



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Norwegian Helsinki Committee Raid in Bishkek

As Delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 10, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States joins Norway in expressing its deep concern about recent actions taken by Kyrgyz authorities against the Norwegian Helsinki Committee in Bishkek.

According to the OSCE Center in Bishkek, Kyrgyz law enforcement officials raided the Norwegian Helsinki Committee's office on June 9th without presenting a search warrant or other documents officially authorizing the raid. Two Committee members may now face charges for operating the office without proper registration, a process they had been attempting to complete since late 2006, and they could be subject to administrative sanctions. Further, we understand that two representatives of Human Rights Watch in Bishkek and two human rights defenders -- Tolekan Ismailova and Aziza Abdirasulova -- may also face charges under Article 364 of the Administrative Code for obstruction of justice in connection with the Helsinki Committee raid.

This sort of action leads to an environment of fear and mistrust for Non-Governmental Organizations and other international actors operating in Kyrgyzstan. It is essential for the democratic development of Kyrgyzstan that civil society be allowed to function freely. We urge Kyrgyzstan to ensure that these organizations are registered quickly and transparently and allowed to operate openly, without intimidation of their staff.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.