



United States Mission to the OSCE

The Raid on the NGO Golos and Repression of Civil Society in the Russian Federation

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Kate Byrnes
the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 16, 2015

The United States is deeply troubled by the searches that were carried out on July 7 at the homes and offices of the staff of the Golos Association, Russia's most prominent, independent election monitoring organization. Golos is a highly professional, non-partisan group that has worked for over a decade to promote transparency and integrity in Russia's electoral processes. We join ODIHR Director Link in calling for participating States to promote, rather than restrict or obstruct, the work of independent election monitoring groups, such as Golos.

This incident is emblematic of the shrinking space for civil society activity in the Russian Federation. The Russian government has taken several steps this year to further restrict, intimidate, and stigmatize Russian NGOs that represent independent views or whose work is perceived as running counter to the government's interests. These measures, such as the law on "foreign or international undesirable organizations," have been adopted under pretenses such as protecting national security, but, in effect, these laws stifle dissent and hamper civil society efforts to promote government transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights and democratic processes. Over 70 of the country's most respected civil society organizations have been placed on the government's registry of "foreign agents."

No less worrisome is the ongoing harassment of and attacks against individual activists, journalists, and human rights defenders in Russia. On June 3, police stood by as a large crowd ransacked the Grozny offices of the Committee Against Torture, a group that reports on human rights abuses in Chechnya, and which had to dissolve itself last week after being labeled a "foreign agent." On July 13, Yevgeny Khamaganov – a journalist and member of the opposition political party Yabloko – was badly beaten in Buryatia, his neck broken.

Mr. Chair, as participating States, we reaffirmed in Astana in 2010 "the important role played by civil society and free media in helping us to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy, including free and fair elections, and the rule of law."

We call on the Government of Russia to uphold the international obligations and commitments it has undertaken to respect freedoms of expression and association, and we urge the Russian authorities to protect, rather than impede, the work of civil society.

Thank you, Mr. Chair