

11 ICOAF

The 11th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces

Sarajevo, 28 October 2019

Welcome remarks of Ambassador Thomas Guerber to 11ICOAF

9:00 – 9:45 Welcoming the participants, expressing gratitude to the co-hosts, and presenting the conference programme

[Thanking Ms Borjana Krišto for her conference opening]

- Your excellency, Deputy Chairman of the House of Representatives, Ms Borjana Krišto, thank you for your welcome.

[Beginning of speech]

Distinguished representatives of ombuds institutions,
Parliamentary and independent commissioners,
Inspector-generals, senior members of defence forces, and defence attaches,
Delegates, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

- I would like to join our Bosnian and Herzegovinian hosts in wishing you a warm welcome to the 11th International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces dedicated to the theme 'Building Resilient and Sustainable Ombuds Institutions'. As always, it is an honour, and a great pleasure to open this year's iteration of the ICOAF conference series – an annual event that has since its inception in 2009 established itself as a crucial global forum for representatives of the ombuds community to establish best practices, forge partnerships, and share lessons learned.
- Yet, the value of the ICOAF conference series goes beyond the two eventful days rich in ideas and discussions to come – as we deliberate on the most pressing challenges that face ombuds institutions for the armed forces, we are privileged to experience new and exciting environments – this year-round, surrounded by the beautiful landscapes of Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the hard work and dedication of our co-hosts and colleagues from Bosnian and Herzegovina, I issue a heartfelt thank you.

- Let me also extend a special welcome to those whose support made this conference possible. My utmost gratitude is due to the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, the Ministry of Defence of the Netherlands, and the Norwegian Parliamentary Ombudsman for the Armed Forces. We thank you for your generous financial contribution to this conference, as well as the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, without the support of which many participants would not have been here with us today. Fortunately, I am happy to announce that following last year's appeal, we have solidified and broadened our funding base – I thank the leadership exercised by Norway and Germany in this regard. With that said, we would continue to appreciate your support in assisting us with securing future funding assurances for ICOAF through your Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence or other organizations.
- DCAF is dedicated to making states and people safer through more effective and accountable security and justice, and ombuds institutions are a critical tool for strengthening good security sector governance. I would go as far as to say that ombuds institutions are the manifestation of democratic governance. Entrusted with the task of oversight, ombuds institutions build accountable, transparent, participatory, responsive, and effective state bodies. The mandate of your offices is not unsimilar to ours, and, therefore, DCAF places great importance on ICOAF. ICOAF is furthermore the only network of its kind to raise the importance of, and to support and promote institutions like yours. For this reason, I am pleased to see so many representatives from all over the world here today.
- ICOAF has come a long way since its first edition in 2009. Back then, the conference hosted 36 representatives of 21 countries. This year, there are over 100 participants representing 47 countries, making this the largest ICOAF to date. This is a clear indication of ICOAF's growing reputation across the world and what representatives of ombuds institutions can achieve when they work together to reach shared goals. The growth is evident also in international scope – following last year's conference hosted for the first time on the African continent. I am glad to see many colleagues from African countries who have travelled far to join us again. This year will again feature a third day – taking the positive example of last year's conference in Johannesburg – allowing the space for regional information sharing for our colleagues in the Western Balkan region and a special event on

“Demystifying whistleblowing in the armed forces”. I look forward to learning from all of you, and I wish you a very fruitful discussion on Wednesday.

