



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Recent Human Rights Violations in Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 3, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

The United States would like to take note of the events over the past week in Belarus. On March 25, the Belarusian authorities disrupted a peaceful rally and arrested and beat scores of demonstrators. Two days later, the government detained 30 independent journalists in 12 cities, apparently without legitimate cause. Some of the journalists had their computer hard drives confiscated and were taken to KGB offices for questioning. The premises of independent media outlets were raided and reporters were harassed and detained. The OSCE's Freedom of the Media representative has rightly condemned this action as a targeted assault on independent media that is "an unconcealed violation of OSCE commitments ... to protect the freedom of the press."

We again call on the Belarusian authorities to observe their OSCE commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms and to release immediately Alyaksandr Kazulin as well as those peaceful protesters and journalists who have been arrested and jailed.

As Belarus has raised the subject of its relations with the United States on several occasions in the last weeks, and also called on the OSCE Chairman in Office to intervene, I would like to use this opportunity to update participating States on recent events since our last Permanent Council session. The government of Belarus, which first insisted that our Ambassador depart, and then that our embassy staff be cut in half, has now informed us that this number must be cut even further. We see no reasonable basis for these unwarranted requests. Moreover, our staff members have been harassed and our diplomats have been the subject of scurrilous reports in the state controlled media that have no basis in fact.

It is highly regrettable that Belarus has chosen a path of confrontation and isolation over a path of human rights and freedom.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.