



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

### **Response to the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan, Ambassador John MacGregor**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Michele Siders  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
April 12, 2018

The United States warmly welcomes the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan, Ambassador John MacGregor, back to the Permanent Council. Thank you for your report, and for its timely submission, as well as for your engaging presentation here today.

Ambassador MacGregor, the United States commends the strengthened relations between Uzbekistan and the Project Coordinator, as well as the increased number of activities and projects. We also take note of the "Roadmap" signed last December between the government of Uzbekistan and the OSCE, and recently proposed extra-budgetary projects. In our view, the OSCE is well-placed to assist with Uzbekistan's ongoing reform process.

The United States supports the Project Coordinator's work in all three OSCE dimensions, including assisting the government with countering transnational security threats, and ensuring that policies and practices to counter 'Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT)' also respect human rights. We also support the Coordinator's work on capacity building to fight corruption; with promoting economic empowerment for women; with strengthening the Ombudsman Institution; and with supporting judicial reform.

We also support efforts to strengthen independent media in Uzbekistan, and appreciate that Uzbekistan hosted the 2017 Central Asia Media Conference, which provided an important venue to discuss the situation of media freedom in the region. We welcome the recent releases of journalists Dilmurad Saidov, Yusuf Ruzimuradov, and Gayrat Mikhliboev. The United States recognizes President Mirziyoyev for releasing more than two dozen prisoners of conscience since taking office in 2016. We remain concerned, however, about the case of journalist Bobomurad Abdullaev, as well as about reports of his torture and mistreatment in custody. It is our hope that the transparency and openness of his ongoing trial will result in prompt and effective justice.

The United States also values the Project Coordinator's work to combat trafficking in persons. We take note of ongoing actions to eliminate forced labor during the annual cotton harvest, and we urge the government to ensure that civil society groups can freely, and without fear of reprisal, monitor these efforts.

Ambassador MacGregor, we hope that the Project Coordinator will strengthen cooperation with NGOs, and further enhance efforts aimed at building the capacity and independence of

civil society organizations. The United States encourages you to develop more projects that promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedoms of expression, association, religion or belief, and the right of peaceful assembly.

Let me conclude by thanking you, Ambassador MacGregor, and your team for your work.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.