



United States Mission to the OSCE

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

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 23, 2016

The United States welcomes to the Permanent Council the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan, Ambassador John MacGregor.

Ambassador MacGregor, we support the Project Coordinator's priorities, including assisting the government with addressing transnational threats, promoting good governance and anti-corruption, combating trafficking in persons, strengthening the criminal justice system, promoting human rights, and gender equality. We support OSCE efforts in Uzbekistan to assist with strengthening the capacity of the Financial Investigation Unit to combat money laundering and terrorism financing, as well as supporting Uzbekistan as it seeks to meet its obligations under the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

We welcome the Project Coordinator's efforts to strengthen government offices charged with promoting respect for human rights. We also support your work to strengthen cooperation with NGOs, as well as to build the capacity and independence of civil society organizations, and we hope that this work can be further enhanced. We encourage you to develop more projects that promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedoms of expression, association, peaceful assembly, and religion or belief. We urge the Government of Uzbekistan to allow minority religious groups to freely practice their faith and ease registration requirements for all religious organizations. In addition, the United States reiterates its concern for newspaper editor Muhammad Bekjanov, whose incarceration is the longest ongoing incarceration of a journalist in the world, by some accounts. Mr. Bekjanov's original sentence has been extended several times for alleged infractions of prison rules, and his health has reportedly deteriorated. We call on the Government of Uzbekistan to release Mr. Bekjanov.

The United States supports the Project Coordinator's work on judicial reform, prevention of torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment, and overall treatment of detainees that is consistent with international obligations and commitments. We also support your work to assist the government in combating trafficking in human beings through efforts such as workshops promoting local-level coordination among the police, health and social service providers, women's committees, local neighborhood associations, and NGOs. Strengthening local, grass-roots efforts to combat human trafficking is of particular importance.

Finally, we urge Uzbekistan to continue its ongoing actions to eliminate forced child labor and take substantive action to end the use of forced adult labor during the annual cotton harvest, and to grant independent civil society groups full, unfettered access to monitor the annual cotton harvest.

In closing, let me say that the United States welcomed the March visit of the Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Steinmeier to Uzbekistan, which demonstrated both his and participating States' strong support for the OSCE's work in the country. Let me thank Ambassador MacGregor and his team for their efforts on behalf of all OSCE participating States.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.