

OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting, 6-7 December 2012, Dublin

Statement by H.E. Mr. Stefán Skjaldarson, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Iceland to the OSCE

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of H.E. Mr. Össur Skarphéðinsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs, allow me first to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Ireland and the Irish Chairmanship, for their hospitality and also to thank them for the dynamism and commitment at the helm of the OSCE.

I would also like to thank the Irish Chairmanship for their commitment to the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security across all three dimensions, while at the same time putting special emphasis on human rights and fundamental freedoms. We wholeheartedly share these priorities. They are fundamental to a comprehensive approach to security. They are at the core of the OSCE.

Having consensus on a balanced package of decisions at this Ministerial, in line with the priorities of the Irish Chairmanship, has been a challenge. We also experienced obstacles in adopting a substantive decision on a Helsinki + 40 process. Furthermore, the very timely and important draft decision on Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association tabled by the EU is having difficulties.

This is in spite of that many participating States have gone a long way in trying to accommodate the views of others to reach consensus on a good package. But there are limits to what is acceptable. We should take good care not to undermine existing commitments in order to reach consensus on new decisions. In our view it is better not to adopt new decisions if such decisions entail undermining already accepted commitments. Any new decisions should strengthen our cooperation, not undermine it. And the OSCE's autonomous institutions, as well as the OSCE's executive structures, need to be preserved and strengthened, not weakened. The same goes for OSCE's capabilities to tackle existing conflicts in the OSCE area and the whole conflict cycle.

Over the last two years we have witnessed the unfolding of democratic transformation to our South. The winds of change in the Arab world have inspired us. At the same time, these developments in our neighbourhood have made us conscious of the constant need to safeguard our fundamental rights and freedoms.

With this in mind, it is regretful that the civil and political rights that we hold so dear are under threat in some parts of our own region. We must unite to address those challenges. Fostering human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, including free and fair elections and the rule of law, is at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of security. We must build on these commitments and we must implement them. In that respect civil society plays an indispensable role. Full implementation of all OSCE commitments by all participating States, in particular in the human dimension, is top priority.

Allow me now to underline a few areas where we see the need for further efforts by the OSCE as a whole, as well as by individual Participating States.

Firstly, I would like to reaffirm that Iceland deeply values freedom of expression as a fundamental right. In fact, as the Irish Chairmanship has highlighted as well as a vast majority of participating States, in the digital age, new technology and social media are absolutely vital to exercise freedom of expression. Digital and social media enable us to communicate with one another, wherever we are. We have seen how these media were used in the Arab Spring and how effective they can be in support of democratic development.

At the same time, we have seen strong forces trying to silence these voices. I strongly believe that those of us able to champion this brave new world must do so. In Iceland, the Government is seeking ways of implement a recent parliamentary resolution that calls for legislation to enhance freedom of expression and dissemination of information and to secure the protection of information sources and whistle blowers.

Secondly, I would like to mention the scourge of human trafficking. We strongly support measures taken by the OSCE to combat this evil that seems unfortunately to be on the rise, including in our region. As a token of our commitment, the Icelandic Government has recently renewed and expanded cooperation with the Icelandic Red Cross to fight human trafficking in our region.

Discrimination is a third key issue that I would like to underline. Discrimination in all its forms, whether between women and men or between ethnic, religious or minority groups, or on any other grounds, is unacceptable. We all have equal rights and we all have responsibility towards our fellow citizens to fight discrimination, xenophobia, intolerance, inequality and injustice. In that regard, special attention should be paid to discrimination and blatant violence against LGBT persons. Sexual orientation should never be considered a crime and violence based on homophobia can neither be tolerated nor condoned. Impunity for violence against LGBT persons is unacceptable. The world we want for us and for our children is a world where women and men are treated equally and where intolerance and discrimination on any grounds are unacceptable.

Finally, allow me to underline Iceland's full support for the draft decision on an OSCE wide action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. It is long overdue for the OSCE to take proper action in support the implementation of this resolution in the OSCE area as well as within its own structures, missions and institutions.

Before closing, I would like to welcome Mongolia as a new participating State and to wish Ukraine all possible success in tackling the challenging and difficult task of chairing the OSCE in 2013. You will have our full support and cooperation in that endeavour.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.