134th Session of the Committee of Ministers

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

Dear President, Excellencies,

I am grateful to Luxembourg for their support to my mandate during the Presidency, including in the context of the 25th anniversary of the Institution of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

I have just two messages.

First, on democratic security:

A considerable part of my work is in response to attacks on civil society, demanding a safe environment for NGOs and human rights defenders, and insisting on freedoms such as those of assembly, association and expression.

In other words, I am driven by a need to ensure respect for clear human rights obligations in the field of democracy under our binding instruments.

As we explore how to bring the Reykjavik Principles of Democracy to life through the New Democratic Pact for Europe, I recall that the preamble of the Principles states "*We will meet our obligations under international law*".

This has to be at the heart of our efforts towards democratic security.

I will continue to play my role in supporting full adherence to human rights obligations in the field of democracy.

Second, on Ukraine:

I applaud the Organisation's commitment to support the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in accordance with international law.

Any peace must be deeply rooted in human rights.

This is why our efforts to ensure accountability and justice are so important.

It is no less important to embed human rights in all other aspects of the path to peace.

We must insist on:

- the release of prisoners of war and civilian detainees and the return of Ukrainian children taken to Russia
- respect for the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons
- close attention to the human rights of people in temporarily occupied territories
- human rights-based humanitarian action and recovery.

These objectives should be met with engagement of multilateral organisations and civil society, and it is crucial that women play a prominent role, in line with UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).
I will continue to pursue these issues at the heart of my work.