

OSCE PA President Christine Muttonen's address to the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, Poland

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Ministers, Director Link, distinguished guests,

When the Heads of State signed the Charter of Paris 26 years ago, they ensured their people democracy and human rights – not as a luxury, but because they knew that democratic and human rights principles are key pillars for creating a peaceful, prosperous and united Europe.

And it comes as no surprise that in the same document the Heads of State call for the creation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE – because they acknowledged that it would be parliamentarians from the participating States that have a key role to play and make sure that these principles are realized by their governments and the OSCE as a whole.

We take this responsibility seriously and I am very pleased to be here with you today. To discuss with you and assure you the Assembly's support when it comes to implementing the human dimension commitments of OSCE participating States. The Parliamentary Assembly greatly appreciates this annual meeting. It is an important place to share good practices across the OSCE area and to make recommendations for further improvement. In many ways it complements our own work in the Assembly to ensure compliance with OSCE commitments.

The PA works as an inclusive forum for international dialogue. We not only seek to build trust across our countries, but we also promote pragmatic solutions to our common problems. In high-level forums such as the OSCE PA's Annual Session, parliamentarians from 56 countries work to hold each other accountable. As importantly, we bring the values of the OSCE back to our national capitals and strive to hold our own governments to account.

When it comes to human dimension commitments, no country is immune from criticism. This became especially clear in face of the global refugee and migrant crisis. As the UN Refugee Agency reported in June, more than 65 million people were displaced at the end of 2015. On average 24 people were forced to flee their homes every minute on every single day of last year.

Yet, rather than responding to this crisis with urgency, empathy and solidarity, many of our governments have taken a so-called “not in my backyard” approach. They sought to build fences and walls while ignoring the plight of refugees. Worse, perhaps, we have failed to properly address migration's underlying causes, like conflicts, poverty, political repression and climate change.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Human rights have been de-emphasized. We must place them back at the very top of the international agenda.

In the Tbilisi Declaration that the Parliamentary Assembly recently adopted, we highlighted “a crisis of leadership and ideas” when it comes to human rights. A sad example of this leadership crisis in recent years is the failure at the ministerial level to reach decisions on OSCE human dimension commitments.

This growing lack of consensus among governments on human rights couldn't come at a worse time – as we attempt to develop a values-based, comprehensive response to the humanitarian crisis of migrants and refugees. This is why our Tbilisi Declaration called for governments to recognize the fundamental rights of refugees.

Today's forum and the wide-ranging discussions that will be held here over the next two weeks are essential. The annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting is one of the few forums for the voices of civil society to be heard on par with governmental representatives. It is only through this sort of open dialogue that we may hope to build understanding and achieve consensus.

Reviewing our implementation of human dimension commitments is something that should be done every single day at the highest possible level. Thus we hope to ensure that our comprehensive commitments are upheld – as laid out by the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris and other landmark OSCE documents.

With this in mind, the Parliamentary Assembly is always looking forward to working with our partners within the OSCE, the broader international community and civil society, to promote accountability and advance the cause of human security for all of us.