



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **Statement on Referendum to Cancel Presidential Elections in Kazakhstan**

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
January 13, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States wishes to voice its grave concern about the ongoing efforts in Kazakhstan to cancel presidential elections and to replace them with a referendum that would allow the president to remain in office until 2020. We recall the situation in 1995 when presidential elections were canceled in Kazakhstan, and President Nazarbayev was reappointed for a five-year term by way of a national referendum. He was reelected President in January 1999 and again in December 2005 in an election that OSCE observers said did not meet OSCE standards.

To cancel presidential elections once again in favor of a referendum would represent a step backwards from Kazakhstan's OSCE commitments to establishing democracy, holding periodic free and fair elections, and respecting the rule of law. The 2012 presidential elections are mandated by the constitution of Kazakhstan, and changing the constitution to allow the referendum is likewise a setback for democracy.

We were pleased to learn that on January 6, President Nazarbayev himself rejected parliamentary efforts to change the constitution of Kazakhstan to allow him to continue in power under this scheme. Unfortunately, we are also aware that the one-party parliament is still considering overriding this veto and passing this legislation if it can assemble a majority of 80 per cent of its members in favor. This referendum issue has profound international implications, especially because of Kazakhstan's recent successful chairmanship of the OSCE, and its repeated pledges to move forward with democratic reform including liberalizing its electoral and political party laws.

We urge the members of Kazakhstan's parliament to consider the consequences of such a measure, including the message it would send to the citizens of Kazakhstan as well as to people and nations of the OSCE community. We strongly urge the members of the Kazakhstani parliament advancing this proposal to reconsider and, in keeping with the principles to which Kazakhstan and all OSCE participating States recommitted themselves at the Astana Summit, to permit the 2012 presidential elections to move forward as a legitimate expression of the will of the people of Kazakhstan.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.