthening transparency, pluralism, and accountability throughout the region, and with this the respect for human rights and the principles of democracy.

We should not forget these positive developments as we tackle the challenges we face today. They can serve as an encouragement for all of us here around this table working for better implementation – wherever this may be: in the ministries, parliaments, in local government, in civil society organizations, or in international bodies set up to provide expertise and assistance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This is my first HDIM as Director of the ODIHR, and from my experiences over the past two weeks, from the many encounters I have had with delegates and representatives of civil society, I can see why the HDIM remains an important tool for increasing security in our region by helping to build strong and stable societies firmly based on respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Firstly, the HDIM contributes to **building trust**. It can help building trust not only between states, but also between governments and civil society.

No other international forum brings governments and civil society together around the same table, on an equal footing, to discuss human rights issues. In some cases, this is the only forum for NGOs to freely talk to their governments. We don't always agree, of course, but we hear each others views and positions, we listen to each other, and this is a precondition for genuine dialogue. We may sometimes feel frustrated about a certain dissonance of voices, about seemingly endless debates, about recurring concerns that appear to persist. But this has also been the strength of this Organization: to meet at the same table and discuss the issues at stake to reach a common understanding, even if this sometimes can be acrimonious and seemingly incremental. I would encourage participating States not only to highlight their achievements, but also to be honest about the shortcomings and challenges they face. Doing so is a sign of strength, not weakness, and it would greatly enhance the dialogue and trust among states and between governments and civil society.

Secondly, the HDIM is a laboratory for developing **new initiatives**. Ideas and recommendations aired at the HDIM are recorded in the final report, and a number of such recommendations have been picked up by governments and the Organization's decision-making bodies in the past, and turned into concrete activities. I heard a number of proposals that, I believe, have the potential to be carried further. We will work hard over the next months on following up on the many very good recommendations that emerged from the working sessions. And I hope that you will do the same, taking advantage of the many examples of good practice we have heard during these two weeks.

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to the Finnish Chairmanship for their strong support not only in organizing this meeting, but also more generally the work of ODIHR.

My thanks also go to the OSCE institutions, the secretariat and field operations for their important contributions. I'm very pleased that the President of the OSCE PA, Joao Soares, is attending this closing session. This testifies to the close contacts we have and the willingness to have a good co-operation in working together on human dimension issues.

And I want to thank all of you who have contributed with your presentations, statements and ideas to the success of this meeting.

We are very grateful also to our Polish hosts for their hospitality during these two weeks, and for hosting ODIHR here in Warsaw.

A big thank you goes to my colleagues at ODIHR, for their tireless efforts which have made this meeting possible. We appreciate a lot the excellent work done by our notetakers and rapporteurs, who gave us a very good overview of the issues that were raised and the recommendations that were made during this meeting. And finally I wish to thank the interpreters for making sure that we all understood each other, at least language-wise.

I look forward to working with you all, as we at ODIHR move ahead in developing our programmes and implementing them together with you.

I wish you a safe journey back home and look forward to welcoming you again next year.