



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Violence Against Journalists in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan

As delivered by Kaye Lee, Director of Resource Management
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 26, 2012

The United States notes with concern an ongoing problem of violence against journalists throughout the OSCE region. This violence has a chilling effect on media freedom throughout our region. I would like to highlight two recent incidents to underscore our concern.

As we have said previously, journalists and a free media are essential to a democratic and open society, and journalists must be able to do their jobs free from fear or intimidation.

In Kazakhstan, journalist Lukpan Akhmedyarov of the independent newspaper *Uralskaya Nedelya* was repeatedly shot with rubber bullets and stabbed on the evening of April 19 outside his home in the northwestern city of Uralsk. Mr. Akhmedyarov is well known for his critical reporting on corruption issues. We join in the sentiment expressed by OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic who, on April 20, called the brutality of the attack “shocking.”

The United States expresses its hope for the complete and speedy recovery of Mr. Akhmedyarov. Our thoughts are with him and with his family following this traumatic and disturbing event.

We welcome the appointment by the government of Kazakhstan of a senior prosecutor to investigate this cowardly assault, and join Representative Mijatovic in calling upon Kazakhstan “to immediately investigate this crime, identify whether it is connected to the victim's journalistic work and bring its perpetrators to justice.”

The United States also notes with concern the assault on independent Azerbaijani journalist Idrak Abbasov and other journalists covering the demolition of houses in Baku on April 18. Mr. Abbasov, a reporter for the newspaper *Zerkalo/Ayna* and the Institute for Reporters' Freedom and Safety (IRFS), was allegedly beaten unconscious by private security guards.

We call on the Government of Azerbaijan to launch a prompt and thorough criminal investigation into the incident and hold accountable those responsible for the assault. We also join Representative Mijatovic in urging Azerbaijani authorities to “take resolute steps to end all forms of violence against journalists.”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.