

**The 3rd Issyk-Kul International Forum on Human Rights
(Bishkek, Cholpon-Ata, 16-19 July 2009)**

Bishkek, 16 July 2009

SPEECH

Ambassador Andrew Tesoriere, Head of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek

Distinguished Prime-Minister, Ombudsmen, distinguished Forum participants,

Thank you for inviting me to offer some words at the opening. I am joined by members of my human dimension team and a colleague from ODIHR, Liane Adler.

It is said that the **concept of the Ombudsman** has a long and proud history, going back to early times in Scandinavia. But its modern form seems to date from around 1809 in Sweden. For many countries however, the Office of Ombudsman is much more recent: in England for example 1967, in France 1973. And for most countries represented in this Forum, the institution is more recent still.

For its part, the OSCE greatly values what the Office of the Ombudsman represents: an advocate and champion of human rights and social justice; and an independent and trusted intermediary between citizen and authority. The Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic is a shining example, having taken a proactive role in issues such as freedom of assembly, the prevention of torture, domestic violence and social and ethnic discrimination.

Indeed one of the central roles in the promotion of good governance and the rule-of-law in the Kyrgyz Republic lies with the Ombudsman's institution. In cooperation with Civil Society and international bodies, the Ombudsman can and does take a lead in the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and victims' advocacy.

To fulfill these tasks, the Ombudsman would benefit from a robust, functional and fully operational Branch Offices in the regions. This is not currently the case, although regional representatives would undoubtedly be instrumental in better oversight of the implementation of Kyrgyz legislation at the local level, as well as coordinating the advocacy efforts of local human rights. Regional representatives of the National Ombudsman could also serve as focal points for the mediation or resolution of such issues as land ownership and disputes, allegations of police abuse, and any forms of discrimination.

OSCE itself is primarily an organisation which supports building trust, preventing dispute and offering an intermediary role where accepted by the parties involved. In this regard, OSCE finds shared purpose with the Office of the Ombudsman.

Key to all this, the OSCE, through the Centre in Bishkek and its partners across the country, supports both Kyrgyz society and the Authorities to build mutual trust.....between the governed and the governing ; between electors and the elected ; between media and the Authorities ; between taxpayer and the collectors of tax ; between the citizen and bureaucracy ; between those who seek State protection and those who should provide it.

Key examples of the ways in which the OSCE Centre helps build trust is through :

Firstly, the **community-based policing** method. We support the Ministry of Interior's programme to strengthen "a social partnership" between citizen and the Police. The Public Prevention Centres have a growing role to play here. OSCE is supporting the *MVD* (MoI) pilot a neighborhood watch scheme in urban Bishkek.

Secondly, the OSCE Centre stands for the **freedom of expression, including for the media**. The media should be confident it can do its job, responsibly but without fear of intimidation. The OSCE is concerned by the increase of attacks on journalists worldwide, including Kyrgyzstan. We deeply regret the recent tragic death of Mr Tashiev and welcome the full judicial investigation underway.

Thirdly, the OSCE Centre wishes to continue to support and advocate robust mechanisms for protecting citizens' human rights and **handling citizen complaints and disputes**. The role of independent as well as accountable internal mechanisms is important. Currently the OSCE Centre funds and supports Free Legal Aid Centres across Kyrgyzstan. We are interested to see these further develop into, let's call them, "Citizen Advice Bureaux", which can operate almost entirely with funding from the Kyrgyz central and local Government and other national sources.

Fourthly, the OSCE Centre wishes to support all efforts to **curb corruption and bribery**. Corruption is the curse of the State, the Citizen and national economic growth.

Fifthly, and very topical for Kyrgyzstan at this moment of Elections next week, the OSCE continues to support efforts to ensure **electoral processes**, let's say "the popular will", are free and open and fair ; and that people have the chance to understand the issues and make an informed choice.

One specific topic of this Forum is the prevention of torture. Last year the Kyrgyz Republic acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. OSCE firmly believes that the National Preventive Mechanism under this Protocol would contribute to the prevention of any physical and moral abuse by the law enforcement agencies.

It is very encouraging that work on the creation of the National Preventive Mechanism has begun under the leadership of the Kyrgyz Ombudsman. Especially welcome is the participation of wide circles of civil and human rights organizations, particular individuals, who undoubtedly will accelerate the institutionalization of this Preventive Mechanism.

In closing, I wish the Forum full success and once again, thank you for this opportunity and your attention.