

Statement to the Plenary Session

The Meeting of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

7 December 2011

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you very much Mr Chairman.

Australia is one of the world's oldest continuing democracies.

We admire Lithuania's success in what it has done in the twenty years of its independence.

We admire the leadership role Lithuania has taken in hosting the Community of Democracies conference this year.

We admire also Lithuania's chairmanship of this important institution over the last two years.

There is an example for us all in what Lithuania has done in just two decades.

Our view in Australia is that Europe is an overwhelming force for good in the world.

We see that reflected in the underpinning principles of the Helsinki Accords.

We see it reflected through its security policy.

We see it reflected through development policy.

We see it reflected through human rights activity across the world's institutions.

That is the core reason why Australia has decided in the last two to three years to enhance its cooperation with this institution and with Europe more broadly.

With Europe more broadly, Australia is in the process of developing a full treaty relationship with the European Union, so that we will work together on the common tasks of security policy, development policy, human rights policy and environmental policy in the important institutions of the world.

When it comes to the future, it is also important for us to reflect on the importance for Europe to continue to look outwards, not inwards.

Europe has much to offer the emerging institutions of other regions and the emerging institutions of the world more broadly.

Of course, there are challenges to that at present.

Europe is understandably preoccupied with the European financial crisis and the associated impact on the real economy and employment in Europe.

The decisions which will be taken by European leaders in the weeks ahead are of fundamental importance to the future of the entire European project, but also of fundamental importance to the rest of the world.

What decisions are taken on the future of the European Financial Stability Fund, the European Central Bank, and the future of a fiscal union in Europe will fundamentally shape whether or not Europe remains engaged in the institutions of the world.

A failure to deal with underpinning financial and economic problems will undermine Europe's ability to do so.

Therefore, speaking on behalf of a country which is not within the European zone, we strongly and firmly encourage European leaders when they meet soon to take long term decisions, far-sighted decisions, on these deep questions, because they affect us all.

I turn to the specific operations of the OSCE itself, and the Helsinki Accords which underpin it.

The Helsinki Accords, with their emphasis on human rights and democracy, on the peaceful resolution of conflicts, the principles of common security, of confidence and security building measures, and of security transparency, are important principles for the global order - not just the European order.

As I remarked yesterday in the luncheon with delegation heads, the difference between Europe and Asia on this question is that we do not have the equivalent of the Helsinki Accords.

We sense that lack within our own region.

We have been building institutions in recent decades.

We've been building the ASEAN Regional Forum, building the East Asia Summit, building APEC and Australia's longstanding diplomatic support over past years for the long term emergence of an Asia Pacific community.

These are important steps in that direction.

But in the future we perhaps need something that is the equivalent of the Helsinki Accords.

Maybe the Tokyo Accords.

Maybe the Jakarta Accords.

Maybe the Seoul Accords.

Maybe even the Canberra Accords.

In this region called Asia, which has so many unresolved territorial and security disputes, where the fundamental principles of human rights and democracy are not universally shared, this is a challenge for our region which we must address.

It is doubly important for the countries of Europe as well to understand the importance of Asia.

I say this because we have already embarked upon the Asian Century.

What happens in the way in which Asia conducts its future in the next forty years will affect each and every country in this room today.

If Asia manages to negotiate a truly pacific century, a peaceful century, we will all benefit.

If it fails to do so, we will all be affected, because that is where the centre stage of global economic, political and security action will unfold in the three to four decades ahead.

Therefore the importance of our friends in Europe and other partners present in shaping the institutions of Asia, and the values upon which they are based, is of critical importance not just in the countries of Asia, but in the global order which will increasingly be driven by events in Asia.

Mr Chairman, beyond Asia, over the last twelve months we have seen extraordinary events in the Middle East.

In the Arab Spring, we have witnessed historic developments which twelve months ago we would not have been considered to be faintly conceivable.

With this change comes hope.

