



United States Mission to the OSCE

Right of Reply – Working Session I Democratic institutions, including address by the Director of ODIHR

As delivered by Ambassador Michael Kozak,
Head of Delegation
OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, September 19, 2016

We would like to exercise our right of reply regarding the statements of the Azerbaijan Citizen Labor Rights Protection League.

The gentleman implied that U.S. civil society is unable to do shadow reports on U.S. human rights performance. Nothing could be further from the truth, as those who monitor the activities of our independent civil society can readily attest to.

I do want to point out that the Azerbaijani GONGO that spoke, comparing U.S. adoption of international covenants to Azerbaijan's adoption of covenants was misguided on several levels.

First, we don't see merit in comparing states – every government has obligations and commitments, every government should live up to them, and should be evaluated on the merits of its implementation.

Second, an emphasis only on adoption and ratification misses the point: the words in these documents are not ornamental—the work is not done when they are adopted. The real work happens through action. The United States is proud of the way that we continuously work to put universal human rights into practice. This morning we shared some examples of how we have corrected our own shortcomings, consistent with universal principles embodied in covenants and the Helsinki Final Act.

Mr. Moderator, when governments pay GONGOs to come to HDIM they do more than waste our time, they reveal their own weakness, their inability to respond to genuinely-held criticisms themselves. The statements by GONGOs this morning make their government sponsors look weak and foolish.