



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Commissioner on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador-at-Large Konstantin Dolgov

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 19, 2012

The United States joins other delegations in welcoming Ambassador-at-Large Konstantin Dolgov to the Permanent Council today, and we thank him for his presentation.

The OSCE, with its comprehensive approach to security, offers a unique forum for the discussion of human rights. This organization and its participating States recognize that human and democratic values are at the core of the Helsinki process, and value civil society's vital role in shaping a peaceful and prosperous future in the OSCE region and around the world.

Your presentation, Ambassador Dolgov, comes as we begin discussions on how to enhance the effectiveness and attractiveness of OSCE Human Dimension events, including the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. This unique forum brings together fifty-six countries to discuss the whole range of OSCE Human Dimension commitments, including important issues relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic development, the rule of law, combating trafficking in persons, advancing tolerance, combating hatred and discrimination, and addressing the rights of persons belonging to religious and ethnic minorities.

We value the HDIM, and we note that it is thanks to the HDIM that the OSCE has become the place where governments and NGOs meet to raise concerns about issues in the Human Dimension with openness and directness. The HDIM sets the OSCE apart from other multilateral settings.

At Astana, the participating States, including those that joined the OSCE in the post-Soviet period, reaffirmed in the Summit's Commemorative Declaration the principles of Helsinki and all the commitments made to date. All of us also reaffirmed unequivocally that human rights are not solely a domestic issue, but also a matter of "direct and legitimate" interest to other States.

All countries, including the United States, have room for improvement in living up to our OSCE commitments, and all participating States have a responsibility to improve, and to stand accountable for their actions. The United States is ready to cooperate with participating States throughout the year to advance implementation objectives in the Human Dimension.

We want the OSCE to continue as a history-making force for peaceful, democratic change, and the HDIM is essential to this Organization and its participating States.

We note with dismay that human rights violations continue in the OSCE region. Advocates for human rights and democracy who seek to help their fellow citizens know and act upon their rights are targeted for persecution, even murder. Laws are wielded as weapons against those who expose abuses or express disagreement with official policies and practices. Judicial independence and the rule of law have yet to be established or fully respected in practice. NGOs are subjected to increasing legal restrictions and burdensome administrative measures that impede their peaceful work, reflecting a disturbing global phenomenon. There are human rights and humanitarian aspects of protracted conflicts that must be addressed as essential elements of settlement and reconciliation processes.

Media—particularly independent media—are under pressure to be silent or to self-censor. Journalists are victims of brutal, sometimes deadly, attacks, due their commitment to report the truth. Countries in the OSCE region are also part of a growing global trend by governments to restrict Internet Freedom, and thus the exercise of freedoms of expression, association, and assembly via new media.

Democratic development is uneven across the OSCE region. Not all elections meet OSCE's standards. Not all officials and government institutions operate in an accountable and transparent manner.

We continue to see intolerance and hate crimes against religious and ethnic minorities, including Roma and Sinti. Violence against women and assaults on individuals because of their sexual orientation or gender identity are significant problems. People with disabilities experience discrimination and tend to be relegated to the margins of society. The OSCE region is both a source and a destination for human trafficking. Men, women, and children are forced into servitude within its borders.

For our part, the United States has been, and will continue to be, responsive to concerns raised by other participating States and NGOs about our performance in the Human Dimension. We will continue to engage on these issues. My government realizes that a failure to acknowledge and correct the shortcomings in its own record limits our ability to press other countries to acknowledge and correct theirs.

The OSCE was the first regional organization to recognize the importance of civil society and provide for NGO participation in its proceedings. Secretary Clinton made a special point of holding a meeting with Belarusian and other civil society groups in Vilnius during the OSCE Ministerial, and we will continue to champion and defend NGO involvement at the Human Dimension Implementation Meetings and other meetings of the OSCE.

We wish to thank Ambassador Dolgov once again and we look forward to continued cooperation with him on our shared commitment to human rights within the framework of the U.S.-Russia Civil Society Working Group.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.