



United States Mission to the OSCE

**Session 9: Education and Awareness-Raising in
the Promotion of Human Rights (cont.)**

As prepared for delivery by Mischa Thompson, U.S. Helsinki Commission
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Mr. /Madam Moderator:

OSCE commitments concerning awareness-raising in the promotion of human rights fall into two categories: respecting the right of civil society and human rights defenders to carry out their work, and conducting government programs to ensure that citizens know their rights and that government officials know how to protect those rights.

Although there has been some progress in meeting these commitments since their adoption, there has also been a troubling trend of actions taken against human rights defenders. In its 2007 Report on Human Rights Defenders, ODIHR identified four negative trends: actual or threatened physical attacks on defenders; curtailment of the freedom of association of human rights defenders; failure to respect and protect human rights defenders' freedom of expression; and often severe restrictions placed on the freedom of movement of human rights defenders. We would like to raise a few cases that are illustrative of these trends.

In our view, independent human rights organizations and media can play an important role in verifying and publicizing to the international community the positive or negative steps that a participating State has taken on human rights. In Tajikistan, unduly complicated NGO registration procedures and the recent refusal by Tajik authorities to register the National Democratic Institute (NDI) illustrate the difficulties encountered by NGOs attempting to fill this important role.

We welcome the formal registration of the Institute for New Democracy (IND) in Uzbekistan. However, we are disappointed that the government did not accredit the currently designated Human Rights Watch director in Tashkent. We urge the Government of Uzbekistan to begin to allow the return of non-governmental organizations and media which were forced to depart the country after the 2005 Andijon events. Many of these NGOs were making positive contributions to Uzbekistan's economic and social development prior to their expulsion from the country.

Since freedoms of association and movement are also essential to the ability of political party leaders and NGOs to raise awareness of democratic rights, we urge the Government of Azerbaijan to ensure that all political party leaders are allowed to travel domestically and abroad to conduct normal party activities, including attending political rallies and meetings.

We call on the Government of Armenia to take greater steps to address the violent attacks on human rights activists within their borders, including the May 21 attack on Michael Danielian of

the Helsinki Association and the May 28 attack on a youth movement leader. We are also concerned about the revelation of an internal government order to round up participants of opposition rallies in Yerevan, wiretap their conversations, and collect personal data. We applaud the legal review conducted by the Ombudsman which concluded that the order was illegal in substance and on procedural grounds.

The United States views with alarm and regret the vicious July 28th attack on Zurab Tsechoyev, editor of Mashr, a human rights Web site based in the volatile North Caucasus republic of Ingushetia. At least 50 armed, masked men in camouflage gear raided Tsechoyev's home, shoved him into an armored personnel carrier, and interrogated and beat him for five hours. The assailants left Tsechoyev on a road outside Ingushetia's capital, Magas, after threatening to kill him and his family if he did not quit his job and leave the republic. We are deeply concerned by this attack, and call upon Russian authorities to conduct a full and transparent investigation.

The OSCE has a role to play in awareness-raising by assisting participating States in implementing their commitments towards human rights defenders. The United States strongly supports the establishment of the ODIHR Focal Point for Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions as well as related programs aimed at increasing the capacity of human rights defenders to improve their knowledge of human rights law, conduct advocacy and monitoring, as well as their general capacity to protect and promote human rights. We are following with interest the pilot project in Moldova to train human rights defenders in international human rights law provisions regarding freedom of assembly and build their capacity to monitor and report on freedom of assembly in Moldova.

Mr./Madam Moderator, the importance of the role of human rights defenders cannot be underestimated. All participating States have committed to ensuring that these courageous individuals can function without undue hindrances. Unfortunately, the trend in some countries is in the opposite direction. We all need to work together to turn this around.