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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Harassment of Belarusian Organization Partnership

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Bruce Connuck
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 10, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the United States shares the concerns expressed by the European Union and other participating States at the November 3 meeting of the Permanent Council, on Belarusian Government actions against the NGO Partnership.

The U.S. Department of State spokesman issued a statement on this issue on November 2, which will be distributed along with this statement.

Mr. Chairman, at last week's Permanent Council meeting, the Belarusian representative appeared to justify his government's actions by commenting that the NGO Partnership is an "unregistered" organization. He argued that the authorities were acting within the scope of national legislation.

We find these arguments beside the point.

As the United States and others have highlighted time and again, Belarus' legal framework governing NGOs is designed, and applied in such a way, as to stifle independent civil society activity.

As such, Belarus' legal framework itself and the specific arrests of the Partnership activists violate its OSCE commitments on freedom of assembly and civil society.

Moreover, we understand from observers that there were serious irregularities, at a minimum, in the trial of Partnership Deputy Chairperson Enira Bronitskaya, indicating further Belarus' disregard for its rule-of-law commitments.

Especially in light of Belarusian presidential elections next year and Partnership's status as the country's leading domestic, non-partisan observer organization, we call on Belarus to immediately desist from its harassment of this and other NGOs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Press Statement

United States Department of State
Sean McCormack, Spokesman
Washington, DC
November 2, 2005

Belarus Harassment of NGO Partnership

The United States condemns the recent arrest, detention and conviction of Belarusian citizens of the Partnership organization who were peacefully and legally meeting in Minsk. Partnership is a Belarusian non-governmental organization devoted to training Belarusians to be election observers and to educate Belarusians on their voter rights under Belarusian law. This harassment of Partnership and other Belarusian NGO's is the latest of many examples raising doubts about the intentions of the Belarusian authorities to conduct free, fair and open presidential elections next year. The United States calls on Belarusian law and court authorities to respect the democratic rights of Belarusians in accordance with the Belarusian Constitution and Belarus' international commitments as a member of the OSCE. Belarus should take these and other essential steps to hold free and fair Presidential elections in 2006 and restore democracy in the country.

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