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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on President Obama's Remarks on the Review of Signals Intelligence

As delivered by Political Counselor Christopher Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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On January 17, President Obama addressed the world on the United States' review of its signals intelligence programs. The President announced the adoption of a series of concrete, substantial reforms that he will adopt administratively or seek to codify with Congress, to include a majority of the recommendations made by the Review Group on Intelligence and Communication Technologies. These reforms help the United States meet its security requirements and also those of our alliances; advance our trade and investment relationships, taking into account the concerns of private industry; and uphold our commitment to privacy and basic liberties.

The President described the need to balance security requirements against the need to maintain trust and cooperation among people and leaders around the world. For that reason, the new presidential guidance lays out principles that govern what we do abroad, and clarifies what we don't do. He made it clear that the United States only uses signals intelligence for legitimate national security purposes, and not for the purpose of indiscriminately reviewing the e-mails or private phone calls of ordinary people.

Here is what we don't do: The United States does not collect intelligence to suppress criticism or dissent. We do not collect intelligence to disadvantage people based on their ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, or religion. And we do not collect intelligence to provide a competitive advantage to U.S. companies, or U.S. commercial sectors.

Here is what we will do: We will only use collected data to meet specific security requirements, including: counter-intelligence; counter-terrorism; counter-proliferation; cyber-security; force protection for our troops and allies; and combating transnational crime, including sanctions evasion.

Given the understandable attention this issue has received, including here at the OSCE, the President has asked his national security team, as well as the intelligence community, to work with foreign counterparts to deepen our coordination and cooperation in ways that rebuild trust going forward.

Our intelligence agencies will continue to gather information about the intentions of governments – as opposed to ordinary citizens – around the world, just as intelligence services of other nations do. But heads of state and government with whom we work closely, on whose cooperation we depend, should feel confident that we are treating them as real partners. The changes the President ordered do just that.

The United States will circulate President Obama's complete remarks on this topic in the OSCE distribution system. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.