It is in all of our interests that, as one government changes after another, these democratic changes become entrenched, and become durable.

Elections have been held in Tunisia, elections now for the parliament in Egypt, but political developments indicate that this will not be an easy road ahead.

The Qaddafi regime has fallen in Libya; the days of the Assad regime in Damascus we believe are numbered.

This has been a momentous year in the Arab world, and we should not underestimate its significance.

Geographically Australia may be removed from the events in the Middle East, but we in Australia have long seen ourselves as a middle power with global interests, and regional interests in Asia and the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

We are committed to the principles of good international citizenship, and that means we are committed to the development and sustenance of a regional and international rules-based order, premised on stability, fairness and justice.

Therefore for the countries of the Middle East we have been active as well.

We have supported our friends in Libya.

We were their second largest donor for humanitarian assistance during the period of the civil war.

We are supporting our friends in Egypt as active partners in the development of sustainable dry land farming, given the problem of food security in that country.

We are also co-funding with the United Nations urban employment programs.

We are supporting our friends in Tunisia, where we have been co-funders in the building of electoral institutions in that country.

We are also assisting our friends in Tunisia with the unfolding of sustainable agricultural practices and dry land farming in their part of the world.

In Syria we are funding the International Committee of the Red Cross, through the Red Crescent, assistance for those who are victims of political violence.

Australia stands ready to do more in the future as well.

Can I say to the gathering here in Vilnius and through you Mr Chairman that we stand ready to expand our partnership and cooperation with the OSCE into the future.

We intend to deepen our ties to reflect that through a range of projects we will co-fund with the OSCE in the future, most particularly in Central Asia.

In Tajikistan we are now funding an OSCE project which will improve the social and economic conditions for women and migrant households.

In Kyrgyzstan we are assisting with an OSCE project to develop the legislative framework for population registration.

In Kazakhstan we have contributed to a regional workshop on international cooperation in criminal matters hosted by the OSCE and the UN Office for Drugs and Crime.

For all Central Asian countries, we have supported the early warning and prevention role of the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities.

To further our cooperation with the OSCE, we are signing a three year agreement focussing on anti-human trafficking with the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, in cooperation with OSCE field offices across central Asia.

Mr Chairman, last month Australia was pleased to attend the Istanbul Conference on Regional Security and Cooperation for Afghanistan.

It is with pride that I sit with my colleague from Afghanistan here today.

We salute and underline the importance of the conference hosted in Istanbul by the Turkish Government as regional partnership arrangements with the countries surrounding Afghanistan are fundamental to that country's future.

Australia has a long standing interest in the future stability and a democratic development of Afghanistan.

We have been among its top ten security partners for the past ten years; its top ten development partners.

We've invested some US\$11 billion in the project of the long term transformation of Afghanistan.

We will be its partners beyond 2014, a commitment which I reiterated on Monday at the Bonn Conference hosted by Foreign Minister Westerwelle of Germany.

To conclude, Mr Chairman, since the OSCE gathered twelve months ago we have seen momentous changes across the world.

Dramatically unfolding in the Middle East; unfolding a little less dramatically in the councils of Asia.

I would say to all of those countries and institutions gathered around this table that this organisation has a future which rests on its engagement with these theatres beyond the technical boundaries of Europe.

Therefore, what we propose is to continue to expand our cooperation with the OSCE across the regions of the world.

We believe this is important in order to underpin solidarity and the common principles of democracy, human rights, development, the peaceful resolution of conflicts and concepts of common security as good visions for the world at large.

We will be your active partners into the future.

Mr Chairman, the ideas which have been framed in this continent of Europe over the past five hundred years, the concept which is often described as the West, are not ideas and ideals lightly to be thrown away.

They should be cherished, they should be nurtured.

They should also be extended to other councils, in other theatres, in other regions around the world.

Australia stands ready to assist this body, and more broadly Europe, in undertaking that mission.

I thank you.