

OSCE Ministerial in Belgrade 3-4 December 2015

ENGLISH only

STATEMENT BY ICELAND

Mr. Chair, Ministers, Colleagues,

In the past year, there have been moments of peril. We have faced atrocious terrorism, confronted a challenging refugee crisis, and witnessed the worrying erosion of human rights in far too many participating states.

This year has also been about war and peace.

We find ourselves in the *Spannungsfeld* between principles and pragmatic solutions. We have different narratives on the past and departing views on the future.

But this increased complexity and intensity of our security environment is precisely why we need to uphold the OSCE values.

The principles from Helsinki, such as the inviolability of frontiers, peaceful settlement of disputes and the respect for fundamental freedoms, provide crucial guidance.

This is what we agreed on 40 years ago.

This is what we expect from each other and this is what our citizens deserve from us.

Mr. Chair,

There have also been moments of promise in the last 12 months when dialogue, cooperation and diplomacy has been allowed to work.

The OSCE and its autonomous institutions, which Iceland strongly supports, has played a laudable role in addressing the conflict in and around Ukraine. Important progress was made last September when a cease-fire was brokered and then skillfully monitored by the brave men and women of the SMM.

Symbolically, when the shooting silenced, schools opened. This gave hope for a much-needed political settlement. Sadly, violence has erupted again, the situation remains unpredictable and lives continue to be lost.

This is why Ukraine must remain a priority for our organization. Until peace and stability is properly restored, the OSCE must continue to invest all its powers and apply all its tools to end this tragic military conflict in our midst.

Borders in Europe cannot and should not be changed at the barrel of a gun.

Iceland joins others in expressing support to the sovereignty and the territorial integrity Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders, and urges all parties to the conflict to fully implement the Minsk agreement.

Mr. Chair,

The fight against terrorism and violent extremism requires our highest attention. I would like to reiterate my Government's condolences to the people of France and to governments, citizens and families in all other member States, including Turkey and Russia, and now recently the United States, that have suffered from heinous and cowardly terrorist attacks.

While recognizing that a strong response is needed we also agree that terrorism cannot be fought with force alone. The OSCE's work on the root-causes of extremism that leads to terrorism certainly adds value in this regard.

We also need to deal with migration – jointly and humanly. This fall, my Government decided to substantially increase its funding to assist refugees abroad and more quickly process the arrivals of refugees and asylum seekers in Iceland.

Again, here, the OSCE's experience on the protection of human rights, on border control, on trafficking and police cooperation, is useful.

We should continue our cooperation on the variety of other issues in the three dimensions of the OSCE – arms control, CBMs and cyber security, promotion of human rights, good governance, renewable energy and sustainable development – just to name a few.

These issues are like mosaic stones of different shapes and colors in our concept of comprehensive security. For Iceland, gender equality is center to this picture.

Ensuring same rights and opportunities for women and men is not only a human rights issue but also clever economic policy. The empowerment of women is also about unlocking potential, skills and talent in our societies.

This is why gender equality was identified as one of the Sustainable Development Goals, and this is why gender issues should remain at the heart of OSCE's activities.

Here I want to mention the key role that men play in this regard, and encourage you to support the work of networks such as MenEngage and the HeForShe campaign.

Aiming at geographical balance comes naturally to us at the OSCE. Let us add gender balance to our DNA as well.

Mr. Chairman,

Iceland is proud of having been at the OSCE table from the start in Helsinki in 1975. The challenges may have changed, but the need for dialogue and cooperation, for comprehensive security and conflict prevention, is as present as it was 40 years ago.

Finally, allow me to commend Serbia for her hospitality in Belgrade and the stewardship in these testing times. I wish the incoming German Chair all the best.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.