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United States Mission to the OSCE

Concern about Accreditation for RFE/RL Radio Ozodi

As delivered by Acting Political Counselor Lane Darnell Bahl
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 31, 2019

Thank you,

The United States is concerned about the denial of accreditation by Tajikistan of journalists affiliated with *Radio Ozodi*, the Tajik Service of *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*.

We welcome the re-issuance of accreditation to seven journalists of Radio Ozodi today. We remain concerned about the three newly-hired journalists who have not yet been issued accreditation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the eight employees of the radio station who have been unable to renew their accreditation this year. This has effectively barred these individuals from working as journalists in Tajikistan.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalists report the news in 22 countries. Their goal is to provide uncensored news, responsible discussion, and open debate across viewpoints.

Arbitrarily denying or indefinitely delaying accreditation for 18 journalists of one outlet is a serious setback for media freedom in Tajikistan. It is also inconsistent with Tajikistan's OSCE commitments. In the *1999 Istanbul Document* participating States reaffirmed "the importance of independent media and the free flow of information as well as the public's access to information," and committed to "take all necessary steps to ensure the basic conditions for free and independent media...[as] an essential component to any democratic, free and open society."

When one of the first of *Radio Ozodi*'s journalists was denied accreditation in June, the *OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media* Harlem Désir said, "it is of great concern that a journalist working for a critical outlet is denied press accreditation. Accreditation should not serve as a tool to control content or restrict the flow of information."

We fully concur with this statement. We call on the government of Tajikistan to immediately issue accreditation to journalists from *Radio Ozodi* and to stop using accreditation as a work permit or a tool to control content.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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