



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the OSCE Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan, Ambassador György Szabó

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 4, 2015

The United States welcomes Ambassador Szabó back to the Permanent Council. Ambassador, we thank you for your report and your ongoing efforts to support Uzbekistan in implementing its OSCE commitments. We appreciate your stated goal of maintaining meaningful work in all three OSCE dimensions and conducting projects in various parts of Uzbekistan.

Thank you for the slides today which gave us some indication of opportunities for improvement. I hope that some pragmatic work can be done to improve the efficiency of the project approval process through the engagement of yourself as well as the government authorities.

The United States supports the Project Coordinator's work in combating corruption, money laundering, and terrorist financing, as well as strengthening the role of the judiciary in promoting rule of law. We welcome your new work on cybersecurity.

Your efforts to promote police reform by training instructors from the Police Academy also have the potential for far-reaching impact. We encourage you to ensure that this police training incorporates relevant aspects of all three OSCE dimensions, including human rights awareness and anti-corruption activities.

We welcome your efforts to strengthen government offices charged with promoting respect for human rights. We believe, however, that there is room to do more, particularly with regard to strengthening the capacity and independence of civil society organizations. We welcome the positive steps reflected in Uzbekistan's new law on openness of governmental bodies, which provides the public with greater opportunities to comment on draft legislation, as well as to interact with local authorities.

In April, we raised our concerns about the conduct of Uzbekistan's March 29 presidential elections. We appreciate both the Project Coordinator's and ODIHR's assistance in electoral reform, and we urge the government of Uzbekistan to take full advantage of this support.

We also encourage the Project Coordinator to develop projects that promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedoms of expression, association, assembly, and religion or belief. The Secretary of State designated Uzbekistan as a Country of Particular Concern for religious freedom in 2014, due in part, to undue restrictions on the ability of individuals to freely practice their religions.

Mr. Ambassador, I would also like to recognize your efforts to combat human trafficking. We support your work to build the capacity of legal instructors, to foster coordination between civil society and the authorities through the National Referral mechanism, and to train police officers – including those working in the transportation sector - to be able to better identify and investigate trafficking cases. Uzbekistan is ranked as a Tier 3 country in the most recent Department of State Trafficking in Persons report, and we hope that OSCE assistance will enable Uzbekistan to improve its record.

Finally – May 13th marked the tenth anniversary of the tragic events that occurred in Andijan. We extend our deepest sympathy to the families of all those who lost their lives or suffered as a result. The United States continues to urge Uzbekistan to uphold its domestic and international obligations on human rights and religious freedom, including its OSCE commitments. Long-term stability and security cannot be achieved without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.