

OSCE Parliamentary Assembly President Pia Kauma

Human Dimension Conference, Warsaw, 2 October 2023

Mr. Chairperson, Minister Rau,
Director Mecacci, Secretary General Schmid,
Representative Ribeiro,
Director O'Flaherty,
Distinguished Participants,

Let me join previous speakers in congratulating the Chairpersonship of North Macedonia, together with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, for convening the 2023 Human Dimension Conference.

I am grateful to be here to represent the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on this important occasion. This conference provides a unique platform for participating States, civil society actors, human rights defenders, and international experts to exchange views and good practices at Europe's largest annual human rights conference.

While I commend the Chairpersonship's efforts to keep human rights and democracy questions at the center of OSCE activities by organizing this conference, I regret that - for the third year in a row – consensus was not reached to hold a full-fledged Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

The systematic misuse of the consensus rule and the politicized withholding of financial resources continue to obstruct the work of the OSCE's institutions and its field operations. The real-life impact on people's enjoyment of their rights is clear. This is why the OSCE PA persists in highlighting the need for closer cooperation and tirelessly advocates for higher level political engagement to overcome the crisis which our organization is currently facing.

Beginning with the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, our organization has developed a vast set of norms and standards based on a comprehensive approach to security based on the recognition that human rights and democracy questions are of equal concern as politico-military co-operation or economic and environmental governance. Today, we are observing deeply troubling trends as fundamental freedoms are increasingly under threat and democratic standards and institutions are being progressively undermined in many parts of the OSCE region.

Speaking of troublesome developments within the OSCE region, Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine constitutes gross violations of every founding

principle of our organization, which is why upholding and defending our human dimension commitments is vital.

Dear guests,

The human dimension is an integral part of our work in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Our Assembly, and specifically our Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, has been dedicated to shedding light on the gross abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by the Russian Federation in Ukraine. Our Vancouver Declaration adopted by our Assembly earlier this year unequivocally condemns the war in Ukraine and highlights the multifaceted impacts of the war, including its humanitarian consequences such as the millions of internally displaced people and war refugees, conflict-related sexual violence and risks of human trafficking, as well as the forcible transfer of Ukrainian children by the Russian Federation.

Furthermore, the Assembly has established a Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine with the aim to consolidate all of the OSCE PA's concrete efforts in support of Ukraine to ensure that the war remains at the forefront of our activities and that Ukraine's needs are fully considered by the Assembly.

While continuing to lend support to Ukraine is of utmost priority for the OSCE PA, we recognize that other areas of concern in the OSCE region equally require our attention:

In the field of elections, OSCE parliamentarians continue to actively observe elections throughout our region to promote effective institutions in view of the election-related standards participating States have committed to. This year, we observed the Parliamentary Elections in Kazakhstan and the General Elections in Türkiye. I will personally be leading observers here in Poland for the parliamentary elections taking place in two weeks. In carrying out our election observation activities, we enjoy ever-closer relations with our partners from the ODIHR – both at a leadership and staff level.

Attacks on freedom of expression remain a great concern for the Assembly. As such, the OSCE PA is highly engaged in activities related to the protection of the freedom of opinion and expression, media freedom and the safety of journalists, and closely cooperates with other OSCE institutions: most recently, the OSCE PA and Representative on Freedom of the Media held a joint event on *Countering Online Violence Against Women*.

Our ad hoc committees on Countering Terrorism and on Migration continue to be active by conducting field visits, reaching out to international partners, and raising vital issues in

national parliaments. This has contributed to develop sound policy guidelines as it regards counter-terrorism strategies and migration governance, which are also key priority areas for the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

The important work of our Special Representatives should also be mentioned in the context of human dimension commitments. Through these Special Representatives – to name a few key areas - we raise awareness on persisting cases of prejudice and discrimination, and we advocate for gender equality by monitoring developments in the OSCE region, particularly as it concerns the inclusion of women politicians in democratic law-making processes. Further, we promote youth engagement in OSCE PA activities, and work to advance OSCE values with youth.

Lastly but certainly not least, I want to invite you to read the OSCE PA resolution *On the Role of National Parliaments in Enhancing Participation of Civil Society in Parliamentary and Decision-Making Processes* our Assembly adopted last July as part of the Vancouver Declaration. This resolution encompasses a wide range of recommendations directed at national authorities, including those related to strengthening dialogue with civil society actors. In this respect, I am proud that our Assembly is able to offer its contribution here in Warsaw: OSCE PA Vice-President Kyriakos Hadjyianni (Cyprus) will be hosting a side event on the role of civil society in the work of national parliaments. This will be a valuable opportunity to exchange with OSCE representatives, civil society actors and international experts as to how national parliaments, as well as international parliamentary fora such as the OSCE PA, can better integrate civil society in their work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me reiterate that a vibrant and strong civil society is fundamental for the promotion and protection of human rights, and democratic values as a whole. Bearing in mind years of democratic backsliding in the OSCE region, and specifically the shrinking space for civil society, this conference will enable us – together with civil society actors – to spotlight human rights and democracy concerns, and to proceed to review the human dimension commitments all OSCE participating states have prescribed to. So to those of you representing non-governmental organizations: I appeal to you to please participate actively, and help us all to hold each other accountable.

With this in mind, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is looking forward to working with all our partners present here today – participating States, OSCE institutions and civil society – to continue to promote accountability and advance human security across the OSCE area in these incredibly challenges times.

Thank you very much