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Head of the Netherlands' Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

Opening Remarks to the 33rd Annual Session

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President of the Senate, Ms. Mei Li Vos,
President of the House of Representatives, Mr. Thom van Campen,
Prime Minister, Mr. Rob Jetten,

Minister Ignazio Cassis,
President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. Pere Pons,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We gather today in The Hague, the international city of peace and justice, at a time when both are under profound pressure.

On behalf of the Netherlands delegation, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Having served this Assembly in different capacities over many years, and having visited many of your countries, it is a particular privilege to welcome you to my own city. The Hague reminds us that peace is more than the absence of war, and justice more than an aspiration. Both require strong institutions, political courage and an unwavering commitment to the rule of law.

That commitment is urgently needed.

The international order is under severe strain. Russia's continuing aggression against Ukraine remains the gravest threat to security in our region, violating the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Beyond our region, the devastating violence in Lebanon, Gaza and West Bank continues to claim an unbearable human toll. The recent escalation in the Middle East has shown once again how quickly regional conflicts can threaten global stability, disrupt economies and undermine confidence in diplomacy and international law. Whether in Ukraine, Middle East, Sudan or elsewhere, civilians pay the highest price when international law is ignored.

International law cannot be applied selectively. If we expect states to respect the rules, those rules must apply equally to all. Otherwise, we weaken not only international institutions but also the trust of our own citizens we represent.

Meanwhile, another crisis continues to reshape our common security. Across the OSCE region—from North America to Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia—extreme heat, drought, floods and wildfires are placing growing pressure on water, food and energy security. Climate change is not only an environmental challenge; it is a security challenge.

These developments remind us why the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security remains so relevant. Lasting security depends not only on military strength, but also on democracy, human rights, the rule of law, economic resilience, environmental sustainability and resilient societies.

This is where parliamentary diplomacy has a unique role. Even when governments disagree, parliamentarians can continue to engage. Through dialogue, election observation, committee work and cooperation across political divides, we preserve channels of communication and build trust. I have witnessed this throughout the OSCE region, including in Central Asia, where parliamentary cooperation continues to strengthen regional dialogue and support local communities.

But dialogue alone is not enough. The declarations and resolutions we adopt here must shape legislation, strengthen democratic oversight and inform the policies of our governments.

Last year, in Porto, we reaffirmed our commitment to the fundamental principles of the OSCE: respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and international cooperation. The Porto Declaration, like the declarations that preceded it, reminds us that these are not abstract principles but shared commitments. I hope the declaration we adopt here in The Hague will reaffirm that same conviction: that lasting peace and security can only be built on respect for international law, democracy and human dignity.

Colleagues,

Peace, security and cooperation cannot be taken for granted. They require political courage, consistency and a willingness to defend the principles we have all committed ourselves to uphold.

As we begin this Annual Session, let us use these days not only to debate, but also to listen. Let us seek common ground where we can, speak honestly where we disagree, and strengthen the trust that makes cooperation possible.

The OSCE was created because our predecessors understood a simple truth: security cannot endure without cooperation, and cooperation cannot endure without trust. Rebuilding that trust is perhaps the greatest task before us today.

Let us approach it with honesty, courage and the conviction that dialogue—even when difficult—is always stronger than silence.

I wish you all a productive and inspiring session.

Thank you.