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United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Session

As delivered by U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan Richard E. Hoagland
to the OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
Astana, June 30, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We thank the Government of Kazakhstan for hosting this important human rights meeting. We are grateful that the OSCE Centre was able to facilitate a dialogue between OSCE participating States and Kazakhstani non-governmental representatives on these issues.

As we meet here, events in Kyrgyzstan sharply illustrate that we ignore questions of inter-ethnic relations, bias-motivated violence, tolerance and non-discrimination at our own peril. The United States is working with our colleagues in Vienna to strengthen the OSCE Center in Bishkek and support the efforts of Kyrgyz authorities to restore public order and reduce inter-ethnic tensions. We hope that the Provisional Government and all citizens of Kyrgyzstan will use the opportunity presented by the peacefully conducted referendum to advance the process of reconciliation and accountability to ensure future interethnic harmony and move Kyrgyzstan forward on the path to stability, security, democracy, and prosperity for all citizens of the republic.

We would also like to reiterate our concern that particular laws, such as those banning head coverings and other forms of religious attire, as well as the building of mosques and minarets, often constitute restrictions on religious expression, can be discriminatory and can marginalize members of minority groups.

We remain deeply concerned about the escalation of violent attacks against Romani individuals, sometimes terrorizing whole communities, as well as a recent spike in anti-Semitism. Along these lines, we would welcome increased attention by the OSCE participating States to the problems of racism and xenophobia.

It is essential that we recommit to combating all forms of intolerance. To this end, we are pleased that so many participating States and NGOs at this conference have called for respect for diversity and protection of human rights of all individuals, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons.

Finally, we would underscore that fundamental freedoms and human rights – particularly freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, and freedom of expression – are essential elements to combat all forms of intolerance, and that these fundamental freedoms are not yet fully respected in the OSCE region. Protecting individual rights and

ensuring space for civil society – such as the participation by the many NGOs in this conference - must remain a singular priority for all participating States.

Thank you.