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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Access to RFE/RL in Kazakhstan

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 29, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

The United States is concerned that Internet users in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states have been unable to access the English and local language websites of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Since April 11, these websites have been inaccessible to Kazakhstani customers of state-owned Kazakhtelecom. As Kazakhtelecom is the major internet provider throughout the region, many internet users in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have also been prevented from accessing these websites.

Despite repeated inquiries from Radio Free Europe and the U.S. Government, the access problem has not yet been resolved by the government of Kazakhstan. Interrupted Internet access as a result of a technical glitch by an Internet server might be a plausible explanation, but limited access that appears targeted against a specific site, especially a site which carries international and national news and information, may appropriately lead to the conclusion that this is more than a technical matter.

Kazakhstan has freely undertaken commitments to respect freedom of expression for members of the press, including OSCE Permanent Council Decision No. 633 on Promoting Tolerance and Media Freedom on the Internet, in which participating states committed to "take action to ensure that the Internet remains an open and public forum for freedom of opinion and expression." Denying Internet users access to the entire RFE website for several weeks would be clearly inconsistent with that commitment. Limiting Internet access would also be inconsistent with commitments the Government of Kazakhstan made at the Madrid Ministerial, which included reform of the media law in consultation with the Freedom of Media Representative.

We strongly urge the Government of Kazakhstan, working together with its Internet service providers, to resolve this issue without further delay.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.