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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Project Coordinator for Uzbekistan, Amb. Istvan Venczel

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 13, 2010

Thank you, Mister Chairman,

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Istvan Venczel back to the Permanent Council. The tireless efforts of you and your staff to advance OSCE principles and commitments and their implementation by Uzbekistan are well known and deserve our deep appreciation and support.

We are particularly pleased with the good news in your report about the approval by the Government of Uzbekistan of 16 projects. Of course, we note, as does your report, that 21 projects were submitted as far back as last November, and the delay of approximately five months will make it difficult for the Project Coordinator's Office to be able to complete all of these projects in the time remaining this year. We hope the growing cooperation between your office and the Government will continue and will bring with it speedy attention to your work by the responsible officials in Uzbekistan.

I would like to highlight three areas that have earned our support for the Project Coordinator's Office.

First, in the Politico-Military Dimension, the work the Office is doing with the Government on developing biometric passports is both timely and significant. Verifying the identity of passport carriers, while protecting personal identification data is a vital step in protecting borders and combating terrorism. We applaud both the Office and the Uzbek government for embarking on this extremely valuable project, especially in conjunction with the Action against Terrorism Unit and the Strategic Police Matters Unit.

Secondly, in the Environmental and Economic Affairs Dimension, the projects aimed at stamping out money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism are, likewise, of invaluable importance to both Uzbekistan and the wider region. We hope to see more projects of this nature – especially in cooperation with the Uzbek Financial Intelligence Unit, the General Prosecutor's Office and the Central Bank of Uzbekistan, as in the past. Similarly, increasingly important issues of water resource management and the crisis presented by the shrinking Aral Sea have begun to receive more attention from the Office, and we fully support these efforts.

Finally, in the Human Dimension, the Project Coordinator's Office has continued to undertake efforts that underscore the depth of OSCE principles, values and commitments. Your work with NGO development; fostering the empowerment of women; increasing protections for vulnerable groups – including the disabled and trafficking victims – show the OSCE at its best. These are the values and principles that all 56 participating States have committed to, and we applaud your considerable contribution to this work in Uzbekistan.

This is not to say that there are no ongoing issues of serious concern to the United States with respect to Uzbekistan's fulfillment of its OSCE commitments. Although the U.S.-Uzbekistan relationship has improved recently, I would be remiss if I did not point out that today marks the fifth anniversary of the events at Andijan and that we still await a complete accounting of those events.

In addition, we continue to have concerns about the suppression of media and religious freedom, torture in detention, lack of due process, and the use of child labor in the cotton harvest. Psychologist Maxim Popov remains incarcerated for working to decrease the incidence of AIDS in Uzbekistan, and journalist Dilmurod Sayid remains jailed for writing about official corruption. These are only two troubling cases among many. Uzbekistan can do better.

Ambassador Venczel, you concluded your remarks on a hopeful note about progress made in the dialogue between the Project Coordinator's Office and the Government of Uzbekistan. We look forward to a strong and continued exchange with Uzbekistan, and to more success and progress from you, Ambassador, and your dedicated and hard working staff in Tashkent in the months to come.

Thank you, Mister Chairman.