



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement Commemorating World Press Freedom Day 2013

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council,
Vienna, May 2, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Tomorrow the nations of the world mark the 20th anniversary of World Press Freedom Day. The UN General Assembly proclaimed that, each third of May, we would commemorate the passage of UNESCO's Declaration of Windhoek and celebrate media freedom, while paying tribute to the many journalists who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

Sadly, as has been repeatedly pointed out by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, since the OSCE's inception, we have yet to see a year without the death of a journalist in at least one participating State. Last July, Vladimir Goncharenko, activist and editor of the newspaper Environmental Security, was brutally beaten after holding a press conference alleging illegal dumping of hazardous waste in southern Ukraine. He was hospitalized and died from his injuries. The United States continues to call for a thorough investigation to bring the perpetrators of this crime to justice. Russian television journalist Kazbek Gekkiyev was also tragically murdered in the southern republic of Kabardino-Balkaria in December 2012.

Journalists throughout the OSCE space continue to be subject to violence, intimidation, harassment, and imprisonment, merely for seeking or reporting the truth. And in some participating States, the danger to journalists – as well as to ordinary citizens seeking to exercise their right to freedom of expression – has been increasing dramatically.

According to UNESCO, "there is a growing awareness that ensuring freedom of expression must also necessarily extend to safety online," and World Press Freedom Day 2013 will therefore focus on the theme "Safe to Speak: Securing Freedom of Expression in All Media." The day will highlight the issues of "safety of journalists, combating impunity for crimes against freedom of expression, and securing a free and open Internet as the precondition for online safety."

For all of us, this theme and these issues are particularly apt. A great majority of participating States have sought consensus in recent years on OSCE decisions that would strengthen our commitment to protecting journalists. Unfortunately, certain participating States have not only blocked consensus on these important measures, they have refused to even reaffirm language to which they themselves have previously agreed in the OSCE and other international fora.

This year, we have an opportunity to change this dynamic. The Ukrainian Chair-in-Office, like its predecessors Lithuania and Ireland, has made a priority of protecting and expanding media freedom in the OSCE. Ukraine is an original co-sponsor of the Declaration on Fundamental Freedoms in the Digital Age. We commend the Chairmanship for its ongoing efforts to assemble a broadly acceptable agenda for the Human Dimension Seminar on Media Freedom Legal Frameworks, and believe that this ongoing effort serves as a model for bridging the gaps that have divided us on broader issues of freedom of expression and media freedom.

As Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Tara Sonenshine stated in Washington last week, “The United States of America was built on freedom of expression.... And so today I remind you of the fundamental freedom for all, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Media freedom is a key part of that, whether it comes from what we say in a public square or what we type on our keyboards.”

In coordination with the Chair-in-Office and other concerned participating States, the United States will continue to advocate for an OSCE decision strengthening protections for journalists against acts of violence and intimidation related to their work. In next month’s Human Dimension Seminar on Media Freedom Legal Framework, we seek a frank discussion of best legal practices to ensure the safety of journalists. We will also continue to work with our partners to reach consensus on the Declaration on Fundamental Freedoms in the Digital Age, which has received the support of 51 participating States.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.