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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Kyrgyzstan Referendum

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 25, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States is concerned that the conduct of the constitutional referendum in Kyrgyzstan held this past Sunday did not meet international standards.

We note limited progress in the technical preparation of the referendum and that the Central Election Commission was able to prepare the polling stations and provide the necessary materials to conduct the referendum. We also take note that domestic election monitors were allowed to observe the voting process.

Nevertheless, the process leading up to the referendum appears to have had a number of shortcomings, including limited opportunity for public involvement in the drafting of the constitution and insufficient time for full discussion and debate. There appeared to be insufficient time after the referendum was announced for ODIHR to provide appropriate guidance to the Government of Kyrgyzstan and for the Government to increase awareness in the population on the content of the draft constitutional documents.

We share Ambassador Mueller's concerns about credible reports of irregularities in the conduct of the referendum and inflated voter participation figures. As the Ambassador observed in his press release, local independent observers reported repeated incidents of massive ballot box stuffing by members of the precinct election commissions, use of administrative resources to bring people to polling stations, and obstruction of domestic observers by local authorities and members of the election commission. Our Embassy in Bishkek mounted a small monitoring effort of eleven teams that visited about 80 polling stations. Several of our teams witnessed precinct officials stuffing ballot boxes and several of these officials indicated to our observers that they were under pressure to obtain a high voter turnout.

We are particularly concerned about reports that three university students who acted as domestic observers in Karakol have been dismissed from their university, and that an NGO that was also involved in monitoring the referendum has been evicted from its offices by local officials. These acts of retribution against independent election monitoring are simply unacceptable.

The Kyrgyz Republic can move forward on a path to greater democracy for its citizens by improving the process for its December 16 parliamentary elections, including preparation of accurate voter lists, the organization of political parties, independent media analysis and open public debate to give the Kyrgyz people a chance to choose their leaders in a fair, inclusive, and transparent manner.

The United States would like to encourage strongly the Government of Kyrgyzstan to issue a timely invitation to ODIHR for an election observation mission and stands ready to support ODIHR's election team in its efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.