



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia, H.E. Mr. Bujar Osmani

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Carpenter
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 12, 2023

Foreign Minister Osmani, welcome back to the Permanent Council and congratulations on assuming the OSCE Chairpersonship. Thank you for your exposition on the priorities for your term as Chair-in-Office. The United States strongly endorses your emphasis on helping people and alleviating human suffering. There is no greater calling for us as diplomats or indeed as human beings than to reduce the suffering of others. Unfortunately, 2022 was a year of terrible human suffering. The last 11 months have witnessed a humanitarian calamity on a scale not seen since the Second World War, owing to the Russian Federation's brutal aggression against Ukraine. You are right to maintain this Organization's focus squarely on Russia's war and its catastrophic consequences. We will support you 100 percent and ensure that we maintain this singular focus on Ukraine even as we deal with challenges in other parts of the OSCE region, as we must.

I look forward to working with you and your capable team to defend and advance the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, and all our other OSCE commitments. We are of the firm belief that we do *not* need to redefine the principles of peaceful interstate relations or of democracy or of human rights. Instead, we need to implement our existing commitments and hold each other accountable to the same. That requires using our OSCE toolbox vigorously and unapologetically to defend our values and principles. This Organization delivers incredible services to the 1 billion citizens of the OSCE area, but only because it is a values-based organization. Those fundamental principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act are our guiding star and must remain so. I have every confidence you will continue the strong and unwavering leadership that Poland demonstrated last year in guiding the work of this Organization on the basis of these shared principles, even if they are shared unequally among those who sit at this table. And yes, indeed, consensus can be valuable, but not a consensus between right and wrong.

Let me start by discussing what we can do to alleviate human suffering in Ukraine. Some statistics help outline the scope of the challenge we collectively face from Russia's war. In 2022, air-raid sirens in Ukraine sounded 14,870 times. Russia's bombing or shelling damaged 3,126 educational institutions in Ukraine, completely destroying 337 of them. Over 1 million Ukrainian civilians, including as many as 11,000 children, have been subjected to Russia's filtration operations in the territory of Ukraine controlled by Russia's forces. There are now 5.9 million internally displaced people in Ukraine and 7.9 million refugees from Ukraine who are being hosted in more than 40 countries. Over 90 percent of refugees from Ukraine are women and children, who face an increased risk of all forms of gender-based violence, including human trafficking and conflict-related sexual violence.

As you have previously said, Minister Osmani, Russia's war has "undermined the European security architecture and threatened the peace and stability of the continent and beyond." You're absolutely right. We have an obligation therefore to move as quickly as we can, and I daresay with greater determination and alacrity, to help end Ukrainian suffering by operationalizing the projects under the auspices of the Support Program for Ukraine. These projects can help Ukrainians in need right now and build a foundation of support for President Zelenskyy's peace plan. Let's get to work. Those who are suffering cannot afford to wait a day longer.

While Russia and Belarus continue to willfully ignore the OSCE's principles, we have the power, the determination, and the tools to hold both the Kremlin and the Lukashenka regime to account, and we must continue to use them. We must be unrelenting and innovative in our efforts to support and defend our comprehensive concept of security, which has guided the Helsinki process from the very beginning. I look forward to working together, Mr. Minister, in this new year, to think big about what we can do together.

While Ukraine remains front and center in our focus, we also recognize the important work of this Organization across the OSCE region in supporting other conflict-affected populations. We want to work with you to build on the Organization's activities in the Western Balkans in critical areas, such as early warning and conflict resolution; strengthening democratic institutions, the rule of law, and anti-corruption; advancing transparency, economic, and environmental security; and electoral reform, media freedom, and respect for human rights and dignity. This includes partnering with and supporting the OSCE's field missions, which continue to do essential work in advancing the Organization's core values.

In Moldova, where Russia's malign activities aim to obstruct democratic reforms and European integration, we value the OSCE's work to buttress democratic institutions and pursue negotiations on a lasting settlement of the Transnistrian conflict. In the South Caucasus, it is critical for the OSCE to redouble efforts to build peaceful relations and avert humanitarian crises. We remain committed to helping facilitate a negotiated, comprehensive, and sustainable settlement of all remaining issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan to achieve a long-term, lasting peace. In addition, as Russia continues to occupy 20 percent of Georgia's sovereign territory, the OSCE is well-positioned to do even more to advance a peaceful resolution to that conflict, based on full respect for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. In Central Asia, we welcome the opportunity to join with our Central Asian partners to build institutional capacity to strengthen their sovereignty and territorial integrity and implement commitments in all three dimensions of security, including through projects that focus not only on border security and countering transnational threats, but also on protecting human rights, facilitating trade and transport, and addressing the negative security impacts of climate change.

We also share your support for the OSCE's independent institutions as well as our field missions, which are indeed critical for turning OSCE principles into tangible results. These institutions are vital tools to accomplish our shared goal of supporting and empowering people as they build better futures for their families and communities. We thank you for taking the initiative to appoint a Special Representative for Civil Society and look forward to exploring how we can increase this Organization's impact, interaction, and collaboration with civil society across the OSCE region.

As Russia's brutal war against Ukraine rages on, the work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has become even more important. ODIHR's meticulous monitoring of human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law will contribute significantly to accountability efforts. Indeed, this year we need to continue to support the OSCE's vital Third

Dimension work across the region in promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, advancing democratic principles and the rule of law, and combating intolerance and discrimination. All participating States freely adopted their Human Dimension commitments, and all of us, including the United States, will be held accountable for meeting them. We also strongly support the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities and look forward to working with you to advance their missions.

Lastly, delivering for all our people means preventing and combating corruption and working to address the security implications of climate change. These should remain OSCE priorities. As a fundamental threat to the rule of law, corruption hollows out institutions, corrodes public trust, and fuels popular cynicism towards good governance. Combating corruption is most successful when we use a comprehensive approach that combines a national security and regional focus and work across all three OSCE dimensions in partnership with civil society. All our efforts must also promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and should be based on gender equality and the advancement of the women, peace, and security agenda.

Minister Osmani, we keenly understand 2023 will be a difficult year. The Chairpersonship of the OSCE is not a job for the meek or faint at heart. But in the face of truly unprecedented challenges, we are confident in your leadership. The United States pledges you our full support. We look forward to working closely with you and your team and with our outstanding Secretary General Helga Schmid to strengthen this Organization and deliver a brighter future for all people in the OSCE region.

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