



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Media Freedom in Uzbekistan

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

The United States wishes to express its grave concern about the state of media freedom in Uzbekistan. We find particularly worrying the present charges brought against journalist Abdulmalik Boboyev. A majority of the charges against Mr. Boboyev are related directly to his work as a journalist, including charges of insult, defamation and preparing and disseminating material constituting a threat to public order and security. A fourth charge is for "illegal entry into the country" and apparently stems from a minor incident involving a missing stamp in Mr. Boboyev's passport.

Despite having worked for Voice of America in Uzbekistan since 2005, and despite repeated attempts to register with the government, Mr. Boboyev's applications for registration seem to have been ignored by Uzbek authorities, leaving him without official accreditation and open to governmental criticism for being unregistered. Such tactics are unfair.

Additionally, the United States expresses equally grave concern about similar charges brought against journalist Vladimir Berezovskiy in August, also charging him with libel and insult based upon articles on his website "vesti.uz" that were critical of the government.

In both cases, these journalists face prison sentences and stiff fines. The government relied upon the findings of the Center for Mass Communications, an arm of the Agency for Communication and Information, in determining that the information threatened public safety and order. The use of the criminal justice system to punish journalists for freely expressed views is an infringement of Uzbekistan's voluntary OSCE commitments and undoubtedly has a chilling effect on journalists throughout the country.

The United States calls upon Uzbekistan to stop the criminal prosecution of journalists based solely on their reporting. Likewise, we enjoin all OSCE participating States that continue to criminalize allegedly defamatory speech to revisit their legislation in light of OSCE commitments and to repeal such laws at the earliest opportunity.