



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR CHRISTIAN STROHAL

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
7 February 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Norway joins others in warmly welcoming Ambassador Strohal back to the Permanent Council. We thank him for his presentation and fully support his programme and priorities for 2008 in building and strengthening democracy throughout the OSCE area.

Mr. Chairman,

Free and fair elections, with full legitimacy at both national and international levels, are a cornerstone in any democratic system, and international election observation is an important contribution towards reaching that goal throughout the OSCE area. Let me once again commend the ODIHR for its internationally recognised methodology in election observation, which has again proven its worth in a number of recent, successfully accomplished election observations. Norway has full confidence in ODIHR's professional and impartial role and expertise in this area.

All the participating states have voluntarily entered into election related commitments. We call on all participating states to wholeheartedly work together with the ODIHR during the entire election process and also to examine carefully and follow up any recommendations emanating from ODIHR.

Mr Chairman,

Let me also stress that our organisation needs to have an open door to the NGOs, especially now that many NGOs face a great number of administrative and political challenges in some participating states. Norway remains firmly committed to an active and extensive NGO participation in OSCE events along the existing modalities, as set out in the Helsinki Document of 1992.

Mr. Chairman,

The Norwegian delegation concurs with Ambassador Strohal that the Participating States should speedily agree on the dates and the agendas for the upcoming events in the Human Dimension. These events should, in our opinion, focus on the fundamental human rights like; freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion or belief, the rule of law, democratic governance as well as the work of Human Rights Defenders.

Mr. Chairman,

A substantial body of commitments has been accumulated over the years within the Human Dimension of the OSCE. Correspondingly, the workload of ODIHR has steadily been increasing. I would therefore take this opportunity to again underline our responsibility to provide the resources necessary to make it possible to implement our recommendations and decisions in practice. This should particularly be kept in mind in our ongoing discussions on the 2008 Unified Budget, which Norway supports.

Finally Mr. Chairman,

I would like to conclude this part of my statement by underlining our appreciation and strong support to ODIHR. Norway looks forward to working closely with Ambassador Strohal and his dedicated and competent staff in 2008.

Mr. Chairman,

Turning now to the latest developments referred to in Ambassador Strohal's introduction, I must express our deep disappointment that it did not prove possible to reach an agreement which would allow ODIHR to conduct a meaningful observation of the upcoming Presidential Elections in the Russian Federation.

As I had the opportunity to state at our last meeting, we were concerned that the invitation to ODIHR came very late and contained restrictions on time and numbers which would

jeopardise ODIHR's ability to conduct a full-fledged observation mission, according to its mandate.

We are now very disappointed to learn that ODIHR's request to allow an earlier start of the observation mission was turned down by the Russian authorities.

As we and others have recalled on several occasions, ODIHR's main contribution to international election observation has been to develop a methodology for election observation which constitutes a necessary supplement to other forms of international election observation. ODIHR's observation covers not only the actual conduct of the elections on election day, but also the electoral **campaign** and the entire election **process**, in fulfilment of its Budapest mandate to observe "**before, during and after** the elections".

As I have already stated, we strongly support ODIHR's election observation activities. The unfortunate situation which has now arisen should not set a precedent. We call on all participating states to work wholeheartedly together with ODIHR, in fulfilment of their obligations and in completion of ODIHR's mandate.

We note with satisfaction that ODIHR has already been invited to other upcoming elections, well in advance and without any restrictions on either numbers or duration, and we are confident that ODIHR will play its usual role in election observation in future elections throughout our region.

Thank you Mr. Chairman