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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Cases of Azimzhan Askarov, Ulugbek Abdusalamov, and Others in Kyrgyzstan

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 23, 2010

The U.S. is deeply concerned with recent court cases involving journalists in Kyrgyzstan. In particular, we note a decision reached by the Nookan district court in Kyrgyzstan on September 15 to sentence human rights advocate Azimzhan Askarov and three other defendants to life in prison -- after a trial that was marked by procedural irregularities and an apparent absence of due process.

The U.S. Embassy in Kyrgyzstan followed the trial closely, and we share their concern about reports that the prosecution failed to present clear evidence of Askarov's guilt, and that Askarov was not afforded access to his lawyer, as is required by Kyrgyz law. In addition, it was reported that local authorities allowed intimidation and abuse of the defendants, their families and their attorneys to take place within the courtroom itself.

The United States calls upon the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic to investigate fully reports that Mr. Askarov and others were abused and tortured while in police custody. We also urge the Government to investigate reports of failure to accord the defendants their right to a fair legal process and reported courtroom intimidation of the court, court officers, and defendants.

The U.S. urges the government of the Kyrgyz Republic to ensure that Mr. Askarov and the other defendants receive the full benefit of an appeals process under Kyrgyz law, and that appeals hearings are conducted in a secure location where the government can ensure a civil atmosphere that fully respects the rights of all defendants and court officers.

The United States is also concerned about Ulugbek Abdusalamov, Vice President of the Uzbek Cultural Center in Jalalabad and Chief Editor of the regional Uzbek newspaper Didor ("Meeting"). Mr. Abdusalamov was to go on trial September 22 in Jalalabad along with three other ethnic Uzbeks on charges of inciting ethnic hatred. Mr. Abdusalamov has a heart condition and suffered a stroke on September 17. We call on the Kyrgyz authorities to postpone his trial until he has regained his health, and to ensure a fair and transparent trial process.

In just over two months, the OSCE will embark upon its first Summit in eleven years. Our shared goal will be to create a new sense of commitment to the unique OSCE concept of comprehensive security across the entire European, Eurasian and North American continent. We urge the Kyrgyz authorities to be mindful of this as they address the issues raised by these cases. How the Kyrgyz Government handles the judicial processes in these and future cases related to June's inter-ethnic violence will be a strong signal to the international community of the Kyrgyz commitment to the rule of law. It is also crucial to the reconciliation process in the aftermath of that violence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.