



**PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE
ODIHR ANNUAL REPORT 2020**

Delivered by Ambassador Anne- Kirsti Karlsen at the Permanent Council
Vienna, 15 April 2021

Madame Chair,

I welcome Mr. Mecacci to the Permanent Council and thank him and his team for the annual report for 2020. Let me also extend our gratefulness to his predecessor and the ODIHR staff for the work done in 2020. The report gives a good overview of the extensive work of ODIHR in a difficult year and shows the institution's relevance and ability to respond timely and well to unforeseen challenges.

Participating States established ODIHR to assist us in ensuring full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, and all other human dimension commitments. Participating States bear the responsibility – collectively - to provide ODIHR with the necessary resources to carry out its mandate. For the time being, it is clear that we should do much more to make this happen.

In 2020 the importance of this mandate became even clearer as Participating States fought to manage the pandemic. ODIHR broad mandate enabled the institution to adjust its work to the developments – such as in assisting States in establishing alternative voting methods or a platform for dialogue about the challenges faced by courts, in introducing methodology for accessible information for people with disabilities and in setting up monitoring of media discourse on Roma people.

We appreciate the integration of the gender perspective in many parts of the report. The pandemic has put many processes on hold and forced us to make significant changes to others. We trust that ODIHR will not let the focus on gender equality slip. Gender mainstreaming throughout the portfolio must still be a goal.

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Madame Chair,

ODIHR's election observation, and advice on election legislation and practices, are fundamental for both safeguarding and strengthening democracy in the OSCE region. ODIHR was the first organization to resume election observation missions after the COVID-19 outbreak and was able to deploy an impressive 16 election observation and assessment missions, albeit somewhat reduced in scope. We fully support the Director's approach towards resuming full scale observer missions again as soon as possible.

The election observation of ODIHR is based on a comprehensive, consistent, and systematic methodology that ensures credibility. The Needs Assessment Missions apply the same methodology equally to all elections in all participating States. Budget resources are the greatest limitation when it comes to both the number of election observation missions and the so called geographical balance between them.

Norway benefited from ODIHR's assistance in 2017, when an Election Expert Team observed our parliamentary elections. The Norwegian government received valuable feedback and recommendations from the team. We have now received a request to conduct a needs assessment mission in preparation for our upcoming elections in September, are working on an invitation to ODIHR and hope that, resources permitting, it will be possible to deploy an observer mission to Norway also this year.

For the 2019 report on *Freedom of Peaceful Assembly in Selected OSCE Participating States*, ODIHR monitored public assemblies in Norway, as well as Belgium, Italy, Germany, Lithuania, and Canada. The report concluded with recommendations inter alia about relevant legal provisions.

We encourage other participating States to make good use of the important tool that the mandate of ODIHR is to us. As part of this mandate, ODIHR monitors our compliance with our commitments. Democracy and rule of law is not something we have, but something we must choose and work towards every single day.

Last year, the HDIM could unfortunately not be organized due to the unprecedented circumstances. With this, participants from governments, international organizations and civil society lost the most important arena for meeting and discussing human dimension issues. The pandemic is still upon us, but this year we have the necessary experience with working in this environment. Norway strongly supports the Chairperson in Office's efforts to arrive at consensus decisions for HDIM.

Madame Chair,

ODIHR is to implement its mandate autonomously under the direction of its Director.

Mr. Mecacci enjoys Norway's full trust and support in fulfilling ODIHR's increasingly relevant mandate. We also look forward to welcoming Mr. Mecacci to a future Human Dimension Committee meeting.

Thank you