



United States Mission to the OSCE
Statement on Fundamental Freedoms:
Freedom of Movement; Migrant Workers and the
Integration of Legal Migrants at HDIM Session 17

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Michael Kozak, Head of Delegation
Warsaw
September 21, 2017

OSCE participating States have committed themselves in the Vienna Concluding Document to, “respect fully the right of everyone to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State, and to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” Nevertheless, restrictions on both internal and external travel continue in some States. These restrictions often appear to be aimed at restricting the activities of human rights activists, journalists, and members of the political opposition. Some governments have denied civil society activists the right to leave their countries specifically to prevent them from participating in this forum.

In Turkmenistan, the government bars select persons from leaving the country. Relatives of imprisoned or exiled critics of the government often find out they are barred from traveling abroad when they are turned away at the airport.

Russia’s ongoing aggression restricts movement in conflict areas of Ukraine. Civilians bear the burden of Russia’s unwillingness to end the violence. We call on the forces Russia trains, arms, and fights alongside to fulfill their commitment to opening a vehicle crossing point in Luhansk in order to ease passage across the line of contact. In accordance with the mandate of the SMM, monitors are to have unrestricted access throughout Ukraine, but they continue to face unacceptable restrictions on their movements. We call on Russia to end the attacks and other forms of intimidation against monitors, and to facilitate safe access for the SMM throughout Ukraine, including along its internationally recognized border with Russia. Russia-led forces in Donetsk and Luhansk must act on the SMM’s request to establish forward patrol bases on territory not controlled by the Ukrainian government that is near the Russian border.

We again call on Russia to grant access for the SMM to Crimea, which remains a part of Ukraine. Due to Russia’s occupation, Ukrainians moving between Crimea and the rest of Ukraine also face long crossings. Crimean Tatars often report intrusive inspections, harassment, and detentions at the administrative boundary. We condemn Russian occupation authorities’ ongoing ban on Crimean Tatar leaders returning to their homeland.

In Georgia, the closure of two controlled crossing points along the so-called “administrative boundary line” of the Russian-occupied territory of Abkhazia further restricts local residents’ movement. The United States fully supports Georgia’s territorial integrity, independence, and

sovereignty within its internationally recognized borders. We call for these crossing points to be reopened, allowing children to attend school and residents to move freely for purposes of work and commerce, visiting relatives, and accessing medical services.

In Azerbaijan, authorities restricted freedom of movement for a growing number of journalists, activists, opposition politicians, and human rights lawyers, preventing them from traveling outside of the country. The government also often places travel restrictions on their family members.

In Uzbekistan, the August 16 Presidential decree announcing the abolition of exit visas by January 1, 2019 is a welcome development. We are encouraged by steps to eliminate restrictions on freedom of movement, and look forward to more progress.

In Helsinki in 1992, participating States recognized that, “that human rights and fundamental freedoms are universal, that they are also enjoyed by migrant workers wherever they live.” In this context, we are concerned about reports of abuses of migrant workers in Russia who are involved in building sites and infrastructure for the 2018 World Cup. The projects have attracted thousands of workers from throughout Russia and the former Soviet republics, many of whom have experienced severe labor rights abuses, including unpaid or withheld wages and outdoor work in unsafe temperatures, as well as retaliation or threats of retaliation for raising concerns. We are also concerned about attacks against and harassment of Central Asian migrants working in Russia.

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