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United States Mission to the OSCE

Restriction of Space for Political Opposition in Tajikistan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Kate Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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The United States expresses its deep concern over the ongoing restriction of space for political opposition by the authorities of Tajikistan in advance of the March 1 parliamentary elections. These actions include undue limitations of the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly—all of which are guaranteed in Tajikistan's constitution and are core OSCE commitments—through obstruction of opposition groups' campaign activities and the politically motivated prosecution and sentencing of opposition figures and their lawyers. These actions silence opposition voices and discourage free and open participation in Tajikistan's democratic development.

We are concerned over reports that Tajikistani authorities refused applications from the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) to advertise and hold conferences in several cities in January in order to limit their pre-election activities. Similarly, we are troubled by the detention and subsequent conviction of domestic opposition figures, including former Minister of Industry and independent Dushanbe City Parliamentarian Zaid Saidov. Mr. Saidov and a member of his defense team are serving lengthy prison sentences on charges that many observers in the international community have described as politically motivated. We are concerned that the perception of the politically motivated prosecution of lawyers produces a chilling effect within Tajikistan's legal community.

As the March 1 parliamentary elections approach, we urge the Government of Tajikistan to fully observe its International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights obligations on freedom of expression—including the expression of opposing political views—as well as the freedoms of association and peaceful assembly. We also call on the Tajikistani authorities to grant detained opposition figures access to fair and open trials with the required procedural guarantees in accordance with Tajikistan's international obligations and OSCE commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.