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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Violence Against Journalists and Human Rights Defenders in Russia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 3, 2009

Madam Chairwoman,

The United States joins the European Union in noting the deep concern expressed by OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Haraszti in his August 13 statement calling upon Russian authorities to assume responsibility in combating violence against journalists and human rights activists.

The two latest examples in what has become a painful catalogue of fallen human rights defenders in Russia come from the events of a single day.

On August 11, newspaper editor Abdulmalik Akhmedilov was murdered in Dagestan. He was a frequent critic of federal and local law enforcement officials, often on human rights issues.

Also on August 11, noted humanitarian Zarema Sadulayeva and her husband were brutally murdered in Chechnya – a day after they were kidnapped at the offices of Sadulayeva's NGO Save the Generation, where for more than 15 years she worked on behalf of children suffering from the effects of war.

These killings follow the kidnapping and shooting death only a month earlier of one of Chechnya's most respected and brave human rights activists, Nataliya Estemirova, who tirelessly fought to expose corruption and human rights abuses in the North Caucasus.

This violence against those who advocate human rights, the rule of law, an independent media and humanitarian assistance is deeply troubling. The atmosphere of impunity in which these killings continue to occur will only end after the Russian government vigorously performs full and transparent investigations and brings to justice the perpetrators of these terrible crimes.

With Representative Haraszti, we join in the urgent call for Russia to develop an action plan to end this crisis against human rights, which "continues to claim lives."

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.