



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Human Rights Reports and Winners of the Human Rights Defenders Award

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 24, 2012

Later today, Secretary Clinton will submit the 2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (Human Rights Reports) to the United States Congress. The Human Rights Reports provide the facts underlying U.S. efforts to promote respect for human rights worldwide. They inform U.S. government policymaking and serve as a reference for other governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations, scholars, interested citizens, and journalists. The Human Rights Reports cover all United Nations member states and assess each country's situation during each calendar year. Each report stands on its own; countries are not compared to each other or placed in any order other than alphabetically by region. This year, the Department has modernized both the format of the reports and the online user interface. To view the new 2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices visit www.HumanRights.gov/reports.

As another aspect of the U.S. effort to promote respect for human rights worldwide, the U.S. Department of State is also pleased to announce that Ales Byalyatski of Belarus and Uganda's Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law are the joint winners of the 2011 Human Rights Defenders Award. This award recognizes individuals or non-governmental organizations that show exceptional valor and leadership in advocating the protection of human rights and democracy in the face of government repression.

Ales Byalyatski has bravely advocated on behalf of victims of political oppression and their families despite harassment by the Government of Belarus. As the founder of "Vyasna," one of Belarus' leading human rights organizations, Byalyatski provided legal and practical support to victims of an on-going, government-led crackdown and acted as a key source of information about human rights violations. He is currently a political prisoner, serving a four and a half year sentence for defending human rights.

Uganda's Civil Society Coalition on Human Rights and Constitutional Law is honored for effectively defending the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals, often at great personal risk. The Coalition, which is comprised of 40 Ugandan NGOs, has successfully defended the rights of LGBT individuals in Ugandan courts, sparked public dialogue on LGBT rights in Uganda, and challenged widespread misperceptions and prejudices. The Coalition's structure, effectiveness, and engagement with Ugandan civil society, government officials, and the Ugandan public provide a model for other human rights activists around the world.

The United States stands with these and all human rights defenders and civil society activists who work hard every day, in every part of the world, to make real the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.