

Foreword

I am pleased to present this second edition of our reference guide to OSCE human dimension commitments in the year when we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Signed in 1975, the Final Act remains a fundamental cornerstone not only of the wider security framework in Europe and throughout the OSCE region, but it is also guides the work of my institution, the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

The Helsinki Final Act was the first international document that recognized the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms as a matter of international concern. It is one of 10 fundamental principles of interstate relations, on the same level and status as the classical rules of international relations we have known since the beginning of the modern age.

But the world has changed considerably since 1975. And so has the framework developed by the OSCE for the entire region. Since the historic changes of 1989, the states of Europe have taken the basic outline of the Helsinki Final Act and developed it into a comprehensive set of norms and standards, in particular with respect to human rights. These basic rights, together with democracy and the rule of law, are the building blocks of what the OSCE terms the human dimension of security.

At the 1990 Copenhagen Conference on the Human Dimension, OSCE states laid the groundwork for what would become the fundamental rule book for the entire OSCE region, the *acquis* of many of the world's developed democracies. It has, so far, not been matched by any comparable international exercise and continues to guide us in our daily work.

Thus, the Helsinki framework has been further developed ever since and has become a comprehensive set of standards. While the details of all of the related commitments can be found in this compilation, their essence is to be found in a few basic principles: that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is at the heart of the OSCE's concept of security; and that states are accountable to all of their citizens, and to one another, for ensuring that these rights and freedoms are indeed respected and protected.

The OSCE states have affirmed that the ODIHR, together with the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on Freedom of the Media are

essential instruments in ensuring respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

In 2001, the ODIHR produced a compilation of human dimension commitments in order to facilitate access to them. This compilation has been an invaluable reference tool for all of us involved in promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. However, new pledges and decisions made by the OSCE call for a continued update. This revised compilation contains chronological and thematic parts, and is now published in two volumes due to its expanding body of commitments.

In the end, it all comes down to what US President Gerald Ford said after signing the Helsinki Final Act thirty years ago, namely that it does not matter what promises we make, but what promises we keep. The OSCE participating States have created an impressive body of norms and principles in the area of the human dimension. I hope that the present publication will further promote the knowledge and the implementation of the many commitments that the OSCE participating States have made to benefit their one billion inhabitants.

Ambassador Christian Strohal

Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights