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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Status of Human Rights Watch in Uzbekistan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a. i. Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 24, 2011

The United States wishes to express its concern at reports that the Ministry of Justice in Uzbekistan has initiated legal proceedings against the local Human Rights Watch office in Tashkent. International NGOs such as Human Rights Watch have an important role to play in Uzbekistan, and we hope that they can continue to fulfill this role. We urge the Government to refrain from taking steps against Human Rights Watch that are inconsistent with Uzbekistan's international and OSCE commitments.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton affirmed the central role human rights play in the U.S.-Uzbek relationship when she urged President Karimov on December 2nd "to demonstrate his commitment to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are truly protected in" Uzbekistan. We repeat that call today.

Should the Government of Uzbekistan decide to close Human Rights Watch, this would represent a significant step backwards from its expressed commitments to further develop civil society and transparency in the country. We hope this will not be the case and we urge the Government of Uzbekistan to ensure that it does not come to pass.

We also take note of the growing trend in too many OSCE participating States to impose burdensome registration requirements on NGOs. Doing so stands in stark contrast to our stated commitment to enhance the ability of NGOs to make their full contribution to the further development of civil society and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. We therefore urge all participating States to end this practice immediately.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.