

**Speech by Uri Rosenthal, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands,
at the presentation of the Max Van der Stoel Award 2011,
The Hague, 24 October 2011**

High Commissioner Vollebaek, Your Excellencies, Mr Stojkovksi, Mr Zekoli, ladies and gentlemen,

This is the first time the Award has been presented since Max van der Stoel passed away last April. He was once interviewed about the ‘quiet diplomacy’ for which he was so well-known. Van der Stoel, in his typical way, replied: ‘I am not just quiet.’ He added that what he did was ‘quiet diplomacy *plus*’. That ‘quiet diplomacy plus’ meant to him to mobilise other states for conflict prevention. And that, to him, it meant convincing parties that it is in the interest of the minority and the majority alike to find a *modus vivendi*.

Van der Stoel’s answer reflects how he was as a person. He spoke softly, but with great determination. He exerted a quiet but powerful influence on processes of conflict prevention and reconciliation in Europe. Processes that remain crucial for peace and stability. In Europe, as well as in continents elsewhere in the world.

Democracy, the rule of law and human rights. These were the driving forces of Van der Stoel’s career as a statesman. He rightly became the first High Commissioner on National Minorities. In fact, Max van der Stoel shaped this position into its current format.

‘Quiet diplomacy *plus*’ also aptly describes the High Commissioner’s core business. Most of the time, he is working behind the scenes. When a crisis is successfully averted, hardly anyone takes notice of his activities. Wars that don’t take place usually don’t make the headlines of the newspapers.

The oppression of ethnic minorities is a root cause of conflicts. Just last year, the High Commissioner issued an ‘early warning’ about the risk of violence against the Uzbek minority in

Kyrgyzstan. Sometimes early warnings by themselves are not enough. The international community needs to follow up with 'early action'.

In the United Nations we are discussing intensely the so-called the Responsibility to Protect. It is to the nation state itself to protect its people against genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. This duty comes with national sovereignty. But when states fail to act, the international community has a duty to address these atrocities. The Responsibility to Protect is not only about military intervention. But also about preventive diplomacy, fact finding and non-military sanctions. The Responsibility to Protect is here to stay. Last month in New York, I hosted a special meeting on this issue together with my Guatemalan colleague. The Netherlands will continue to support these important developments.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2001, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the Max van der Stoel Award for persons or organisations that improve the position of national minorities in OSCE countries. In that same year, Max van der Stoel was appointed the OSCE's special envoy to Macedonia. He successfully mediated in the conflict between the Macedonian majority and the ethnic Albanians.

It gives me great satisfaction that now, exactly ten years later, the Nansen Dialogue Centre Skopje is receiving the Max van der Stoel Award. Not just because it is based in Macedonia. But because the Centre's work embodies the very spirit of Max van der Stoel. He saw education as key to improving equality and interaction between ethnic groups. He therefore recommended the establishment of a university in Tetovo. A town with an ethnic-Albanian majority. His plea led to the establishment of the South Eastern European University. Its lectures are delivered in Albanian, Macedonian and English. And it has a strong focus on interethnic cooperation.

The Nansen Dialogue Centre Skopje, for its part, promotes dialogue among students, young politicians and NGO representatives from various ethnic backgrounds. In recent years, it has focused on integrated education at primary and secondary schools. In 2008, it opened its first Integrated Bilingual Primary School. Since then, its model has been extended to primary and

secondary schools across Macedonia. By focusing on integrated education it continues Van der Stoel's legacy.

So, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to congratulate Mr Stojkovksi and Mr Zekoli and their staff on winning the Max van der Stoel Award 2011. I hope this award supports you in your truly important work. You are enabling young people in Macedonia to build their futures together. You can be proud of that.

Thank you.