



**PERMANENT DELEGATION
OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE**

**STATEMENT BY NORWAY REGARDING THE OFFICE OF THE NORWEGIAN
HELSINKI COMMITTEE IN BISHKEK**

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
10 July 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Norway would like to bring to your attention a matter of great concern.

In late 2006 the Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC) established its Central Asian Office in Bishkek and started the formal registration and immigration processes in accordance with Kyrgyz official regulations and official advice. Since then the NHC has sought to finalise its registration with the Kyrgyz Ministry of Justice, but unfortunately the registration has repeatedly been delayed. In the meantime, and until this spring, NHC has carried out activities in Kyrgyzstan, with the kind but informal approval of the Ministry of Justice and its subsidiary agencies.

To the surprise of many, on 9 June 2008 Ministry of Interior personnel, accompanied by persons who presented themselves as “witnesses,” raided the office of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in Bishkek, and initiated investigations of its activities and legal status in the country. Both local and international representatives dealing with human rights issues were present and expressed criticism against these actions.

On 12 June two NHC staff, regional representative Ivar Dale and project coordinator Lena Mamadnazarova, were brought in for questioning by the Ministry of Interior. Here, an agreement was made, under which the NHC has suspended its activity until relevant registration and work permits are granted, and has refrained from taking issue with Kyrgyz authorities related to the 9 June raid. As far as we understand, under the same agreement the Ministry of Interior would confirm to the Ministry of Justice that it does not object to the registration of NHC.

However, contrary to the spirit of this agreement, further steps have been taken by Kyrgyz authorities against NHC representatives. Recently Ivar Dale received warning

from the authorities that unspecified “administrative proceedings” may be carried out against him and Lena Mamadnazarova. In addition, representatives of Human Rights Watch Andrea Berg and Mihra Ritman, and human rights activists Tolekan Ismailova and Aziza Abdirasulova, who expressed criticism against the 9 June raid, have been warned that “measures” may be taken against them, too. In our view, such warnings are unnecessary and represent a deplorable development.

Mr. Chairman,

The right to defend human rights has been underlined in several CSCE and later OSCE documents. The 1989 Vienna document, the 1990 Copenhagen document, the 1990 Paris document, the 1991 Moscow document, as well as the 1999 Charter for European Security all contain provisions committing OSCE participating States to respect and facilitate the work of human rights defenders.

The current restrictive legislation and practice with regard to NGOs in several participating States is, however, a challenge to the effectiveness of the NGOs in promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Such restrictive policies run counter to the main values and commitments of the OSCE.

As such, this case concerns not only NHC but the more general issue of the right of human rights organisations to operate in OSCE countries, including Kyrgyzstan. We expect Kyrgyzstan to fully live up to its democratic and human rights commitments.

Mr. Chairman,

It is our clear impression that the Norwegian Helsinki Committee has done its best to comply faithfully with all requirements for attaining registration. However, if any misunderstandings remain, we are sure that NHC will contribute fully to clearing them up together with the relevant Kyrgyz authorities.

We urge Kyrgyz authorities to finalize the formal registration as soon as possible, in close dialogue with the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

Furthermore, and in light of the warnings of proceedings against NHC and other NGO representatives, we request Kyrgyzstan to clarify its registration procedures and policies regarding civil society organisations in general.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude for the valuable support that Norway, as well as the NHC, has received from the OSCE and from participating States.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman