



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities

Address by

Henrik Villadsen
Director and Officer-in-Charge

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

to the

Max van der Stoep Award 2016

[Check against delivery]

The Hague, Netherlands – 24 October 2016

Dear Minister,

Dear Laureates and Jury Members,

Dear family members and friends of Max van der Stoel,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this year's Max van der Stoel Award ceremony. This well-established Award commemorates the legacy of the distinguished Dutch statesman and diplomat, Max van der Stoel, the first High Commissioner on National Minorities from 1993 to 2001.

The award is given every two years by the Government of the Netherlands to an individual, or organization, in recognition of the exceptional work they are doing to improve relations among communities in the OSCE area. It consists of a generous donation of 50,000 euros to the winner. We are therefore honoured to welcome the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, Mr. Bert Koenders, who will shortly present the prize to this year's winner - the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research (AHDR). The two co-Presidents of AHDR – Ms. Alev Tuğberk and Mr. Kyriakos Pachoulides – have travelled from Cyprus to accept the award and share their story with us: we extend a warm welcome to both of you.

We celebrate today's award, fortuitously, this year falling on United Nations Day, and fittingly in the Peace Palace. We celebrate today's award in the spirit of Cyprus and its rich, if troubled, history. The scene has been set by the enticing melodies aptly composed by Mr. Giannis Koutis and played by him and Mr. Ruven-Michael Ruppik. The piece you heard, and the one which will close the ceremony, are imbued in the Eastern Mediterranean musical tradition and are in themselves a testimony of shared histories and dialogue.

Because of the nature of our work, we are all too often confronted with the negative fall-out of conflicts, particularly mistrust of the 'other'. It is therefore very refreshing to see activities that demonstrate the far-reaching benefits of empathy, and a willingness to stand back and re-evaluate one's own assumptions in the interest of reconciliation. In a post-conflict situation, this is not an easy road to follow. But showing examples of what works well in practice – as you will see today – can help to inspire others. Especially those in similar situations.

For this reason, we are greatly indebted to Max van der Stoel's dedication and the Dutch government's enduring support. This helps us remain focussed on our mandate. While much of our Institution's work is carried out by means of 'quiet diplomacy' - it is good to have the opportunity to shine the spotlight on it from time to time. The Max van der Stoel Award enables us to give credit where credit is due by promoting the hard work of courageous and dedicated individuals and organizations which spearhead and practise dialogue among communities and help to build a common future.

As we all know, trust takes long to build, but only minutes to destroy. The winners of this year's award are working hard to build trust and understanding through history teaching. In doing so, they are reaching future generations. They do this by helping to foster a mutual understanding of a shared yet divisive history. This builds upon Max van der Stoel's firm belief that "Fundamentally, the vast majority of people in this world share common interests in economic prosperity, political stability, and the universal enjoyment of basic rights."

As we will learn from the previous winner of the Max van der Stoel award, the Kyrgyz organization – Spravedlivost – the award brings a host of intangible benefits, improved confidence, and the satisfaction of knowing that your work is acknowledged. These benefits have the greatest reach.

This was also the case of other past laureates who used the Award as a source of additional legitimacy. All thanks go to the Max van der Stoel legacy which further boosts their operational capability to contribute to conflict prevention and build and maintain peace.

I would like to invite all of you to watch a recent film about Spravedlivost. It shows how the Award has helped them in their excellent and indispensable work.

After the movie, the floor will go to this year's Chairperson of the Max van der Stoel jury, our dear friend: the former High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ms. Astrid Thors.

In the meantime, I trust you will enjoy the film and wish you a pleasant and memorable afternoon.

Thank you.