



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **Statement on Government of Uzbekistan's Decision to Shut Down UNHCR**

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 23, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States condemns the Government of Uzbekistan's decision to shut down the offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. This action runs counter to OSCE and other international commitments that reaffirm the importance of international standards and instruments related to human rights and the protection of refugees and asylum seekers.

We call on the Government of Uzbekistan to rescind this order and allow UNHCR to continue protecting and assisting refugees and asylum seekers in Uzbekistan. We also call on all governments in the region currently hosting or detaining Uzbek asylum seekers to uphold their international refugee and anti-torture commitments by refraining from forcibly returning them to Uzbekistan, and to recognize the right of such individuals to seek protection from persecution.

Finally, once again, we call for UNHCR to be given access to the 18 Uzbek asylum seekers that have been forcibly returned to Uzbekistan from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine in a manner inconsistent with OSCE and other international commitments on the treatment of asylum seekers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.