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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Sergey Kapinos, Head of Office in Yerevan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 16, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

We would also like to welcome Ambassador Kapinos back to the Permanent Council, and thank him for his comprehensive report on the Office's activities in the past year. We remain impressed by the work the Office is doing to bring police training institutions in line with international standards and to combat trafficking in persons.

We also commend the Office's creation of a community policing pilot program, and encourage the Office to ensure the sustainability of this center by monitoring progress and providing mentoring on a regular basis. We believe that establishment of more such projects in other Yerevan districts and around the country would positively affect the safety and security of the Armenian people.

At the same time, we want to highlight the need for the Office to focus on a few critical areas where the OSCE has a clear mandate and a capacity to help government authorities fulfill OSCE commitments in the areas of police assistance, good governance and anti-corruption, reform of the judiciary and promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of the media and assembly.

In our view, the Office should direct its attention in the second dimension to practical, results-oriented work in the vital area of good governance, including anti-corruption and transparency of government administration. Economic development work, while important, can be undertaken more effectively and appropriately by other organizations.

We support the Office's continued focus on election reform, in particular assisting the Armenian authorities to implement the recommendations stemming from the February 2008 OSCE election observation mission. The electoral complaint process needs particular attention, as does the overall implementation of election-related legislation necessary for a transparent, level playing field.

The results of the recent municipal elections in Yerevan underscore the importance of continuing efforts in this regard. The Office should intensify its active support to pluralism of media, particularly alternative media such as online news sites. The Office could also play a useful role in assisting the authorities to review amendments to the Law on TV and Radio in order to facilitate compliance with OSCE commitments and ensure that the planned digitalization switch in 2010 does not hinder fulfillment of those commitments. The United States also joins the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in condemning recent instances of violence against Armenian journalists, and calls for effective, transparent

investigations and prosecutions of the perpetrators of these acts. We support your Office's continued monitoring and intervention in these cases of violence against the media until they are resolved.

Despite some improvements to legislation on freedom of assembly, implementation has been lagging. We would therefore support further OSCE assistance in this area.

We also support the Office's efforts to strengthen the Government's judicial reform programs, in particular by focusing attention on training of defense attorneys and judges on international judicial standards and case law.

The United States highly values its relationship with Armenia and stands ready to work together with the Office and the government and people of Armenia to assist Armenia in advancing its democratic development toward becoming a more stable, prosperous country.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.