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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Beating of Demonstrators in Belarus

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 21, 2007

Mr. Chairman,

We condemn the use of brutal force against demonstrators last week in Minsk, in particular the severe beating of 19-year-old Young Front leader Dmitry Fedaruk, who appears to have been specifically targeted. He was hospitalized with serious injuries. This incident is another in a long series of repressive acts by the Belarusian authorities against their own citizens.

We express our deep concern for all of the individuals who have been injured, arrested, and jailed in recent days during peaceful protests. We call upon the authorities to permit Mr. Fedaruk, and any others who may need it, to receive complete medical care.

Unfortunately, the arrest and use of force against peaceful demonstrators is just one manifestation of a wider pattern of Belarus ignoring its OSCE commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. In recent days, we have also seen the authorities use administrative pretexts to prevent civil society, such as Aleksandr Milinkevich's "For Freedom" movement, from legally operating, and we have seen the arbitrary use of judicial power to close down and harass what remains of the independent media. The authorities have also continued their steady harassment of opposition political parties.

We again call on the Belarusian authorities to cease their persecution of citizens seeking peacefully to exercise their fundamental rights, including freedom of speech, press and assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.