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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on New Legislation in Kazakhstan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 12, 2009

Madam Chairwoman,

At the Madrid Ministerial meeting in 2007, the United States welcomed the selection of Kazakhstan as Chairman in Office for 2010. At that time, Kazakhstan publicly committed to protect the OSCE's core human dimension mandate, including the autonomy and current mandate of the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, and also to advance specific democratic political reforms in Kazakhstan before the end of 2008. Kazakhstan also pledged to work closely with the OSCE, with ODIHR, and its Representative on Freedom of the Media on these reforms.

We would like to take the opportunity today to note that over the past week, President Nazarbayev signed into law new legislation on the media, on elections, and on political parties which was aimed at fulfilling Kazakhstan's Madrid commitments. This legislation marks a step forward on Kazakhstan's path to democracy.

While we welcome this progress, we look to Kazakhstan to continue its cooperation with the OSCE and ODIHR in bringing its laws fully in line with its OSCE commitments.

We urge Kazakhstan to enhance its coordination with the Representative of Freedom of the Media to improve its media legislation, which should include decriminalizing libel.

Similarly, we urge Kazakhstan to take further steps to create the conditions for genuine political pluralism. This should include legislation ensuring that all political parties are represented on independent electoral commissions and further reducing registration hurdles for political parties.

The United States would also like to take this opportunity to note that new draft legislation is under consideration in Kazakhstan's parliament that would restrict freedom of expression via the Internet. To meet OSCE commitments to wider and freer dissemination of information and freedom of expression, a key aspect of which is access to the Internet, Kazakhstani law should secure such access for the people of Kazakhstan.

Madam Chairwoman, the United States pledges its best efforts to work closely with Kazakhstan as it prepares for its 2010 OSCE Chairmanship. By continuing to take steps to bring its legislation fully in line with its OSCE commitments, Kazakhstan will not only strengthen the OSCE, but also develop the democratic institutions that are the foundation for long-term stability and prosperity.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.