



ARTICLE 19 INTERVENTION TO 2006 OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

Thank you, Mr/Mme Chairman

ARTICLE 19 is a human rights organisation with a specific mandate and focus on the defence and promotion of freedom of expression and freedom of information worldwide.

We believe that all people have the right to freedom of expression and access to information, and that the full enjoyment of this right is the most potent force to achieve individual freedoms, strengthen democracy, and pre-empt repression, conflict, war and genocide.

ARTICLE 19 works in partnership with fifty-two national organisations in more than thirty countries across worldwide. I would like to stress that we also seek to work in partnership with Governments who seek expertise, for example in analyzing and drafting new laws that have an impact on media and free expression.

Mr/Mme Chairman

I would like to register our concern about situations in a number of participating States of the OSCE.

In Turkmenistan, freedom of expression is non-existent. The recent, violent death in custody of Radio Free Europe correspondent, Ogulsapar Muradova, was a shocking incident. We call on the Government of Turkmenistan to fully investigate the killing, and to refrain from further harassment of media professionals and their families. We would also call on the OSCE community not to forget the overall human rights' situation in Turkmenistan, which is amongst the most critical on Earth. We would recommend that a special Permanent Council debate be convened to discuss this.

Since the massacre in Andijan in 2005, Uzbekistan has clamped down on independent voices with great efficiency. We call on the Government of Uzbekistan to reverse this trend and live up to its international commitments.

ARTICLE 19 regrets another year of diminishing freedom of expression in Belarus. We condemn the continued targeting of media sources, like Narodnaya Volya, Den and Beloruskaya Delovaya Gazeta. We have not forgotten that the murder of cameraman, Dmitri Zavadsky, has yet to be properly investigated. We urge the Representative on Freedom of the Media to remain engaged in Belarus. We call on Belarus to accept his expertise, and stand ready to offer Belarus necessary assistance.

In July this year, ARTICLE 19 expressed its concern that Russia had adopted draconian amendments to the 2002 Law ‘On Counteracting Extremist Activity’ on 28 June 2006. If adopted, the amendments would increase the list of categories of ‘extremist’ activity punishable by law. We called upon the Russian government to immediately abandon consideration of the proposed amendments to this and to ensure that the existing provisions on incitement to extremist activity are implemented in a fair manner, through processes independent of political considerations. We also joined the international community in expressing concern over the restrictive NGO law.

As a world leader, a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a member of the G8, Russia should be fighting for freedom of expression and other human rights. The trend in this important country in recent years has been alarming.

Mr Chairman

As Kazakhstan seeks new and increased responsibilities in the international community, so must scrutiny of its human rights’ record. In that respect, ARTICLE 19 would support the Representative on Freedom of the Media’s recommendations to further improve the media law there. We were disappointed in the restrictive freedom of information atmosphere in the run-up to the December 2005 Presidential election. This was a missed opportunity.

We urge Azerbaijan to implement the new law on Freedom of Information, which entered into force in December 2005. The recent spate of legal action against journalists in Azerbaijan has provoked the concerns of the international community. We call on Azerbaijan to take action to improve the environment for free expression in the country and stand ready to offer assistance.

ARTICLE 19 would urge the President of Kyrgyzstan to allow the public broadcasting law to be passed. We call on the Armenian Government to speed-up implementation of its law on Freedom of Information.

ARTICLE 19 would call for the removal of article 301 from the Turkish penal code under which several writers have been charged since 2005, notably Orhun Pamuk and Elif Shafak.

Ending the frozen conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria remain crucial to bring peace, stability and prosperity to the region. We call on all sides, including those with influence over the various parties, to exercise

responsibility when making public statements. ARTICLE 19 would be interested in supporting measures to strengthen and encourage media ethics and professionalism in the conflict zones.

ARTICLE 19 has followed the case of the closure of the only Basque-language daily newspaper. In November last year, we called upon the Spanish government to provide satisfactory justification for the extreme measures it has taken in respect of *Euskaldunon Egunkaria*.

Mr Chairman,

ARTICLE 19's focus has not been solely in the Former Soviet Union. During 2006, we made a submission to the ICJ Eminent Jurists Panel on freedom of expression and UK anti-terror law and practice, in which we expressed increasing concern at the impact of the UK's anti-terror laws and policies on the legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

In this context, we call on the Governments of *all* participating States of the OSCE to resist the temptation restrict public speech, debate and free media under the pretext of the fight against terrorism. We recommend that the Representative on Freedom of the Media continues to monitor trends across the region and reports regularly, and publicly.

ARTICLE 19 supports Mr Haraszti's efforts to make the OSCE region a criminal defamation free zone. However too many Governments across the region still have these laws on their statute books, even if they are not used. We recommend that countries with an effective moratorium on using these laws should make the effort to repeal them in order to set an example to the few who still repress freedom of expression using these methods.

OSCE participating States have affirmed "...the importance of (...) the free flow of information as well as the public's access to information." We note with satisfaction that the majority of participating States have enacted freedom of information legislation. We recommend that the Representative on Freedom of the Media pays attention to implementation of these laws, and assists States who have not yet enacted them.

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