

# PUTTING HUMAN SECURITY IN THE CENTRE OF IMPLEMENTING THE HELSINKI PRINCIPLES

## A Civil Society Manifesto on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act

Adopted by members of the Civic Solidarity Platform and partners, July 2025

*The Civic Solidarity Platform, a coalition of over 100 non-governmental organisations with deep and long engagement in supporting the implementation of the Helsinki principles, organised a “Helsinki+50 Reflection Process” to consider how these principles can be an inspiration for action as we mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic adoption of the Helsinki Final Act at the time of several crises of comprehensive security.*

*Following our deliberations, CSP members and its partners offer this Manifesto with key appeals on:*

- *What states must do to fully realise the Helsinki principles and implement OSCE commitments;*
- *What OSCE structures should do to effectively fulfil their mandates;*
- *What civil society commits to be doing to realise the Helsinki principles in all three dimensions.*

We recognise that the OSCE is in crisis due to such key factors as its inability to prevent and stop Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine, deteriorating implementation by participating States of their OSCE commitments in all three dimensions, and a lack of accountability for systematic or gross violations. Within the OSCE, compartmentalisation of the three dimensions undermines the comprehensive security concept while abuse of the consensus principle limits effective decision-making and contributes to chronic underfunding. The Organisation should engage vigorously in addressing such challenges to comprehensive security as the climate crisis, the impacts and causes of migration, the backlash against gender equality and gender identity, and the growing use of hybrid non-military tools. We are particularly troubled by the OSCE’s failure to fully utilise civil society’s potential to serve as a key actor in upholding the Helsinki principles, often limiting engagement with civil society to a symbolic level. The general public lacks awareness of the Helsinki principles and OSCE work, limiting popular demand for implementing the OSCE acquis.

These problems require urgent attention by all who want the OSCE to address multiple international crises and its own institutional challenges. The OSCE must act as both a guardian of the Helsinki principles and a forum for dialogue. It should reinforce existing commitments, strengthen its institutions, and be open to civic scrutiny and participation.

Key Helsinki principles of sovereign equality, refraining from the threat or use of force, the inviolability of frontiers, and respect for the concept of comprehensive security should be non-negotiable and remain at the centre of the European security order. Above all, Russia must immediately end its war of aggression against Ukraine. Any disputes between states should be settled peacefully.

The Helsinki Final Act gained strength through subsequent consensus agreements on a range of OSCE commitments in the post-Cold War period, giving substance to the concept of comprehensive security. We expect States, with the support of OSCE structures, to take real, sustained, and meaningful steps to implement all their commitments to make security truly comprehensive.

The prevention and resolution of conflicts should be based on enhancing comprehensive security, putting human security in the centre of action as opposed to using only military security means, applying gender perspective on

security, and involving all sectors of the populations, aimed at ensuring their common interests and maximising their enjoyment of human rights. Sustainable peace and prevention of new conflicts can be only achieved on the basis of delivery of justice, including full rehabilitation of victims and ensuring accountability of violators. We urge and will campaign for OSCE participating States to act on the basis of their common interest in effectively using the OSCE security toolbox, limiting and controlling the capacity of arms of mass destruction and of hybrid actions that put pressure on civilian life and may contribute to a spiral towards all-out war.

We expect States to cooperate on the fair and sustainable use of natural resources, protection of the environment, and mitigation of the climate crisis, as required for the survival of civilization.

The recognition in Copenhagen, Paris, Moscow, and Astana that the protection and promotion of human rights is the first responsibility of governments and that developments in the human dimension of security are not solely the internal affairs of any single State should retake centre stage. We call on participating States that care about democracy, human rights, and the rule of law to use all appropriate OSCE tools, including the Moscow Mechanism, wherever large-scale violations of the Helsinki principles occur in the OSCE region, including in the U.S. and EU member states, and incorporate the promotion of the Helsinki principles in their foreign policy.

We call on the OSCE bodies and participating States to recognise the value of civic participation in all three dimensions, including contribution of women, youth and minorities, and translate this into opening space in talks on the design and implementation of programmes in all dimensions. The OSCE bodies and States should defend civil society space and actors at risk. We expect OSCE executive bodies and autonomous institutions to be bold in promoting the Helsinki principles and OSCE commitments and to involve civil society at every stage of their work in the most collaborative and meaningful manner.

