



United States Mission to the OSCE

Restrictions on the Freedoms of Expression, Association and Peaceful Assembly in the Russian Federation

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate M. Byrnes to the Permanent
Council, Vienna
March 30, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Colleagues, upholding each participating State's international law obligations regarding respect for the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly is among the core principles of the Helsinki Final Act and at the heart of OSCE's human dimension. In 1990, in Copenhagen, all OSCE participating States reaffirmed that "everyone will have the right of peaceful assembly and demonstration." Later that same year, in Paris, we determined "that, without discrimination, every individual has the right to... freedom of association and peaceful assembly." In 2008, in Helsinki, all participating States reaffirmed that "everyone has the right to... freedom of opinion and expression, (and) freedom of peaceful assembly and association." All 57 OSCE participating States committed themselves to fulfill their international law obligations.

It is with this commitment in mind that the United States strongly condemns the detention of hundreds of peaceful protesters throughout Russia on Sunday. Detaining peaceful protesters, human rights observers, and journalists is an affront to core democratic values. We were troubled to hear of the arrest of opposition figure Alexei Navalny upon his arrival at the demonstration, the police raids on the anti-corruption NGO he heads, and the later sentencing of Navalny to 15 days in prison and 11 NGO staff members to between 15 and 25 days in prison. The United States calls on the government of Russia to immediately release all those detained for exercising their rights to the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. We note that these individuals were protesting against reports of high-level government corruption. During last week's Permanent Council meeting, the Russian Federation stated that the Russian government saw corruption as a threat, and its eradication a necessity. We therefore look to the Russian government to work with its people and civil society members that wish to eradicate corruption, rather than detain them.

The Russian people, like people everywhere, deserve a government that supports an open marketplace of ideas, transparent and accountable governance, equal treatment under the law, and the ability to exercise their rights without fear of retribution. The United States calls upon the Russian Federation to uphold its OSCE and other international obligations and commitments regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Chair