



Address of the Permanent Representative of Iceland, Mr. Guðni Bragason, at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, 16 September 2019, Warsaw, Poland.

Madam Chair.

Allow me to thank our Polish hosts for their hospitality and ODIHR, the Director and her team, for organizing this most important gathering within the OSCE Human Dimension, bringing to the table representatives of Member States, civil society, and the distinguished key-note Speaker, H.E. Lech Walesa, former President of Poland.

Next year we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. The commitment to human rights, gender equality and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction as to race, language or religion, was established in the UN Charter. Still, however, these fundamental freedoms, are being challenged in many countries, by individuals but also by state sponsored violence

The OSCE is an organization which actively confronts difficult human rights situations on a day-to-basis, be it in the meetings in Vienna, or through the work of independent institutions, like ODIHR, the Representative on the Freedom of Media and the High Commissioner for National Minorities, as well as by the missions in the field. OSCE plays a vital role in in the constant struggle to preserve democracy, liberty, human rights and economic rights.

Madam Chair.

We welcome the HDIM emphasis on the media, the freedom of expression and the precarious situation of journalists and the media in Europe. We need to follow-up on the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on the Safety of Journalists in Milano last December where attacks on journalists were condemned, and which called for their protection by law. Our message should be loud and clear: The media is an integral part of democratic and pluralistic society, and fundamental for our common security.

The Conference in London this summer, called by Canada and the UK, sharpened our focus on these matters. As a follow up, Iceland will increasingly prioritize media freedom in its work at the Human Rights Council, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

We are committed to the rights to freedom of expression, of peaceful assembly and of association, offline as well as online. Last week, in Prague, we discussed digital developments. Digital technologies bring many opportunities, but have also the potential to create challenges, risks and threats. Emerging trends in State actions to control and impede access to and use of digital technologies with the aim of limiting fundamental freedoms, are of grave concern. We are concerned that the targeted surveillance of journalists, civil society, politicians and others who are exercising their right to freedom of expression, has assumed Orwellian proportions.

Madam Chair.

I like to recall the Ministerial Declaration in Milano on **Violence against Women**, which was a considerable achievement, and which should encourage us to venture further.

Sustainable peace can only be accomplished with the active inclusion and meaningful participation of those affected by conflict, irrespective of their gender. Women must have a seat at the table and their voices must be heard. Effective implementation of the UN Security Council resolution nr. 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security would strengthen the comprehensive security role of the OSCE. The provisions of the resolution should be well integrated into OSCE-structures and field missions. We should use the up-coming 20th anniversary of the resolution as an opportunity to assess what has been achieved and where we could do better in mainstreaming the UNSC resolution 1325 into the work of the OSCE. We also encourage the adoption of their first National Action Plans on resolution 1325.

Women, children, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and LGBTI persons are particularly vulnerable to discrimination. **LGBTI persons** continue to face discrimination, social exclusion, harassment, torture and even arbitrary killings and attacks in some Member States. Iceland has made the rights of LGBTI individuals a priority during its membership of the UN Human Rights Council. Human rights are

universal and we must make sure that everyone can enjoy their rights and freedom, irrespective of their sexual orientation.

Iceland is a strong supporter of LGBTI+ rights internationally, while also making progress at home. Last June a new legislation on gender self-identification was passed in the Icelandic Parliament, granting individuals over the age of fifteen the right to register their self-identified gender.

This milestone legislation puts Iceland among the most progressive states when it comes to the status of LGBTI+ human rights. In addition to ensuring the rights to gender self-identification, without specific requirements such as medical diagnosis or medical intervention, the legislation is also intended to protect the right to bodily integrity. (Subsequently, a working group on the rights of intersex children will be established.

Madam Chair.

Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are fundamental prerequisites in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) directly express economic, social and cultural rights. Goal 16 on *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions* is particularly important in order to prevent and combat the shrinking democratic space globally.

Thank you.