



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Police Crackdown Against Protesters in Russia

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 19, 2007

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman,

Heavy-handed crackdowns by Russian police of peaceful demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg are the latest of several incidents involving the use of overbearing force against freedom of expression and assembly. Once again, we urge respect for Helsinki and Copenhagen commitments.

On March 24, we raised concerns about Russian government efforts to prevent rallies by the opposition in Nizhniy Novgorod, St. Petersburg and Moscow. And just last weekend, Russian authorities again used excessive force against peaceful protestors and journalists in Moscow and St. Petersburg. According to several reports, over 9000 policemen were deployed to control a crowd of perhaps 3000 people. Among those detained were four journalists from the Reuters news agency as well as opposition leader and former world chess champion Garry Kasparov, who was reportedly arrested for the crime of "shouting anti-government slogans in the presence of a large group of people."

These actions raise serious concerns about the ability of Russian citizens to exercise their basic rights of freedom of assembly and expression, concerns magnified by the fact that protest organizers faced significant difficulties in their attempts to receive permits from the government to hold these peaceful demonstrations.

Peaceful marches and protests that air differing viewpoints are a cornerstone of democratic society, and every individual has this right. We have consistently raised our concerns about the freedom of assembly and expression. The recent actions by the Russian government are clearly contrary to OSCE commitments, including those expressed in the Copenhagen Document of 1990, in which States reaffirmed that "everyone will have the right of peaceful assembly and demonstration" and also the Moscow Document of 1991, which reaffirms that "pluralism is important in regard to political organizations."

Thank you.