



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Denial of Registration to the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 20, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We were greatly disappointed to learn last week that a reputable NGO, the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, was not allowed to register and participate in last week's Victims of Terrorism conference. The principle of NGO participation at OSCE events is one we hold in high regard. NGOs and civil society in general are the cornerstone of a vibrant, pluralistic democracy.

In this particular situation, the RCFS has not been accused of carrying out terrorist acts. In his opening statement at last week's conference, Ambassador Titorenko noted that the organization was closed down because it published statements by well-known terrorists and alleged that this is a "promotion of terrorism."

Mr. Chairman, if this were the case, then almost every reputable news organization in the U.S. and Europe would have to be shut down immediately as they have at one time or another carried statements by such well-known terrorists as Osama bin Ladin. This is clearly inimical to the principles of free speech and cannot be permitted.

Moreover, we sincerely hope that the RCFS will be able to participate in the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting coming up in Warsaw. It participated in an OSCE conference earlier this year and participated at previous HDIMs in the last few years as well. The RCFS is a highly regarded organization. As the EU pointed out last Friday, the RCFS was a recipient of the 2004 Recognition Award of the International Helsinki Federation and was one of the few remaining organizations in Russia reporting on human rights conditions in Chechnya and the Northern Caucasus. It must have the chance to participate, just as any other peaceful organization.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.