



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

### **Statement in Response to Belarus Regarding May Day Protests in the United States**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Gary Robbins  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
June 6, 2013

I would like to respond to concerns and questions raised by Belarus regarding recent protests in Seattle, New York and Washington, D.C.

My colleague expressed concern, in particular, regarding the actions of law enforcement during May Day protests in Seattle, where police and city officials sought to prevent a reprise of the violent protests that took place in Seattle last May Day, resulting in serious vandalism against many downtown shops and retail outlets. According to our information, although a much larger, authorized protest in the city had proceeded peacefully and without incident earlier that same day, the demonstration in question was unpermitted and some demonstrators became violent, hurling rocks, bottles, fireworks and smoke devices at police and bystanders. The police response to the attacks included the use of pepper spray and flash bang grenades, which produce intense light and noise. Several protestors were arrested in connection with the violence.

During May Day protests in New York, which were largely calm and peaceful, a small number of individuals were arrested. In the case of the protests cited in Washington, D.C., several individuals were arrested, and subsequently released, after tying themselves to the White House gates in a symbolic gesture of civil disobedience to underscore their commitment to their cause. In the other case, protestors were arrested, and released, after blocking access to a White House entrance. To our knowledge, there have been no allegations of wrongful detention in any of these cases. I would note that a few days after the activists protesting the Keystone Pipeline were arrested, an estimated 40,000-strong peaceful demonstration against the pipeline took place without incident on the National Mall.

The United States takes seriously our obligations to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, the freedoms of expression, assembly, and association included, under international law and our own Constitution. We view the exercise of the rights of assembly and association as essential to accountable, democratic government. While there is always room for improvement, the U.S. has a genuinely free, open and democratic society where the freedoms to assemble and associate are routinely exercised, online and offline, protected and facilitated by government and law enforcement officials, and upheld by an independent judicial system under which no one, including government officials and police officers, is above the law.

Our robust civil society and vibrant free media also serve to hold our authorities accountable. We note that in accord with the commitments agreed in the Copenhagen document, our justice system also provides effective remedies where violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms are alleged to have occurred.

Thank You, Mr. Chairman.