



United States Mission to the OSCE

OPENING PLENARY

**Statement of Ambassador Pamela Hyde Smith
U.S. Delegation to the OSCE Implementation Meeting
October 6, 2003**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States considers the OSCE, and this Human Dimension Meeting, to be essential resources in our core objective of promoting democratic development and respect for human rights throughout the vast OSCE region. This year marks the tenth anniversary of this forum, the single most important human dimension activity on the busy OSCE calendar. Over the past decade, we have pushed to strengthen this platform and highlight it as a vital link between the Organization and the NGO community. We consider the protection of human rights a fundamental responsibility of each of our States, one that ensures human dignity, security, and prosperity. We cannot attempt to address the threat to the stability of our region, if we do not deal with ensuring the fundamental human and democratic rights of our populations. The United States is committed to drawing attention to the work we do here and reinforcing these efforts in capitals.

The reason for this is simple.

The promotion of human rights is vital for security. It is a fight against the greed, aggression and abuses that foster conflicts. But the process of protecting human rights is continual.

Every generation learns for itself that it must enter the struggle if it is to protect human rights. All of us must stay alert as challenges change and new protections are needed. Outside the U.S. National Archives Building in Washington stands a monument that says, "Eternal Vigilance is the Price of Liberty." That vigilance is the heart of this meeting.

The beauty of the OSCE Human Dimension Meeting is that it lets us assess our progress and renew our commitments in a room with nations that hold common values. We all have signed the Helsinki Final Act that launched this process. As Andrei Sakharov aptly observed, "The whole point of the Helsinki Accords is mutual monitoring, not mutual evasion of difficult problems."

We all know where we stand. We can speak freely here. Because of this openness, we have the opportunity to look candidly at current issues and challenges, as well as encourage those who are struggling to solve problems that have long and difficult histories. By our collective efforts, we can give support to those governments trying to make changes that are sometimes difficult for their societies to accept.

It is the responsibility of every government to listen to these views, and to allow freedom of media and freedom of speech to give voice to these debates. It is also the responsibility of every government to ensure that victims of human rights violations have redress, through an independent judiciary system. Respect for human rights and the implementation of our common OSCE commitments are the responsibility of our governments. We can discuss over the next two weeks how the OSCE can assist States in implementing their commitments, but the will to do so must come from the States themselves.

Mr. Chairman, we are also confronted with the reality that some have simply stopped trying and reverted to authoritarianism and worse. I would like to raise one pressing example of this – namely, Turkmenistan – and I do so in hopes of sparking a discussion during this meeting that might result in ideas for ameliorating the situation there. There are also pressing concerns elsewhere, especially in the Republic of Belarus.

The new era of democracy boldly proclaimed in the Charter of Paris has yet to be realized throughout the OSCE region, notwithstanding the courage of individual men and women, the strength of the will of the people, and the power of the ideas of the Helsinki Final Act.

Mr. Chairman, I said the Human Dimension meeting was important, but I did not say it was painless. Every nation here has felt discomfort from time to time as the spotlight is turned on its problems. And often the pressures felt in Warsaw are just an extension of critical opinions voiced at home. The conversations that take place here usually reflect pressures that are brought to bear elsewhere. In the United States, for example, we have had animated public discussions during the past year across the spectrum of public policy issues, from the conduct of elections to the right to privacy, to the imposition of the death penalty and the detention of suspected terrorists. Those and many more human rights concerns are still very much in play among the critical American public.

The triumph of democracy is, of course, that these debates take place, not just occasionally in hushed rooms, but continuously, loudly and pervasively. And from this come the efforts to keep improving our records and inventing new solutions. That is the opportunity we all have here.

Mr. Chairman, our aim should be to inspire and promote directed action. At its best, this forum should be a catalyst for producing innovative approaches to the human dimension. It should give us new perspectives and a renewed commitment to the power of those ideas enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act. As President Bush has noted, “Freedom is the non-negotiable demand of human dignity.” May our work here in Warsaw respond to that demand.

In closing, I wish to note with respect that today is Yom Kippur, the most solemn day of Judaism, which takes on special importance given our venue and the goals of this meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.