

OSCE Warsaw Human Dimension Conference: UK opening statement

Thank you, Mr Chair, and thank you to Poland and OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) for your warm welcome and hosting.

We gather today, against the bleak backdrop of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. In the history of the OSCE never have the Helsinki Final Act's ten foundational principles been so disregarded. The territorial integrity of States is paramount. Yet Russia chooses to consistently ignore this principle. No matter the cost. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians have been killed and injured. Vibrant, historic cities of Ukraine lie in rubble, sham referenda are being organised. Multiple international humanitarian law and human rights abuses have been committed. Detailed in all their horror in two Moscow Mechanism reports. Lives have been put on hold. Many changed irreparably. Russia's shadow looms large over its neighbours in the OSCE region. The impact of Putin's illegal invasion seeping across the globe.

As we stand united with Ukraine, we must also reflect on the state of human rights within the Russian Federation and Belarus. Internal repression and external aggression represent two sides of the same coin – when a state places a stranglehold on the freedoms of its own people – it sets the conditions for, and enables, aggression abroad. We have witnessed this again over the last few days. Russian police arrested around 2,000 people for peacefully protesting mobilisation. Mr Chair – we cannot, and will not, sit idly by.

The institutions of the OSCE – ODIHR and the Representative on Freedom of the Media – act as an early warning to internal human rights abuses. We must heed their calls and react decisively. The human dimension underpins European security and is absolutely critical to the functioning of the OSCE. We must robustly defend the independence, mandates, and budgets of the OSCE's institutions and structures. Our peace, stability and security may depend on it.

I'll end by paying tribute to civil society representatives; the activists, lawyers, and the journalists who have travelled to Warsaw this year, some at real personal risk, to defend human rights. The UK delegation looks forward to a lively discussion with you.

Thank you Mr Chair.