

Five years ago, when the Soviet Union first proposed to hold a meeting on human rights in Moscow it seemed virtually impossible, almost as impossible as the events of the past few years which have so fundamentally changed the context of global relations.

This meeting is one of many initiatives inspired by President Gorbachev. It is a high point on the courageous trek from tyranny to democracy. President Yeltsin and other reformers in the Soviet Union have taken up the challenge and continue to blaze the trail to freedom, human rights and social justice for all with great courage and conviction. Our gathering here in Moscow is a vital link in the chain of nations which is forming from Vladivostok to Vancouver between countries which share a dedication to the rule of law, political plurality and a fundamental respect for human rights and freedoms. Strengthening this chain is the business of our meeting here in Moscow. The principles expressed here form the basis of solutions to the problems of security in Europe today.

The principles of the CSCE cannot be applied selectively. The tragic events in Yugoslavia confirm the need to embrace them totally. An essential principle must be the elaboration and adoption of agreed standards for the treatment of ethnic minorities -- for a society is only as strong as its most vulnerable member.

The Charter of Paris enjoins us to address the issue of minorities. The Participating States made a start in this regard at the second meeting of this Conference at Copenhagen. The Meeting of Experts on Minorities held in Geneva in July took the process a modest step further; but it also confirmed what a long road lies ahead. Our role now as ministers is to make sure that we address this task as an urgent one, that it doesn't lapse into another arid talkathon. We must take decisive action.

The question of minority rights remains the most important and explosive issue on the agenda of this meeting. But we need to move ahead in other areas of the human dimension where our collective will can take us further in the new circumstances which have opened before us. We confirmed in the Paris Charter that freedom and political pluralism are also fundamental to the successful transition to market economies. Free enterprise and freedom of the individual go hand in hand, not as an ideology but as a fundamental way of living our lives together on this planet.

Despite our best efforts and intentions, there is still much work to do in fully implementing the range of commitments we each have as CSCE Participating States. I, for one, remain aware that anti-semitism persists among us -- and must be eradicated, whether it takes the form of restricted exit permits or the fear of pogroms. Others will have other examples. Also, although we no longer need to come to CSCE meetings with long lists of people