



Protecting and promoting human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, is inextricably linked to the preservation of peace and stability within and between States, participants said today at the opening of a two-day OSCE meeting in Vienna.

The meeting, organized by Serbia's 2015 OSCE Chairmanship, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), brings together representatives of governments and of civil society organizations to discuss the OSCE's contribution to the protection of national minorities, especially through the prism of the HCNM's Recommendations and Guidelines. These provide participating States with practical advice on how to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

Participants will assess the achievements, explore the challenges and identify ways to address remaining gaps in the implementation of OSCE commitments in the area of rights of persons belonging to national minorities 25 years after the adoption of the Copenhagen Document.

The meeting specifically focuses on The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies and The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations.

"At last year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw, Serbia presented its priorities in the human dimension and proposed that one of the supplementary human dimension meetings should be devoted to the OSCE's contribution to the protection of national minorities, with special emphasis on the Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations and the Ljubljana Guidelines," Serbian Ambassador Vuk Žugić, Chairperson of the Permanent Council and Serbia's Permanent Representative to the OSCE, said in his remarks to open the meeting.

"I hope this Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting will provide us with a platform for further discussions on how the OSCE has contributed to the protection of persons belonging to national minorities. This is a good opportunity for sharing experiences among participating States on policies that facilitate the integration of diverse societies. Also, this meeting may serve as an opportunity to review implementation and assess whether some of these documents should be updated," Žugić added.

"To effectively promote the integration of diverse societies, it is crucial to foster a sense of

belonging for all members of society. Ensuring effective equality for persons belonging to national minorities is of key importance," said Astrid Thors, OSCE HCNM. "The Ljubljana Guidelines are more topical than ever."

ODIHR Director Michael Georg Link said: "Roma and Sinti are disproportionately affected by social and economic exclusion, face obstacles to equal participation in public and political life and continue to have their security, including in their dealings with law enforcement, threatened. Participating States should redouble efforts to promote inclusion and equality for all people, including Roma and Sinti and other minorities."

This meeting on the OSCE Contribution to the Protection of National Minorities is the last of three Supplementary Human Dimension Meetings.

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