

## Press Release

### **OSCE : human rights remain the major challenge, lack of political will undermines the Organisation's credibility**

**Open Letter :** <http://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/osce3011f.pdf>

**Paris - November 30, 2009: In an [open letter](#) to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) participating States, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) expresses its concern over continuous serious human rights violations occurring in the OSCE area and questions the organisation's relevance in the international arena.**

In 2007, FIDH sent to the OSCE participating states a position paper expressing its concerns that various trends and policies of some OSCE participating states were having negative consequences on independent OSCE institutions engaged in the field of the Human Dimension. FIDH outlined recommendations to maintain the organisation's *acquis* in a changing international environment. Unfortunately, on the eve of the 2009 Ministerial Council, the recommendations brought forward by FIDH to improve OSCE action in this regard have not been adequately addressed by the Organisation. While the initiative of the Greek Presidency in 2009 to hold an informal Ministerial OSCE Meeting in order to exchange ideas on the future of the OSCE is to be commended, FIDH is still concerned by the persistence of serious human rights violations occurring in the OSCE area, which compromises the Organisation's added value in the promotion and protection of human rights.

FIDH emphasizes that the implementation of OSCE commitments should be addressed by the Ministerial Council as a matter of absolute priority and that the flexible human dimension tools, the Vienna and Moscow mechanisms, should be the first answers to address violations.

In its open letter, FIDH also calls upon the participating States to maintain unhindered access for NGOs and civil society by rejecting any draft decision or initiative which may restrict their capacity to take part in OSCE activities, as participation of NGOs in OSCE debates has been essential for a better understanding of the issues civil society faces, in particular in states undergoing transitional reforms.

FIDH further puts forward its concerns with the human rights situation in Kazakhstan, the next OSCE Presidency. Despite Kazakhstan's "pledges" to support NGO participation, human rights protection and promotion and refrain from weakening Human Dimension mechanisms and bodies, it is highly problematic that many violations continue to take place within its own territory, thereby undermining its position as the OSCE Chairmanship.

FIDH's open letter states that the fundamental need for the OSCE today is not simply new declarations but concrete proposals and plans of action in order to protect and consolidate the organisation's *acquis* by implementing and monitoring the commitments taken in the field of Human Dimension. In this context, FIDH underlined that the absence of a Ministerial Council Decision will further undermine the OSCE's status and role at the international level. FIDH recommends, among other things, the annual review of cases of non-compliance with OSCE commitments at Ministerial Councils and the creation of plans of action for follow-up at Permanent Council regular sessions. FIDH also stresses that concrete action at the political level is necessary to address continuous human rights violations in the fields of freedom of expression and of the media, of freedom of association and assembly, of the rights of human rights defenders<sup>1</sup> and of the right to free and fair elections, by fully supporting the work and the independence of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

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<sup>1</sup> In 2009, the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of FIDH and the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), issued dozens of Urgent Interventions on violations of the rights of human rights defenders occurring in several OSCE participating States.