



Address of Ambassador Guðni Bragason, Permanent Representative of Iceland, delivered at the OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna, 14th May 2020.

Mr Chairman.

I like to begin by thanking the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and Director Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir for the comprehensive Annual Report for 2019.

The report demonstrates the professionalism of ODIHR and its staff. It clearly shows ODIHR's steadfast adherence to OSCE principles and commitments in co-operation with participating States.

These principles are regularly challenged; the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences causing the latest threat to democratic institutions and human rights. ODIHR has risen to this occasion and vigorously upheld the rule of law and democracy, as have the other independent institutions.

Throughout the participating States one sees the footprint of ODIHR, but rarely so lasting as in election monitoring, which is perhaps the most visible activity of ODIHR. We hope that on-site election monitoring can be resumed shortly, and that we can generate the necessary means and manpower for this important work.

The recent rise of violent extremism leading to terrorism and growing use of Internet and social media as tools of misinformation and political control is of great concern. As identified in the report, the work of human rights defenders has therefore been increasingly impeded.

Human rights defenders give voice to the voiceless and participating States must ensure that they enjoy freedom of movement, have safe spaces and communications channels in order to create and participate in networks. We value ODIHR's increased efforts to conduct capacity-building activities related to digital security for human rights defenders.

We especially appreciate the emphasis on the gender perspective in the report. Ensuring the equal and meaningful participation of women and men in public and political life is essential for democratic societies.

The development of Gender Action Plans in Parliaments, mentioned in the report, gives reason to hope for more inclusive legislative assemblies and should serve as an inspiration for Participating States to follow suit.

Moreover, we appreciate ODIHR's work on providing a dialogue between national authorities and civil society organizations, as demonstrated by the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings (HDIMs). A vibrant and pluralistic civil society, both online and offline, is essential to a democracy.

Finally, Mr Chairman.

These days we have discussed the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on OSCE's work in all three dimensions, giving us a moment to reassess matters and prepare for future work of the organisation. ODIHR is and will be a key tool in safeguarding of our shared commitments.

Thank you.