- The topic of this year’s conference, “Building resilient and sustainable ombuds institutions”, is now more relevant than ever. Over the last decades, volatility and turbulence across all areas of society is increasing at a rate proving difficult for us to adapt. Our natural, social, economic and political systems are characterised more by the disruption they experience, rather than by their stability – we need not look far for examples illustrative of that fact.
- Ombuds institutions are not immune to this trend. In recent years many have increasingly come under stress, experiencing attacks from government officials, both civilian and military, as well as other prominent figures in society. These attacks manifest through public scrutiny on their independence and impartiality, reduced budgetary allocations, removal from office or diminished levels of cooperation, and severely blocked the ability of ombuds institutions to carry out their work.
- In parallel, the notion of ‘resilience’ has emerged as a concept for generating the ability to resist such pressures and stress. Appropriated from the field of ecology, the concept is now used in a wide range of policy domains. What allowed this shift to happen is a change in our understanding of stability, formerly seen as static. However, a static understanding of stability is untenable in today’s rapidly changing world. Many systems today, which are stable and safe, are so *precisely* due to their dynamism. A dynamic understanding of stability recognises the positive role that changes and adaptations can have. Against this backdrop, resilience denotes the ability of actors to manage disturbances in a way that allows for the effective continuation of their goals – achieving stability and continuity through dynamism and flexibility. Resilience is empowering. It is imbued with an emancipatory quality as it shifts attention to the potential for development, capacity for action, survival strategies, and support networks. With no signs of the volatility trend abating, resilience will be here to stay.

- Resilience and fragility are two sides of same coin: increasing resilience will reduce fragility and vice versa. Yet, these are not absolute values. Resilience and fragility operate on a scale: to an extent, all actors are resilient as they are fragile – just to differing degrees. We must be mindful of this – even strong and seasoned institutions within non-fragile states are under stress. Similarly, fragility can be related to the political and the security level – a country’s security sector may be very resilient, yet their governance may be very fragile. In such contexts, the work of ombuds institutions becomes even more important. Resilience applies to all of us.
- Resilient ombuds institutions, able to effectively carry out their mandate unabated by external and internal shocks, are a mechanism to foster resilient societies. As you decrease fragility and increase good governance of public institutions, you create positive knock-on effects for those governed under these institutions. This does not make your task harder but more important – not only do you foster resilience within your organisation, you also generate resilience on a societal level.
- Conversely, by exchanging lessons learned and positive practices, as well as by creating long-lasting partnerships, ICOAF increases the resilience of your institutions. Our hope is that leaving this conference, you are better equipped to deal with future challenges and adapt in the face of disruption. Our hope is that you leave this conference more resilient than before. To imbue this hope with meaning, the conference statement of this year’s ICOAF will integrate concrete follow-up steps that cement the lessons shared, and learned over the next two days.
- A quick procedural note before the conference starts – DCAF staff will be taking pictures in the course of the conference to be included in the conference report. Should you take issue with your picture being displayed, please contact one of our staff. Now, that all is said, I wish you rich, constructive and enjoyable conference and it is my great honour to pass the floor onto Bosko Siljegovic, Parliamentary Military Commissioner of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Brief remarks of Ambassador Thomas Guerber to Welcome Dinner

19:30 – 19:33 // 27 October 2019

Dear friends and colleagues!

I welcome all of you who have travelled from afar to Bosnia and Herzegovina. This year is our biggest conference yet – evidence of how much we value these days spent together. We owe our gratitude for this year's welcome dinner to our hosts here in Sarajevo, Boško Šiljegović, the Parliamentary Military Commissioner of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ambassador Uebber of Germany, Roald Linaker, Ombudsman for the Norwegian Armed Forces, Reinier van Zutphen, the National Ombudsman of the Netherlands and Oswald Padanou of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Thank you for your financial support to the conference.

Now, in the spirit of this year's conference theme – that is, strengthening the resilience of your offices to withstand shocks – we will test the resilience to shocks of our next speakers as each of them receives the bill for all the champagne we have just consumed.

- 1. Boško Šiljegović, the Parliamentary Military Commissioner of Bosnia and Herzegovina*
- 2. Ambassador Uebber of Germany,*
- 3. Roald Linaker, Ombudsman for the Norwegian Armed Forces*
- 4. Reinier van Zutphen, the National Ombudsman of the Netherlands*
- 5. Oswald Padanou of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation*