



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

### **Response to the Head of the OSCE Program Office in Dushanbe, Ambassador Tuula Yrjölä**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Harry Kamian  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
May 17, 2018

Madam Ambassador, the United States warmly welcomes you to the Permanent Council. Thank you, Ambassador, for your timely and comprehensive report.

We note that the new mandate for the Program Office has been in place now for almost one year. The United States believes that the Office must support Tajikistan in addressing issues across all three OSCE dimensions, as well as continuing to work with members of civil society, academia, and other OSCE-supported structures. Ambassador, we take note of your report that the new mandate thus far is working well.

The United States supports the Office's important work on rule of law and human rights, which are integral parts of our OSCE concept of comprehensive security. This includes programs on torture prevention and the rights of detained persons. We also welcome the Office's activities to support independent media. Countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLT) is – and should remain – a priority, with a cross-dimensional approach that also protects human rights. We also believe that the Office should continue to assist in reducing violence against women and girls, and we welcome your work to mainstream gender equality in the Office's activities. The United States highly values the work of the Women's Resource Centers which, among other things, address the needs of victims of domestic violence. We were alarmed to hear that 15 centers dependent on extra-budgetary funding have had to close, due to lack of funds. We are looking into any possibilities of short-term funding to allow the centers to reopen, and we urge other participating States to do the same. We also support the Office's work to combat trafficking in persons and encourage increased engagement on the part of concerned stakeholders, including government and civil society.

The United States strongly supports the Border Management Staff College (BMSC) in Dushanbe. We continue to believe that it should be included in the OSCE Unified Budget in order to put it on a more stable and predictable footing. The BMSC benefits personnel from many countries, and its activities need to be more sustainable financially.

Mr. Chair, we are concerned about several negative developments in Tajikistan over the past year. The United States has repeatedly raised its concerns about the rule of law, the elimination of political pluralism, and the targeting of defense lawyers in Tajikistan. We are

also concerned about the government's list of individuals alleged to have committed grave crimes, many of whom appear to have been added to the list for politically motivated reasons. We also continue to be concerned about the detention of journalist Khairullo Mirsaidov, whose case we have raised previously. Mirsaidov's arrest reflects a pattern of increasing pressure on media freedom in Tajikistan, which has led to a number of journalists leaving the country. This pressure also has led to the closure of several independent media outlets. The space for civil society has been shrinking in Tajikistan, as NGOs face increasing government scrutiny and pressure.

Madam Ambassador, thank you again for your report. The United States appreciates all that you do to assist Tajikistan in implementing its OSCE commitments and in addressing the common challenges we all face today.

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