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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of Center in Astana Amb. Alexandre Keltchewsky

As delivered by Acting Chargé d'Affaires Jeff VanDreal
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 4, 2009

Ambassador Keltchewsky, welcome back to the Permanent Council, and thank you for your very comprehensive report. Congratulations are due both to the Center and to the Government of Kazakhstan on the tenth anniversary of the OSCE's presence in the country. Kazakhstan's close cooperation with the Center and its field office in Almaty has been critical to the success of the OSCE's activities over these years, and we recognize the value of this productive working relationship.

The United States fully supports the Center and its work across all three dimensions. We are particularly impressed with efforts by the Center to promote confidence and security building measures and improve border security capabilities in the first dimension, to combat corruption and money laundering in the second dimension, and to assist the Government in crafting legislative reforms to increase fundamental freedoms in the third dimension. The Center's media activities and projects during this reporting period are also commendable, including hosting roundtables on media self-regulation and draft media and internet legislation, as well as launching several media projects to enhance awareness of journalists' rights.

As Kazakhstan prepares itself to assume the chairmanship of our Organization, it is important that it continue to promote essential freedoms through legislative reform and in practice. In this regard, we commend the Center for its outreach to civil society and its work to create a forum for dialogue on important legislation regarding fundamental freedoms. We urge the Center to continue working closely with Kazakhstani officials on the fair and transparent implementation of the package of new legislation passed in February, which includes the law on elections, political parties, local self-government, and media. We would also welcome enhanced efforts to work with the full spectrum of political parties on these issues.

The United States appeals to the Government of Kazakhstan to consider again recommendations made by the Representative on Freedom of the Media concerning the draft Internet law. While we recognize that some improvements to the law were made in its second reading in Parliament, more work needs to be done to bring the law into line with international standards and best practices. We urge the Center to facilitate additional dialogue with OSCE experts and civil society to better address these concerns. Similarly, we believe that the draft 2009-2012 National Human Rights Action Plan would be a useful framework to continue the process of democratic reform, and we urge President Nazarbayev to sign it into effect. We also would like to echo the Center's calls for the Government to adopt the draft laws on equal rights and opportunities for men and women and on the prevention of domestic violence.

Madam Chairwoman, the United States is confident that Kazakhstan and the Center in Astana will continue to maintain a rewarding relationship during the next year. We stand ready to assist in any way that we can.

Thank you again, Ambassador Keltchewsky.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman