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Speech by Michael O'Flaherty
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

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Chairperson, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Secretary-General, leadership of the OSCE, Excellencies, friends,

Yesterday, I went to the new magnificent Museum of Modern Art here in Warsaw. And while wandering around, I stumbled on a set of portraits. They are known as the Helsinki Series. Portraits by the Polish artist Jurry Zielinski. Portraits of all the signatories of the Helsinki Final Act and they are quite striking.

In the first place, it is all men, a testimony to the reality back then.

Secondly, they are all men of an age. Every one of them was alive in the Second World War, many as adults. And I think that they knew that, and it was very much part of their presence in that room on that day.

And of course, they also came with many very diverse preoccupations. There was the then Portuguese President, Da Costa Gomes, who was literally in the death throes of the military dictatorship. There was President Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus, a world figure back then, who obviously was preoccupied with the situation of his island. And then to take my own country, Ireland, there was its Taoiseach, its Prime Minister, Liam Cosgrave, preoccupied with the possible impact of Helsinki for the situation in Northern Ireland.

But notwithstanding all that diversity, one common thread, I think, was shared across every one of the signatories and that was the effort to bring about an end to the Cold War.

It is well beyond my capacity to assess how well that objective was delivered, but there were some successes delivered that I suggest were well beyond the imagination of the signatories.

I have in mind the delivery of so much of the third basket in terms of contributing to a culture of human rights on our continent. I have seen this personally over the years.

First, back in the 1990s in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially the role of the OSCE field operation in terms of its contribution to embedding human rights and a culture of human rights, which in turn contributed to the consolidation of peace.

I have seen it across the years in how the High Commissioner for National Minorities has headed off conflict through often invisible and quiet diplomacy.

I have seen it in the work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media. I have seen how successive representatives have become global leaders on free speech.

And now in my current job, and most recently when I was Director of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, I see it in the cooperation with ODIHR across multiple areas of human rights engagement. And the one common thread I see in all the cooperation with ODIHR is its deep expertise and its capacity to be listened to and to be impactful.

There is one further dimension of OSCE achievement I would like to mention, and that is one that was absolutely not in the minds of those original signatories, and that is the extent to which what was signed in 1975 triggered a burgeoning of civil society, of organisations established, inspired, driven on by the Helsinki Final Act. I want to acknowledge the vital role of that civil society ever since.

And now at 50, the stocktaking is well underway, and I very much appreciate the important conference in Helsinki during the summer. As we continue our stocktaking, I would like to mention five dimensions of why I see that the situation in our world today is quite frankly dreadful.

First, there is the violence, the violence all around us, in Ukraine, against Ukraine, in Gaza, elsewhere as well, as well as the persistent real risk for all of us of a nuclear war.

Second, I see the impact of COVID still under-acknowledged in terms of the extent to which it has harmed and damaged our societies, above all for young and old people, but for everybody else as well.

Third, and closely related, there is the rising levels of global inequality. The ten richest men in the world, and it is men, own more than the bottom 3.1 billion. This dreadful inequality is getting worse and is destabilising societies.

Fourth of my five, we have the onset of AI, with its remarkable capacity for good, but also its remarkable capacity for damage and for risk. All of this compounded, exacerbated, by the role of the private sector, with the entire industry driven ultimately by just five private businesses, all of them motivated not by the well-being of society, but by profit.

And final of my five, we have the triple planetary crisis, where arguably we have already gone past the tipping point.

To sum it all up, I would borrow the words of philosopher Paul Preciado, who has said recently that we are in a moment of dysphoria mundi.

The question then is how to engage the dysphoria. I greatly welcome the voices of the OSCE, including today, in terms of saying that the engagement with the dysphoria must be based on

a profound commitment to multilateralism and respect for and insistence on respect for human rights.

But I ask, what would that look like in practise? Let me suggest 5 elements of what that would look like in its delivery. I am also describing what I am attempting to do in my role as Council of Europe Commissioner.

The first is that we must of existential significance, stand up for the human rights of the people of Ukraine. My focus right now is seeking to embed attention to human rights in the pathway to peace for Ukraine, something on which I recently published a Memorandum.

Second, we have to seek to embed human rights as we engage the great issues of the day. It is why I welcome the recent judgments of the European Court of Human Rights around issues of the climate.

My own focus has to do with AI and the need to push back against those loud voices saying, "less regulation, less control". To the contrary, we need smart oversight directed to human well-being.

Third, there is the issue of who we focus our human rights efforts on. Who are the beneficiaries? It must be the most forgotten and marginalised people.

I spend a lot of my time working on and with the situation of the Roma communities. But it must also be about our general populations. We must work across our street to help show that human rights is about everyone, about my neighbour as much as somebody far distant.

In that way, not only do we do good, but we build communities of support for human rights and that is the context, for instance, of the need for efforts to tackle poverty and promote equality.

By the way, when here in Poland, I am reminded of the importance of this when I look back at the story of Solidarity. Of the 21 demands that solidarity made in the Gdansk shipyards back in 1980, 18 of them, were about what we would describe as socio-economic rights.

A fourth and a penultimate consideration has to do with the way in which, not who we work with, but how we work with them. It is important that we be principled and consistent in standing up for international human rights law. My friends, it is not à la carte. Law cannot be ever subordinated to other considerations.

What am I thinking of? I am thinking of the way we behave increasingly on our borders. It is vital that we preserve the right to seek asylum, that we avoid the risk of refoulement. In so doing, we have to push back against the false arguments of a zero-sum game vis-à-vis respect for international law and the protection of national security. Or to put it in OSCE language, we have to re-embed the notions of human security in our understanding of national security.

And fifth and finally, we have to recognise the degree of threat to that essential element of our human rights architecture, civil society.

I spent the last week in Strasbourg and in Brussels meeting with NGOs. I met with NGO activists who are in exile. I have met with those who are on the brink of leaving their country, still active, but only just holding on. I met with the families of human rights defenders in jail. And I met with so many whose organisations were in crisis because of absence of funding. And here I have to mention the huge implications of the withdrawal of USAID and indeed the large-scale pullback from Europe of the Open Society Foundations.

That is enough of my list. There is so much for us all to do. I wish OSCE all the very best as you embark on the next 50 years of your essential work. I will do what I can to support you and to play my own complementary and cooperative role.

In other words, friends, I look forward to being your partner in realising the sentiments that were so well expressed by the then US President Ford in Helsinki in 1975 when he said, and I quote, "We owe it to our children, to the children of all continents, not to miss any opportunity, not to mangle for one moment, not to spare ourselves or allow others to shirk in the monumental task of building a better and a safer world".

Thank you for your attention.