



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR STROHAL, DIRECTOR OF
ODIHR**

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 12, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Let me join other speakers and most warmly welcome Ambassador Strohal back to the Permanent Council to what would be the last appearance in his capacity as Director of the ODIHR. Again, we listened carefully to a most thought-provoking analysis of the current situation for human rights, democracy and rule of law in the OSCE area.

While substantive progress has been achieved in our area during the five-year tenure of Ambassador Strohal in ODIHR, and often with the active assistance of ODIHR, we must agree that substantial challenges still remain, and our work is far from completed.

In a number of participating states we still see frequent occurrences of systematic election fraud, restrictions on freedom of assembly and association, an intolerable situation for human rights defenders, curtailment of the freedom of expression and of the media, resort to torture, and grave weaknesses in the justice sector. We agree with Dr. Strohal's observation that in a situation where adherence to accepted commitments is lacking, independent institutions like the ODIHR have a vital role to play, - not for the sake of naming and shaming, but in offering practical assistance to remedy shortcomings. That is why we believe it is so important to preserve ODIHR's autonomy and to strengthen its capabilities.

Let me add that we all have challenges and dilemmas to cope with, e.g. in fighting terrorism without compromising inalienable human rights and civil liberties, and in promoting tolerance and understanding without jeopardising the all-important freedom of expression. Common analyses and peer reviews undertaken as part of our cooperation with ODIHR provide us with useful tools to come to grasp with these dilemmas and learn from each other's experience.

Mr. Chairman,

In his five years as Director of the ODIHR, Ambassador Strohal has spared no effort to strengthen the ODIHR's effectiveness and efficiency. He has taken measures of streamlining,

mainstreaming and consolidation of the institution, in order to meet also the many new challenges, as combating trafficking in human beings, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, or gender inequality. We are very grateful for his achievements.

We have inter alia taken positive note of the stronger focus he has given to ODIHR's work on democratization. We believe this part of the ODIHR's multifaceted portfolio could be developed even further, not at the expense of other core activities, but because OSCE assistance for instance to justice sector reforms can have positive and long-lasting effects on the rule of law situation in the participating state concerned.

Mr. Chairman,

Election assistance and election observation remain at the heart of the ODIHR's activities, not because election observation by far is the most visible part of the organisation's work, but because free and fair elections hold the centre of the stage in any democratic system.

ODIHR's internationally recognized methodology of election observation, covering the whole election process, is one of this organisation's most important contributions. In support of Dr. Strohal's observation that there is no crisis in election observation, I would like to point out that the three most recent election observation missions, to Serbia, Georgia and the FYR of Macedonia, were all shining examples of how useful election observation can be. While some serious shortcomings in the conduct of the elections were identified in the two latter cases, the election observation went very well, with full cooperation by the host country authorities, and concluded with very thorough, nuanced and undisputed assessments of what had happened. And most important of all: the observation reports provide the countries concerned with an excellent tool to identify and remedy existing shortcomings, again with the assistance of ODIHR and the field missions. We note with satisfaction the declarations by the authorities concerned that they will fully avail themselves of this offer. Election observation is thus only a tool to improve and perfect election systems throughout the OSCE area.

We would also like to give credit to Dr. Strohal for having broadened the geographic scope of election observation missions. It has further strengthened the legitimacy of this instrument.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, let me again express our most sincere appreciation of the work Ambassador Strohal has done during his five year long tenure as Director of ODIHR. The dedicated and tireless manner in which he has discharged his responsibilities has been of utmost importance for preserving the integrity and relevance of this important institution. We would wish Ambassador Strohal all possible success, in his future professional endeavours as well as in his personal life.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.