



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Belarus on Internet Freedom in the United States

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 16, 2012

We wish to thank the distinguished Permanent Representative of Belarus for raising the issue of Internet freedom in the United States. Debate and exchange of views are important elements of this forum.

You are correct in noting that the two proposed bills, the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the PROTECT-IP Act (PIPA), caused a robust public debate among the American people, as well as in the international community. The proposed legislation would have given the United States Department of Justice and private parties new legal tools to block access to foreign websites that allow U.S. consumers to download music, movies, TV shows and other protected materials in violation of the U.S. copyright law. Following a deluge of critical editorials, emails, Facebook comments, letters and telephone calls, as well as peaceful demonstrations, several co-sponsors of both bills withdrew their support and leaders have said they would shelve the bills until there is wider agreement on a solution. This is an excellent example of how the exercise of the fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, and association -- on or offline -- can meaningfully affect the political process.

During this debate, the Obama Administration made clear that it would “not support legislation that reduces freedom of expression, increases cybersecurity risk, or undermines the dynamic, innovative global Internet.”

The rule of law is essential to both Internet freedom and protection of intellectual property rights, both of which are firmly embedded in U.S. law and policy. The United States continues to be an advocate of fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly and association through cyberspace. We urge all OSCE participating States, including Belarus, to live up to OSCE commitments and ensure these fundamental freedoms are fully respected.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.