



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Religious Freedom in Kazakhstan

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 23, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

The United States takes note that the lower chamber of the Kazakhstani parliament passed on September 24th draft amendments to legislation on freedom of religion and religious associations.

We are pleased that Kazakhstan solicited comments from ODIHR experts, non-governmental organizations and religious groups on the original draft of these amendments, and we welcome the improvements that were made to the text as a result of these consultations.

Nevertheless, the United States remains concerned that certain provisions of the current draft legislation are both out of line with OSCE commitments on religious freedom and do not reflect the leadership on this issue that Kazakhstan's 2010 Chairmanship presumes. These amendments to Kazakhstan's religion law would seriously limit the activities of smaller religious groups and would require all religious groups to re-register under potentially more restrictive procedures.

Many Kazakhstani officials have pointed out in this Permanent Council and in other forums the great achievement of religious pluralism and tolerance that exists in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan can be an example to other OSCE member states by reflecting this in its law. At the Madrid Ministerial, the Government of Kazakhstan underscored that "the dialogue between religions and people is the imperative demand of our time."

In this same spirit, we urge the Senate of Kazakhstan to review the draft amendments to ensure that they adhere to OSCE principles and commitments. We are encouraged that ODIHR and the Government of Kazakhstan appear willing to continue cooperation on this important piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.