



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on LGBT Harassment and Political Prisoners in Belarus**

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
February 14, 2013

The Belarusian MFA issued a report last week critical of the human rights performance of 25 countries, including the United States. The delegation of Belarus cited this report at the last meeting of the Permanent Council. The United States welcomes dialogue with other countries and non-governmental organizations regarding the human rights situation in the United States. We urge Belarusian authorities to engage, as well, in a dialogue about human rights within Belarus.

In this context, the United States expresses its deep concern regarding recent incidents in Belarus involving official harassment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals.

At least four times this year, police have raided clubs frequented by members of the LGBT community in Belarus and briefly detained dozens in Minsk and Vitebsk, most recently on February 8. During one of the raids, police reportedly told the detainees that they were connected with "inappropriate" activities of the human rights NGO GayBelarus. GayBelarus has been unable to register legally and, following its second attempt to do so in January, police questioned over 60 members of the NGO regarding their activities.

Members of the LGBT community are not alone in facing harassment and intimidation in Belarus. Malady Front activist Uladzimir Yaromenak was sentenced to 12 days in jail on January 24 for violating the conditions of his August 2011 pardon from prison. He originally received a three-year sentence following the December 2010 crackdown.

Political activists and journalists are limited in their freedom of movement. Iryna Khalip reports that local police have told her that, as part of her suspended sentence, she cannot travel freely. Khalip, the wife of former political prisoner Andrei Sannikov who is in exile, is also subject to a curfew.

We welcome the February 9 release of political prisoner Vasil Parfyankou, and we take this opportunity to reiterate our call on the Government of Belarus to honor its OSCE commitments, immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners, and ensure their full rehabilitation. Respect for democracy and human rights in Belarus remains central to overcoming the country's international isolation and is essential to the progress of the country and welfare of its citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.