



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Russian Legislation on NGOs

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 12, 2012

Just last week, the United States took the floor to note with concern Russia's proposed legislation requiring domestic non-governmental organizations (or NGOs) accepting foreign contributions and engaging in quote: "political activities" to register as "foreign agents." We continue to be concerned, particularly since the draft is expected to have its second reading in the Russian Duma on July 13.

We also note that the introduction of draft legislation that would re-criminalize defamation. In November 2011, the United States joined OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic in welcoming the announcement that the Russian Federation had decriminalized defamatory speech and insult. We thus see this new bill, introduced July 6, as a clear step backwards. The new bill, if passed, would also make the offense punishable by a maximum fine of 500,000 rubles (\$15,200) or up to five years in prison.

We are also concerned with amendments to the law "On the Protection of Children from Information Detrimental to their Health and Development," which passed its second and third readings on July 11. These amendments permit the government to block certain websites without court orders or due judicial process. Of course we all want to protect children from harm, but as pointed out this week by Dunja Mijatovic, it is "not clear under which criteria content will be defined as harmful to children and thus blacklisted." The proposed language would allow the blacklisting of websites without due judicial process. We agree with the conclusion of the Russian Presidential Human Rights Council that this law could easily lead to internet censorship. Moreover, we are concerned that under the law limits on access to "information for which distribution has been forbidden in the Russian Federation" would be applied to the texts that the government has placed on the list of "extremist" materials.

Noting the unusual speed with which these draft bills appear to be moving through the Duma, the United States strongly urges Russian authorities to approach these legislative initiatives in a spirit of deliberation in order to ensure that their provisions meet Russia's international human rights obligations, OSCE commitments on human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law and allow the opportunity for public comment and debate. We reiterate that the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media have experts who can review draft legislation being considered by OSCE participating States to ensure that the language of the laws meet those international obligations and commitments.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.