



**Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**

**High Commissioner on National Minorities**

[www.osce-hcnm.org](http://www.osce-hcnm.org)

**MAX VAN DER STOEL AWARD 2009  
OPENING ADDRESS**

by  
**Knut Vollebaek**

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

**Presentation of  
the Max van der Stoel Award  
to the Integration and Development Centre  
for Information and Research (Ukraine)**

[Check Against Delivery]

The Hague, the Netherlands – 14 October 2009

Minister Timmermans,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very warm welcome to all of you. A very special welcome to the person who has given his name to the award, namely Minister Max van der Stoel. It is a great pleasure to see you here today. Let me also welcome Frans Timmermans, Minister for European Affairs of the Netherlands, who will present the fourth Max van der Stoel Award laureate and hand over the prize of 50.000 Euro to the award winner, the NGO Integration and Development Centre for Information and Research from Ukraine.

Allow me at the very outset of this event to thank the Government of the Netherlands for establishing this significant award. The Award celebrates a famous son of the Netherlands, Minister of State Max van der Stoel. Throughout his renowned career, Minister van der Stoel was a champion of the oppressed, excluded and discriminated. He is internationally recognized as an outspoken protagonist for human and minority rights.

Max van der Stoel's path-breaking work for the OSCE in the field of conflict prevention began in the early 1990s; an era when parts of Europe were in flames, and ethnic cleansing, genocide and nationalism each became household words; when crying men, women and children, carrying their meagre belongings, stared out from our TV screens every day.

The challenge faced by a Europe torn apart by interethnic conflict was unprecedented. Against this backdrop, the Netherlands and a group of like-minded countries took an equally unprecedented step. They proposed setting up a preventive and intrusive mechanism – the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities – to nip interethnic hostilities in the bud.

When Max van der Stoel assumed his duties in January 1993, he entered largely uncharted territory. He stated that he would “have to explore a path which has not been trodden before”. Indeed, by then the CSCE Copenhagen Document, the most important catalogue of minority rights at that time, had only been endorsed less than 3 years before. The UN Declaration on Minorities was passed first a month later.

Minister Van der Stoel approached his tasks with typical Dutch sobriety. He was not afraid to call things by their real names. His research of issues was meticulous. His treatment of the parties involved was impartial.

At the time, Minister van der Stoel did not always make friends in the countries he visited. In 1999, Xan Smiley of The Economist compared van der Stoel's role to that of a prefect in a rundown boys' school: “The prefect's main job is to stop big boys from bullying little ones,

and to stop boys of all sizes from fighting among themselves. He is not allowed to use his own fists... He is, perforce, a bit of a swot, a bit of a sneak, and a bit of a prig. Nobody likes him much.”

This is, however, no longer true. Today he is remembered all over the OSCE area for his dedication, impartiality and pragmatic attitude seeking solutions to some of the most burning problems of that time. As Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE in 1999 I witnessed first hand the impact he had. Today I can harvest and build on the solid foundations laid down by him during his times as High Commissioner.

When Max van der Stoel retired in 2001, he left behind an impressive imprint on the minority rights regime in Europe and beyond. Many places in the OSCE region became much safer than they had been prior to 1993. And a lot of the credit for this goes to him. Even governments that at one time were sceptical now realize the importance of his contribution to conflict prevention and integration.

Minister Timmermans,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the places regularly visited by Max van der Stoel was the Ukrainian Crimea Region. By the end of 1994, he had been to the peninsula several times. In 1995-1996, Van der Stoel brokered an agreement between the authorities in Kyiv and Simferopil through a series of confidential meetings. His interest in the regional situation continued unabated in the years to come.

Crimea is blessed with fertile land, a warm sea and breathtakingly picturesque views. At the same time, this region has seen some of the worst fighting known to Europe in the course of its history, and has changed hands many times. It was also witness to some of the most heinous crimes committed by the Stalinist regime. Thousands of Crimean Russians, Ukrainians, Jews and others perished in the purges. Sixty-five years ago hundreds of thousands – Crimean Tatars, Greeks, Armenians, Bulgarians and others – were thrown into cattle trucks and forcefully resettled. The people hardly had time to gather their belongings before they were forced to travel for weeks without any food or warm clothes, eating grass to survive.

Scars of injustice run deep in Crimea. The relationship between ethnic groups there is fraught with stereotypes, prejudices and historical woes. In June this year, a leading Crimean newspaper published a poll taken among Crimean youth. A staggering 41.5 per cent of the young people supported the 1944 deportations of Crimean Tatars.

The Ukrainian Government, civil society and international actors still have a lot to do to further tolerant interethnic coexistence on the peninsula. This must of course be done respecting both the territorial integrity of Ukraine and the linguistic, educational and participatory rights of Russians, Ukrainians, Crimean Tatars and other communities.

For all these reasons, the region of Crimea remains a priority area for the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities. Fortunately, the HCNM is not alone in attempting to heal the scars. Many grass-roots initiatives seeking to build bridges between the communities in Crimea have sprung up. One such organization is the Integration and Development Centre for Information and Research.

Since its founding in 1997, this NGO has trained government officials and members of the police service in diversity management, monitored the press for hate speech, assisted formerly deported peoples and engaged in conflict prevention at the local level. In 2006, the HCNM and the IDC joined hands in tackling intolerance and xenophobia at grass-roots level. Together with the Renaissance Foundation, the IDC has introduced a facultative course entitled “Culture of Good Neighbourhood” in Crimean schools. This course is now a recognized part of the effort by the authorities and civil society to instil values of tolerance and respect from an early age.

The Integration and Development Centre for Information and Research is a worthy disciple of Max van der Stoel and his conflict prevention and integration work in Ukraine.

Minister Timmermans,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Netherlands took a bold decision when it inaugurated the Max van der Stoel Award in 2003. It is a noble, long-term investment both acknowledging and further inspiring activities that have a tangible impact on majorities and minorities alike. The work of all the laureates – the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies, the Russian NGO Memorial, the European Roma Rights Centre and now the Ukrainian Integration and Development Centre for Information and Research – makes a difference to the daily lives of so many.

We are very honoured to have among us today the director of IDC, Mr. Oleg Smirnov, and IDC’s specialist for its intercultural education programme, Ms. Margarita Aradzhyoni.

Let me now read the Jury’s citation for this year’s Award before I leave the floor to Mr. Frans Timmermans, Minister for European Affairs of the Netherlands.

### **Jury Motivation: Max van der Stoel Award 2009**

The Jury has decided to confer the 2009 Max van der Stoel Award on the Integration and Development Center for Information and Research (IDC) for its efforts to promote tolerance and understanding among the multi-ethnic population of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula. For many years the IDC has initiated, developed and implemented projects, particularly in the field of education, aimed at facilitating genuine integration and participation of all ethnic communities in Crimea.

The Jury considers these efforts as particularly cogent in light of the challenges facing Crimea, including the return of formerly deported people to the region, local interethnic and inter-religious tensions and strained international relations. The message that IDC has consistently advocated through its work is that Crimea, as an integral part of Ukraine, should be home to all communities, be it ethnic Ukrainians, Russians or Crimean Tatars and not exclusively to any one group. As such, this NGO plays an important and commendable role as a builder of bridges in a divided society. It has become a symbol of co-operation and tolerance, admirably reflecting the spirit of the work of Max van der Stoel and making it a deserving and befitting recipient of the Award that bears his name.