



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement of Support for LGBT Events Planned in Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 21, 2013

Belarus' Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender community has announced plans to hold a series of events in Minsk between December 6 and December 10. Collectively, the events will be called "Minsk Pride 2013" and will be geared towards decreasing homophobia and eliminating discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity in Belarusian society. In conjunction with Minsk Pride, organizers have asked the Minsk City Executive Committee to grant permission for a demonstration against homophobia in Belarus timed to coincide with World Human Rights Day on December 10. This is the ninth attempt since 1999 to hold a legally sanctioned LGBT event or demonstration in Belarus. All previous attempts at registration have been denied.

The United States expresses its support for "Minsk Pride 2013" and, respectfully requests that our Belarusian colleagues, consistent with participating States' OSCE commitments on freedom of assembly and association, encourage the Minsk City Executive Committee to: (1) grant permission for the demonstration, (2) provide adequate police protection for the demonstrators as well as for any counter-demonstrators, and (3) treat the organizers with dignity, tolerance, and respect.

At previous meetings of the Permanent Council, the United States has raised some of the problems that LGBT activists confront in Belarus. Our statement on February 14 noted that the NGO GayBelarus has been unable to register legally and that after its second attempt to do so in January, police questioned over 60 members of the NGO regarding their activities.

I should stress that combating discrimination is not, of course, a challenge unique to Belarus or to any participating State, nor is it uniquely related to the LGBT community. But we raise this now because there is a concrete opportunity for a participating State to support and protect the fundamental freedoms of association and assembly for its citizens.

Madam Chair, we also renew our call on the Government of Belarus to fulfill its OSCE commitments, release all political prisoners immediately and unconditionally, and ensure their full rehabilitation. The treatment of political prisoners and respect for fundamental freedoms remains central to overcoming the country's international isolation and is essential to the progress of the country and welfare of its citizens.

Thank you, Madam Chair.