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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Denial of Freedom of Assembly and Violence Against LGBT Individuals

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 24, 2012

On May 17th, the United States delivered a statement commemorating the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO) and supporting the diversity and efforts of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals around the world. This statement also encouraged participating States to allow LGBT persons and their allies to exercise their right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Peaceful marches marking IDAHO and other LGBT gatherings have been held in many participating States without obstruction, but regrettably over the past two weeks, several incidents have marred this overall positive trend.

Lawful gatherings commemorating IDAHO were disrupted by anti-LGBT violence in St. Petersburg, Russia, and Tbilisi, Georgia. In St. Petersburg, local police evacuated protestors on police buses after attackers fired projectiles, hurled tear gas canisters, and broke through the police line securing the rally area. However, the police failed to detain any of the attackers. In Tbilisi, police were slow to protect participants. On May 20th in Ukraine, the first Kyiv pride parade was cancelled thirty minutes before it was set to begin due to the presence of violent and unlawful counter-protestors and lack of police protection. On May 8th, there was an arson attack at an LGBT-friendly bar in Yerevan, Armenia.

These incidents are worrisome and we urge a strong government response to such violence and threats. In many instances, governmental authorities reportedly made statements condoning anti-LGBT sentiments. Such statements encourage those who wish to commit violence and provoke hatred against the LGBT community. We encourage the participating States to speak out against such sentiments and to facilitate the ability of LGBT persons to exercise their rights to freedom of assembly and association without fear of attack. We urge States to curb the increasing trend toward the enactment of legislation that impinges on the ability of all persons, particularly LGBT individuals, to exercise their freedoms of expression and opinion, association, and assembly under the guise of banning so-called "gay propaganda." Fundamental freedoms belong to all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.