



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Belarus

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 18, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States takes note of the efforts of the government of Belarus to hold a roundtable on media freedom and to allow two independent newspapers into state distribution networks. We will monitor the situation closely for follow-on actions to bring about genuine media freedom in Belarus. We also noted that President Lukashenko has asked the government to study OSCE/ODIHR recommendations on electoral reform. We will again watch the situation closely, looking for concrete steps that improve the electoral environment in Belarus ahead of upcoming presidential elections.

Other developments in Belarus, however, strike us as not at all promising. Only days after the OSCE adopted a ministerial declaration commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirming our mutual human rights commitments, Belarusian police dispersed demonstrations marking international Human Rights Day and detained dozens of activists—including nine whose offense was handing out copies of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Human rights defenders continue to be prosecuted for exercising their right of non-violent protest. On December 9, youth activist Alyaksandr Barazenko was sentenced to one year of house arrest for participating in an entrepreneurs' rally back in January.

Such behavior is an outright flouting of the Government of Belarus' international commitments to respect universal human rights. Mr. Chairman, we call on the government of Belarus to honor its international obligations and commitments to respect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens, and to promote democracy in Belarus. Steps toward genuine democratic reform and respect for human rights can foster the possibility of significantly improving bilateral relations between the United States and Belarus.

We are also concerned and disappointed that the OSCE Office in Minsk has not reported on these recent events. We urge the Office to strengthen its focus on the promotion of core OSCE values in Belarus.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.