

**Joint Statement on Human Rights and Fundamental
Freedoms
OSCE Ministerial Council 2023
Closing session**

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the following 45 participating states:

Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain/EU, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America and my own country Denmark.

Mr. Chair,

2023 marks the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that recognizes that all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights, with human rights as the basis for a free, just and peaceful world order. The OSCE principles and commitments and its comprehensive concept of security exemplify this.

Over the past decades, we have made great strides in advancing human rights and fundamental freedoms. Yet, in recent years, it has become more evident than ever that the fight for freedom,

gender equality, justice and democracy is far from over, and that their defence requires our ongoing vigilance and principled action. Across the region, the space for civil society and independent media is rapidly shrinking, offline and online. There has been an alarming rise in anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim bigotry and violence in the OSCE region. Discrimination still excludes many from full, equal and meaningful participation in our societies. And peaceful protesters, human rights defenders, journalists and media actors too often face threats and violence.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, enabled by the Lukashenka regime in Belarus, serves as the starkest example and reminds us all that human rights and fundamental freedoms are among the primary targets of an aggressor and that ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is a prerequisite for lasting security and peace among and within states. We are appalled by the independent reports, *inter alia* under the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism, which have found serious violations of human rights and "clear patterns of violations of international humanitarian law by Russian forces" in Ukraine, including targeted killings of civilians, unlawful detentions, abductions, forcible transfers and large scale deportations as well as the use of torture and other ill-treatment, including sexual violence. We strongly condemn these horrific violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law. All alleged violations of international humanitarian and human rights law, war crimes and

crimes against humanity must be duly and thoroughly investigated. Those responsible must be held to account.

Mr. Chair,

Recognition that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is integral to comprehensive security is enshrined in the guiding principles of the Helsinki Final Act. Since this organization's earliest days, it has been a leading platform for championing the liberty, dignity and equality of all persons who call this region home. We will continue to speak out when democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms are violated or abused. Whether it is human rights defenders, journalists and media actors facing reprisals, including imprisonment, for their brave work, or violent crackdowns on peaceful protesters aspiring for democratic change. We will continue to fight for the rights of women and girls and to promote gender equality. We will press for the release of all those arbitrarily detained or imprisoned for knowing and acting upon their rights. We will keep pressing for the eradication of torture and other ill-treatment. We will continue to support free and fair elections. We will promote tolerance and condemn, investigate, and prosecute hate crimes. We will challenge stereotypes and prejudice, combat myths and disinformation with facts, and promote a world where no individual is left behind or targeted for who they are, for whom they love, for what they look like, or for what they believe or say.

Mr. Chair,

Civil society is an indispensable part of our countries' conscience and an important partner in advancing the values and work of this organization. It is a key component of an open, inclusive and thriving democracy. We pay tribute to the individuals and civil society organisations that work tirelessly to defend our shared dedication to democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms. They deserve our recognition, protection and support. We thank those who joined the parallel Civil Society Conference on 29 November 2023.

We highly value the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting as an important platform for participating states and civil society to review together the implementation of the OSCE human dimension commitments. In the regrettable repeated absence of the yearly HDIM, the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference yet again proved a valuable opportunity for an exchange of views with civil society. The continued obstruction of the HDIM is unacceptable. It is important that the HDIM is held next year as mandated, and we will support the efforts of the 2024 chair to that end. We value and commend the OSCE autonomous institutions for their efforts to promote and protect human rights, as core components of peaceful, inclusive and democratic societies. Their work, mandates and institutional independence are essential to the promotion and

advancement of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in our region. As many of the conflicts in our region are linked to failures to observe commitments in the human dimension, these efforts are indispensable.

All participating States have categorically declared that commitments in the human dimension are matters of direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned. We will continue to fight to place implementation of OSCE principles and commitments at the forefront of our work in this organisation for the benefit of all who call the OSCE region their home.

In closing, we would like to thank the OSCE Chairpersonship and the chair of the Human Dimension Committee who work on our behalf to strengthen the Human Dimension despite challenging times.

I would be grateful if you would attach this statement to the journal of today's meeting.

Thank you.