



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on World Press Freedom Day 2012

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 3, 2012

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States notes that today's meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council coincides with World Press Freedom Day, hosted this year by UNESCO in Tunis. This fortuitous timing offers us an opportunity to reflect on the importance of OSCE commitments with regard to freedom of expression and media freedom, and how far our region has yet to go to before those commitments are met.

It is worth recalling Permanent Council Decision 193 of 1997, establishing the mandate of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, which states that "freedom of expression is a fundamental and internationally recognized human right and a basic component of a democratic society and that free, independent and pluralistic media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government."

Unfortunately, just as people around the world observe World Press Freedom Day, the global risks to journalists are rising. Within the OSCE region, journalists and internet bloggers continue to be threatened, attacked, disappeared or murdered for trying to report the news, express independent opinions or expose corruption and other abuses of power at local and national levels. Attacks and murders of journalists go unpunished, and governments are not taking necessary steps to end the climate of impunity for these crimes. As we have repeatedly stated, protecting the safety of journalists remains one of our most important and urgent challenges in the OSCE's Human Dimension. Whenever the flow of news, information and views is restricted, individual citizens suffer. Societies suffer. Economies suffer. Trust between nations suffers, too.

The United States notes with great concern that too many governments represented here have taken steps to directly or indirectly censor the media, prosecute journalists for doing their jobs, and restrict the online exercise of freedom of expression and other fundamental freedoms – all of this contrary to OSCE commitments. Most recently, we discussed this issue in our March 29 Response to the Report to the Permanent Council of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, Dunja Mijatovic, and identified a number of governments of participating States which demonstrate worrying actions limiting media freedom.

On World Press Freedom Day, the United States calls on all OSCE participating States to take the steps necessary to create space for journalists and online bloggers to do their work without fear of violence or persecution. We further urge all participating States to join us

in affirming that OSCE commitments to the unhindered exercise of fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, apply equally to the digital realm.

On this day we pay special tribute to those courageous journalists and bloggers and citizens who have sacrificed their freedom, health and even their lives so that their fellow citizens could be informed and thus be better equipped to play a role in the life of their countries. We honor the role of free and independent media within the OSCE space in helping to build open, vibrant and sustainable democracies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.