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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Moscow Helsinki Group's 30th Anniversary

As delivered by Political Counselor Bruce Connuck
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 18, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Last week marked the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Moscow Helsinki Group. The United States applauds the Group's three decades of contributions to the worldwide movement for human rights.

Established on May 12th, 1976 by a small circle of steadfast human rights activists, the Moscow Helsinki Group sought to promote the Soviet Union's implementation of the 1974 Helsinki accord -- an agreement linking security among states to respect for human rights within states. At a press conference held in Nobel Laureate Andrei Sakharov's apartment announcing the Group's formation, the Group's leader, physicist Yuri Orlov, asked those present to join him in the traditional toast of Soviet dissidents: "To the success of our hopeless cause!"

Thanks in great measure to the courage, perseverance and sacrifice of the Moscow Helsinki Group members -- and the work of the NGOs that they inspired in the Soviet Union and Eastern and central Europe -- the Helsinki process has not just borne witness to historic changes once thought to be hopeless causes; it has helped to bring those changes about. We recognize the pioneering contributions the Group has made and the importance of NGOs to the development of civil society in supporting OSCE commitments.

Mr. Chairman, even today, citizens of some OSCE participating States face harassment or arrest for meeting quietly in private homes and apartments. Their governments continue to persecute them and violate their human rights. When we - all of us here - use this forum and others to speak out on their behalf, we provide solace and support to those who seek to bring about positive changes in their countries. We call on participating States to continue to raise issues of fulfillment of OSCE commitments, to strengthen civil society and to advance freedom and democracy.

In the noble tradition of its founding members, the dedicated men and women of today's Moscow Helsinki Group are calling attention to current human rights challenges and continuing to work for peaceful, democratic change. By doing so they are serving the cause of freedom and strengthening the foundation for lasting security.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.