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United States Mission to the OSCE

On International Human Rights Day

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 12, 2019

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to identify common rights and freedoms for all people in all nations. An American, former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, chaired the UN Human Rights Commission that drafted this landmark document. Chairwoman Roosevelt needed only to look at our own deep American traditions as inspiration for formalizing these inalienable, individual rights. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights have guided our nation for more than 200 years in promoting rights and freedoms.

Thanks to Chairwoman Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, more persons around the world enjoy these fundamental rights and freedoms than was the case before the Declaration's adoption. Indeed, it is widely recognized that a government's moral authority is derived in large measure by its willingness to protect the rights and freedoms enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Sadly, not all nations have demonstrated this willingness. Today we face government actions that aim to promote divisions and impede the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms at every level. Russia – who has just spoken – brazenly interferes in the democratic processes of other States, for example, and seeks to delegitimize their institutions as it cracks down on civil society actors and peaceful protestors at home. Mutual respect cannot be based on that kind of conduct.

Russia is not alone in using restrictive NGO and media laws and anti-extremism and anti-terrorist statutes to suppress civil freedoms, dissenters, and members of ethnic and religious minorities and in holding political prisoners in deadly prison conditions. These acts contravene the OSCE's foundational principles and threaten the stability of our region. We should insist that participating States accept the responsibility to implement policies that advance the human dignity of all.

Today, we celebrate the universal rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and recommit ourselves to protecting and promoting these fundamental, universal, and essential freedoms. The United States will always remain a staunch supporter of those who strive for their unalienable rights and human dignity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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