



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Strohal, Director of ODIHR

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 29, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On behalf of the United States, I would like to thank Ambassador Strohal for his thorough and useful presentation on ODIHR's priorities in the year 2004, as well as for his leadership of this important institution in 2003. We would also like to begin by reaffirming our belief in ODIHR's important role in helping to promote security by improving respect for human rights and the rule of law in all OSCE participating States. The belief that true stability can only be achieved by ensuring democracy and fundamental human rights is central to the Helsinki Principles. ODIHR is a critical tool to help all of us fulfill the commitments that we have undertaken.

It is apparent from the presentations to the Permanent Council this year that 2004 will be a year of implementation. The United States strongly supports and encourages this emphasis. As Ambassador Strohal has pointed out, there were a number of areas during 2003 in which the OSCE adopted strategies and decisions that require urgent implementation.

Promoting tolerance and reinforcing the fight against racism, xenophobia, discrimination, and anti-Semitism will be a significant area of ODIHR activity in 2004. We are pleased by the importance Ambassador Strohal placed on this issue in his presentation.

We encourage ODIHR to get implementation of the Maastricht Decision on Tolerance off the ground as quickly as possible. In this vein, we urge that serious consideration be given to using the 300,000 Euros earmarked in the 2004 budget for Maastricht follow-up for establishing a tolerance program. In addition, we hope that ODIHR will be able to present a report to the Anti-Semitism Conference in Berlin on April 28-29 on the steps it has taken to implement the Maastricht Tolerance Decision.

Ambassador Strohal is absolutely correct in reminding the participating States of our responsibilities under the Maastricht Tolerance decision and we call on fellow participating States to lend their support to ODIHR as it seeks information on hate crime statistics, legislation, and best practices to fight intolerance.

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate the valuable contribution that ODIHR's election observation efforts make to democratization throughout the OSCE region. We commend ODIHR, in particular, for organizing an effective observer mission to Georgia's presidential election earlier this month, on very short notice, as well as an observation mission to Georgia's November 2003 parliamentary elections. The United States stands ready to provide observers again for the new round of

parliamentary elections scheduled in March, as well as for many other important ODIHR-led observation missions.

We applaud Ambassador Strohal's intention to develop a systematic approach to follow-up as part of ODIHR's overall election observation methodology. Implementation of ODIHR recommendations is a key aspect of the election observation process and should be improved. In light of ODIHR's critical role in election observation and other areas, we are sensitive to ODIHR's budget concerns that Ambassador Strohal so eloquently expressed a few moments ago. The United States is prepared to consider adjustments at the mid-year review to ensure that important requirements can be met.

We fully support Ambassador Strohal's continuing efforts to enhance ODIHR's operational capacities, improve management and enhance communication with delegations. We attach particular importance to multi-annual programming as a way to enhance on this organization's return on its investment in ODIHR's work.

We recall the discussions that took place in 2003 between ODIHR and the Russian Federation concerning possible ODIHR work in Chechnya. Along the lines of the human rights concerns that Secretary Powell raised with Russian authorities during his recent visit to Moscow, we encourage ODIHR and Russia to reach agreement on practical, on-the-ground programs for promoting human rights education and human rights training of law enforcement officers in Chechnya itself. In light of recent reports that three remaining tent camps in Ingushetiya for internally displaced persons from Chechnya may be closed in 2004, we urge the Russian Government to adhere to the principle of voluntary return and to provide alternative shelter for IDPs who may not wish to return to Chechnya.

Mr. Chairman, the United States is pleased to join consensus on the topic and dates of the Human Dimension Seminar and the dates, as well as the special topics for the second week, of the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. At the same time, we will look for additional focus in the Seminar topic of "Democratic Institutions and Human Rights," perhaps by highlighting issues such as improved public access to government information, increased public participation in decision-making, or less restrictive registration requirements for political parties and civil society organizations. It is also important that creative ways be found to involve NGOs in the HDIM special topic on "Complementarity and Cooperation Between International Institutions in Promoting Human Rights." It would be useful if NGO representatives could offer their perspective on cooperation among and with international organizations.

Mr. Chairman, I hope my remarks illustrate the strong U.S. support for ODIHR. ODIHR's efforts warrant the support of all participating States as it pursues goals that are at the core of our organization and central to protecting human dignity.