



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Freedom of Expression in Kyrgyzstan

As delivered by Political Counselor Christopher Robinson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 5, 2014

The United States is disappointed with Kyrgyzstan's recent adoption of the "False Accusation" amendment to its criminal code. This amendment, which reintroduces the crime of defamation in Kyrgyzstan, is a setback for freedom of expression in Kyrgyzstan, and tarnishes its image as an emerging democracy in the region.

We share Representative on the Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović's particular concern about a provision in the amendment that would also introduce stronger penalties for accusations of corruption against public officials. As she noted, because they hold positions of public trust, public officials have a special responsibility to be open to criticism and accusations of wrong-doing.

Even applied in moderation, criminal charges for defamation can result in a chilling effect and can serve to suppress legitimate news stories, as well as to intimidate or punish journalists reporting on matters of public interest. While this law is unlikely to solve the problem of false and erroneous information appearing in the news media, it will almost certainly negatively affect freedom of expression. We urge the government of Kyrgyzstan to repeal this anti-democratic legislation and reaffirm its OSCE commitments to respect freedom of expression and the independence of the media.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.