

Opening Statement by Senior State Secretary Vilmos Szabó

“Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to open the Second Budapest Human Rights Forum and welcome the participants to the conference organized to provide dialogue among representatives of international organizations, NGOs and governments on concrete human rights issues. I would also like to commend my colleagues here in the Ministry on doing an excellent job in organizing this event. The positive feedback from the First Budapest Human Rights Forum, reconfirmed our original intention to make this Forum a tradition and arrange annual human rights conferences in Budapest, where challenging human rights questions may be addressed by a wide circle of diplomats, international experts, and NGOs.

Let me express my deep gratitude for the financial contribution provided by the Embassy of the Netherlands and of Canada which helped us to invite several panelists to the Forum.

The international protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms is a matter of high priority for the Hungarian foreign policy. This is not surprising in light of our history. This year, 2009 is a historic date for several reasons. Though 160 years ago Hungary fought without success, but not unnecessarily to regain its freedom, 20 years ago, however, Hungarians again shaped the history. In 1989 Hungary significantly contributed to the collapse of the Communist regime by literally dismantling the Iron Curtain and acted as a major driving force to pave the way for democracy, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the region. This year we commemorate the 20th anniversary of this historic event, and with it the re-unification of Europe. One of the panels of the Forum will examine the effects of the demolition of the Iron Curtain and the opening of the borders between Eastern and Western Europe.

Dear Participants,

The Government of Hungary is fully convinced that the prevention of genocide and mass atrocities as the most extreme human rights abuses should be one of the top priorities for the international community. As a member of the European Union and the United Nations, Hungary is fully committed to the notion of genocide prevention and is ready to make concrete steps for its implementation and contribute in a rather tangible manner to the efforts of the international community in this realm. Therefore, I am especially pleased that last year, during the First Budapest Human Rights Forum, Hungary announced its intention to prepare a feasibility study on the establishment of an International Centre for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities (ICPG) in Budapest. Today, I am proud to announce that the feasibility study is completed, and its promising outcome will be presented within the framework of the first panel of the Forum.

Dear Participants,

The Eastern Partnership initiative adopted by the European Council last December constitutes a strategic vision to strengthen ties and increase cooperation with our Eastern neighbours. One of the priorities of the strategy is to step up efforts in the field of democracy and rule of law that will certainly have impacts on the issues of human rights as well. Hungary, herself going through tough economic reforms, will not be indifferent to the fate and progress of these countries and remains committed to providing the necessary assistance and support for their efforts in the domain of democratization including human rights matters. Therefore, I am really glad that the second panel today is going to discuss some human rights issues in the 6 countries participating at the EU Eastern Partnership initiative.

One of the principal indicators that a State embarks on the long way of democratic transition is holding democratic elections. International organizations provide support for the preparation and conduct of fair and democratic elections and deploy Observation Missions to enhance transparency and settle the possible electoral disputes in a peaceful manner. For this reason, the last panel of the Forum is going to address this issue.

I am particularly honoured to open this conference in my capacity as State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary, and I would like to thank you all for your participation at the Second Budapest Human Rights Forum. I invite you to a lively and fruitful discussion in the next two days.

Thank you for your attention.”