



United States Mission to the OSCE

Opening Statement

Delivered by Ambassador Larry Napper, Head of the U.S. Delegation
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
October 4, 2004

Mr. Chairman and distinguished delegations,

For twelve years, we, the participating States of the OSCE, have gathered annually to review our commitments to the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The mandate for both formal review conferences and this implementation meeting was visionary for several reasons. The first was that it built on the landmark decisions of the Helsinki Accords and the 1991 Moscow Concluding Document, which established that human dimension issues were the legitimate interest of all OSCE States and did not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of any one nation. The second was the inclusion of non-governmental organizations at the meetings. Those two principles have served us well over the years. We have all seen how the collective concern of our members can galvanize the political will needed for policy reassessment, positive change, and strengthening of democratic institutions. We have also noted the exceptional contribution of non-governmental organizations as watchful guardians of our commitments and have valued them as experts, as activists and as allies. We are very glad to see so many of them represented here today.

Each of our Human Dimension Implementation Meetings has been unique, but important common threads run through them all. Perhaps the most significant of these is the clear recognition that, in the pursuit of full protection for human rights and fundamental freedoms, no society can declare that its job is done. This fact should not be understood as an excuse for countries not to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, but rather, should stand as a warning against complacency and inaction. The commitment to human rights must be maintained with vigilance, and encouraged on every possible occasion and passed from generation to generation.

The American people were shocked by the abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. These acts were wrong and were inconsistent with U.S. policies and values. We will take the opportunity in the upcoming days to elaborate on the measures the U.S. has taken and will take to address concerns about treatment of detainees, including at a special side-event we are organizing.

Likewise, it is the sign of a healthy community, such as that of the OSCE, to openly raise and discuss such issues, regardless of which member of our community is affected. As we have jointly acknowledged, in the words of the Moscow Document, "commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the CSCE are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned." I hope that our willingness to discuss the sensitive topic of treatment of detainees, even at a time when criminal cases are being brought against U.S. service members and civilians, and investigations and reviews are ongoing, will demonstrate the strength of

democratic institutions and the need for transparency. We hope other participating States will also use this session to deal openly with acts that are similarly inconsistent with the human dimension goals of the OSCE.

As former Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Lorne Craner said in May, “who would be better off if we self-consciously turned inward and ignored human rights abuses elsewhere...?” Therefore, while we will continue efforts to improve our effectiveness at ensuring respect for human rights, we will also continue to raise human rights concerns we may have with respect to other countries.

Mr. Chairman, over the next few days we will be examining many situations throughout the OSCE region, including tolerance, freedom of assembly, democratic elections and the rule of law. The United States is interested in knowing more about how a wide variety of human dimension issues can be better addressed and will openly express concern where it sees violations of OSCE commitments. But, we will also be listening.