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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
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Testimony :: Hon. Christopher H. Smith

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Co-Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

“The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights:

Accomplishments and Challenges”

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Rep. Christopher Smith, Co-Chairman

May 21, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome to Ambassador Lenarcic and everyone joining us today.

Mr. Ambassador, I want to thank you as well as your outstanding staff at ODIHR – and I’ve known many of them over the years – for your and their work promoting human rights and democracy in the OSCE region. Since ODIHR is on the front lines of so many issues, there are more things to talk about today than we really have time for – so I will focus my comments on three issues.

First, the fight against human trafficking. As author of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act and its 2003 and 2005 reauthorizations, and as the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Special Representative on Human Trafficking, I have closely followed ODIHR’s work to combat trafficking. I look forward to participating in the upcoming special trafficking conference that Ukraine is convening in Kyiv in June in order to strengthen the coherence of the OSCE response—including international law enforcement response—to trafficking in

persons.

One of the issues that I hope that event will focus attention on is the thousands of trafficking victims moved across borders each year who could be rescued in transit if airline and other transportation personnel were appropriately trained and law enforcement ready to intervene. The Ukrainian Chairmanship-in-Office of the OSCE will hold a side event to discuss the Airline Ambassadors airline initiative to address this issue. I hope that ODIHR would also consider using this training, and I hope it can be introduced in all 57 OSCE participating States to create the situational awareness in the transportation industry that will make it much harder to traffic people.

Second, anti-Semitism – another problem where ODIHR has been in the forefront of the fight to defend human dignity. Back in 2002, in response to what appeared to be a sudden, frightening spike in anti-Semitism in several countries, I and a number of other parliamentarians proposed the idea for a conference on combating anti-Semitism under the auspices of the OSCE. Those efforts directly led to important OSCE conferences on combating anti-Semitism in Vienna (2003), Berlin (2004), Cordoba (2005), and Bucharest (2007). In each of those, participating states made solemn, tangible commitments to put words into action. In some countries, progress has indeed been made, yet the scope and outcome of anti-Semitic acts have not abated in others, and in some nations it has actually gotten worse. So, I would like to ask you about how we can work to make those commitments – too often not honored – a reality.

Third, religious freedom. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recently released its 2013 Annual Report on the State of International Religious Freedom. USCIRF recommends that three OSCE participating States should be designated by the U.S. Secretary of State as Countries of Particular Concern (CPC): Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. In addition, three other OSCE States were put on USCIRF's Tier 2 Watchlist: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. ODIHR has recently reorganized its Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief. I look forward to hearing what work ODIHR has undertaken to assist OSCE participating States in implementing their commitments in this regard.

Thank you Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to hearing Ambassador Lenarcic's testimony.