



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Events in Ferguson, Missouri**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
September 4, 2014

The attention of the American people and many in the international community has focused on events in Ferguson, Missouri following the tragic death of 18-year old Michael Brown on August 9 during an encounter with a police officer. The public demonstrations in Ferguson in reaction to the incident and the police response to these demonstrations, remind us that issues of race and respect for civil liberties demand the vigilance of the United States, as well as other countries. In reaction to events in Ferguson, President Obama said “there is never an excuse for violence against police, or for those who would use this tragedy as a cover for vandalism or looting. There’s also no excuse for police to use excessive force against peaceful protests, or to throw protestors in jail for lawfully exercising their First Amendment rights. And here, in the United States of America, police should not be bullying or arresting journalists who are trying to do their jobs and report to the American people on what they see on the ground. Put simply, we all need to hold ourselves to a high standard, particularly those of us in positions of authority.”

Attorney General Eric Holder traveled to Missouri to meet with Michael Brown’s family, protestors, civil society, and local government officials. The U.S. Department of Justice has opened an independent federal civil rights investigation into the death of Michael Brown. This investigation is being undertaken by the FBI and federal prosecutors from the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division and the U.S. Attorney’s Office. The U.S. government is taking seriously its responsibility to uphold its civil rights laws and constitutional requirements by investigating events in Ferguson. As the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has noted, and we concur, journalists have the right to report on public demonstrations without fear of undue police intimidation or arbitrary arrest.

The death of Michael Brown and subsequent events in Ferguson have led to a difficult, impassioned, wider discussion in the United States about issues of race, and relations between minority groups, law enforcement, and government. These are issues that have confronted the American people for much of our history, and there continues to be a gap in trust that needs to be closed. President Obama acknowledged this when he stated that there “are going to be differences in terms of what needs to happen going forward.” But, we will work diligently to build stronger communities, because as the President noted, “we’re all part of one American family. We are united in common values, and that includes belief in equality under the law; a basic respect for public order and the right to peaceful public protest; a reverence for the dignity of every single man, woman and child among us; and the need for accountability when it comes to our government.”

The United States is not perfect. But we do continuously seek to become “a more perfect union,” as our Constitution states. We seek to uphold our fundamental freedoms by having

an independent media report on injustices, a vibrant civil society that holds government accountable, an independent judiciary that allows the wronged to seek justice, and a legislative branch that freely debates the challenging issues of the day. We aspire to deal with our imperfections honestly, urgently, openly, and with an enduring commitment to principles.

The United States holds itself to a high standard and earnestly strives to meet that standard. We continue to call on OSCE participating States to respond to events raising human rights concerns, such as the events in Ferguson, Missouri, in an open and transparent manner.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.