For our part, as civil society leaders and activists, we will:

- continue to promote the implementation of the Helsinki principles and all OSCE commitments by shining a spotlight on violations and gaps in implementation across the entire spectrum of the Helsinki principles and OSCE commitments and advocating for effective action by concerned actors;
- continue to assert that the Final Act and the Helsinki principles are of value for societies and states because of how they developed with an evolving understanding of security as comprehensive and inter-dimensional, not acknowledging spheres of influence, rule by force, and disrespect for international law;
- inform organisations and people across the region of the comprehensive security concept, what it means for how governments should operate and societies function, and how guidance and instruments developed by the OSCE can be applied. We will emphasise how the Helsinki principles allow us to think about security as more than just weapons – to see that it is about putting human security in the centre, building inclusive, resilient societies, where citizens are not persecuted for engaging in civic life;
- translate the Helsinki principles for more diverse audiences, stimulating their use by diverse institutions, organisations and groups in society, beyond human rights defenders; consider how environmental activists, feminist groups, organisations of minorities, anti-war activists, social justice movements and other groups may utilise the Helsinki principles to mobilise a broader ‘movement of resistance’ for dignity, fairness and freedom, reviving the spirit of the civic Helsinki movement of the 1970s-1980s.

**We will ask not only what the OSCE can do for us, but primarily what we can do for comprehensive security.** In addition to pointing to gaps in state policies, we will stimulate interest inside our societies for action for contributing to comprehensive security. In this way, a stronger and more effective OSCE may become a natural product of increased public attention to and interest in the Organisation.

**The Civil Society Manifesto on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act has been signed by the following organisations as of 29 July 2025:**

*Civic Solidarity Platform members:*

1. Austausch e.V. (Germany)
2. Austrian Helsinki Association (Austria)
3. Bir Duino (Kyrgyzstan)
4. Center for Participation and Development (Georgia)
5. Centre for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
6. Citizens' Watch (Russia)
7. Crew against Torture (Russia)
8. Crude Accountability (USA)
9. Danish Helsinki Committee for Human Rights (Denmark)
10. "Dignity" (Kazakhstan)
11. EQUAL PostOst e.V. (Germany)
12. Freedom Files (Poland)
13. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly – Vanadzor (Armenia)
14. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia (Serbia)
15. Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan)
16. Human Rights Centre ZMINA (Ukraine)
17. Human Rights Center "Viasna" (Belarus)
18. Human Rights Club (Azerbaijan)
19. Human Rights Defence Centre "Memorial" (Russia/international)
20. Human Rights Group "Citizen. Army. Law" (Russia)
21. Institute of the Republic (Ukraine)
22. International Partnership for Human Rights – IPHR (Belgium/international)
23. International Protection Centre (France)
24. Hungarian Helsinki Committee (Hungary)
25. Kazakhstani International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (Kazakhstan)
26. KRF "Public Alternative" (Ukraine)
27. Macedonian Helsinki Committee (North Macedonia)
28. Minority Rights Group (Hungary/international)
29. Moscow Helsinki Group (Russia)
30. Netherlands Helsinki Committee (the Netherlands)
31. Norwegian Helsinki Committee (Norway)
32. OVD-Info (Russia)
33. Promo-LEX (Moldova)
34. Public Verdict Foundation (Russia)
35. SOVA Research Center (Russia)
36. Sphere Foundation (Russia)
37. Swiss Helsinki Committee (Switzerland)
38. Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation (Bulgaria)
39. Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union (Ukraine)

*Partners:*

40. Andrei Sakharov Institute (France)

41. "Ariadna" (Kazakhstan)
42. Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners of the Kremlin (Ukraine)
43. Centre of Law Enforcement Activities Research – CLEAR (Ukraine)
44. Civic Assistance Committee (Russia)
45. Crisis Group "North Caucasus SOS" (Russia)
46. "Erkindik Kanaty" (Wings of Freedom) (Kazakhstan)
47. "Equal rights" (Kazakhstan)
48. European Exchange (Germany)
49. Human Rights Group SICH (Ukraine)
50. International Helsinki Association for Human Rights (international)
51. International Strategic Action Network for Security – iSANS (Poland/international)
52. Italian Federation for Human Rights – Italian Helsinki Committee (Italy)
53. Kazakhstani Feminist Initiative "Feminita" (Kazakhstan)
54. Nemolchi.kz Foundation (Don't Be Silent) (Kazakhstan)
55. Radio Sakharov (Germany)
56. Roskomsvoboda (Russia)
57. RKS Global (France)
58. Russian Initiative Group "Delo LGBT+" (Russia)

The Manifesto is open for signing by civil society organisations. To sign the Manifesto, please write to the Civic Solidarity Platform Secretariat at [civicsolidarity.info@gmail.com](mailto:civicsolidarity.info@gmail.com).