



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Head of the OSCE Center in Astana

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 13, 2013

Ambassador Zarudna, the United States warmly welcomes you to the Permanent Council in your capacity as Head of the Center in Astana. We thank you and your superb staff for the informative and comprehensive report detailing your many important activities supporting Kazakhstan's efforts to fully implement its OSCE commitments.

We commend the Center in Astana's cross-dimensional approach to much of its work. In particular, the involvement of both the Secretariat's Trans-National Threats Department and ODIHR in the Center's efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism highlights the importance of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. It also illustrates the value that the Secretariat and the independent institutions bring to the work of the OSCE's field missions. We encourage you to continue utilizing these important resources whenever possible.

Your Human Dimension activities remain a high priority for the United States. We strongly support your efforts to assist Kazakhstan in implementing its commitments related to fundamental freedoms and civil liberties, especially freedom of expression, public access to information, and freedom of religion or belief. Your focus on issues surrounding the implementation of the Law on Freedom of Religious Associations is especially important. We encourage you to continue to promote freedom of expression and support your plan to coordinate with the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) as well as journalists' associations in your upcoming programs to enhance the professional skills of journalists. We encourage you to also work closely with RFoM as the Center supports the development of legislation governing media use.

We agree with the Center's focus within the Economic and Environmental Dimension on implementing the goals and principles reaffirmed in the 2012 Ministerial Council Declaration on Strengthening Good Governance and Combating Corruption, Money-Laundering, and Financing of Terrorism. Your efforts to assist Kazakhstan to implement the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and to promote trans-border transportation and trade fall naturally into line with this focus.

The United States particularly values the fact that nearly all of your projects and activities are in response to a specific request from Kazakhstanis – whether civil society activists, community leaders, government officials, or ordinary citizens. We applaud this demand-focused approach and view it as a strong indicator of the fundamental usefulness of the work the Center is doing.

We welcome your efforts to complement the Center's work in Kazakhstan with programs designed to strengthen regional cooperation within Central Asia. To that end, we appreciate the attention you place on encouraging close coordination with other OSCE field presences in Central Asia. Close co-ordination with other international organizations, particularly the UN and the EU, will also be useful both to advance this regional focus and to ensure that the Center's activities complement rather than duplicate others' efforts. Also, we trust that you will take care to ensure that these regional efforts do not come at the expense of a continued robust program of activities throughout Kazakhstan – including regions outside the two major cities of Astana and Almaty.

Madame Ambassador, the United States is deeply concerned about the future of the Almaty Liaison Office (ALO). We are aware that consideration is being given to closing the ALO and shifting its activities to Astana. However, this process has been marked by a lack of transparency. The decision to close any OSCE field operation that this council has agreed to fund in our annual budget decisions should only come after transparent discussion among all participating States. We believe that closing the office in Almaty would significantly undermine the OSCE's work with Kazakhstan's community of civil society organizations, the bulk of which are headquartered in Almaty. We believe the ALO serves as a key resource for the Center's regional activities and should remain open.

Finally, Ambassador Zarudna, on behalf of the United States Government, I would like to express our sincere appreciation for your excellent service in Astana.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.