

Canadian Delegation to the
Organization for Security & Cooperation
in Europe



Délégation du Canada auprès de
l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération
en Europe

**Delegation of Canada to the OSCE
Response to Ambassador Ake Peterson, Head of the Office in Minsk
As delivered by Chargée d'affaires a.i. Karine Asselin, to the
662nd Plenary Meeting of the Permanent Council
26 April 2007**

Mr. Chairman, Canada would like to join others in warmly welcoming Ambassador Ake Peterson back to the Permanent Council and we thank him for his concise written report and informative presentation.

We are pleased to see that the OSCE Office in Minsk continues to implement projects, notably in the economic/environmental dimension, in spite of the difficult registration and approval requirements established by the Government of Belarus.

Canada also commends efforts of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, with the Office's close cooperation, in engaging Belarus' government in promoting civil society and media freedoms.

Further, we strongly support the work of the Office in monitoring court proceedings, rallies and other events. Working with civil society in these areas is invaluable for building an effective, pluralistic society.

Mr. Chairman, Canada highlights the continued challenges faced by civil society, especially NGOs, due to difficult registration requirements and government legal processes against these groups.

In this context, we note with concern recent heavy-handed responses to peaceful demonstrations. Freedoms of assembly and expression must be protected.

We are also troubled by the lack of independent media in Belarus, exhibited by an alarming decrease in political news sources over the past five years due to Government efforts to limit freedom of expression.

These restrictions and impediments undermine democratic development and contravene international democratic standards.

Canada calls on Belarusian authorities to cooperate fully with the OSCE Office in Minsk, especially in areas of institution-building, rule of law and civil society, to ensure that Belarus' OSCE and other international commitments in these areas are met.

We thank Ambassador Peterson and wish him and his team every success in their important work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.