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

# **Statement on the Release of the 2009 Religious Freedom Report**

As prepared for delivery by Chargé d'Affaires Carol Fuller  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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On Monday, October 26, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton transmitted to the United States Congress the 11<sup>th</sup> annual Report on International Religious Freedom. We hope this report will also serve as a useful resource for delegations and the OSCE Secretariat.

In her remarks at the release of the report, Secretary Clinton stated that, "The right to profess, practice, and promote one's religious beliefs is a founding principle of our nation." The rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, and assembly are essential values enshrined in the founding documents of our country, as well as in the shared commitments of the States participating in this Organization.

The annual report highlights both the admirable protections for, and the unjust violations of, religious freedom across the globe. In the OSCE region, the report reflects some troubling trends, including religious groups having difficulties in registration, securing places of worship and facing discrimination by government-sanctioned denominations, as well as concerns about police raids and arrests for peaceful religious activity. It also highlights improvements in some participating States.

We welcome the opportunity to collaborate on initiatives that both respect human rights and foster a climate of religious tolerance. But we should be equally wary of efforts to criminalize statements or publications deemed offensive to a particular religion.

Through our bilateral relationships, our work in international fora, and our ongoing engagement with NGOs, religious groups, civil society leaders, and scholars, the United States will continue to actively promote religious freedom for all as essential to human dignity, a robust civil society, and democratic development.

It is our hope that the International Religious Freedom Report will encourage existing religious freedom movements in the OSCE Region and promote dialogue among governments and within societies on how best to accommodate religious communities and protect each individual's right to believe or not believe, as that individual sees fit. It is another valuable tool to assist participating States in the evaluation of their efforts to fulfill our common commitments.

The English language version of the report can be found at the website  
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/index.htm>

Thank you, Madam Chair.