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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Commemoration of International Human Rights Day

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 10, 2009

Today, December 10, is International Human Rights Day, which marks the 61st Anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document that affirms the inherent rights of people everywhere and enshrines basic freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, association and belief. The focus of this year's Human Rights Day is on non-discrimination.

Last week in Athens, we reaffirmed that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law are at the core of the OSCE comprehensive concept of security, and that combating intolerance and defending human rights are important elements in the promotion of human rights and democratic values. Violations of human rights, including hate crimes and other violent manifestations of intolerance, threaten the security of both individuals and society, and give rise to conflict and violence on a wider scale.

The United States wishes to underscore our concern over human rights violations and acts of violence directed at individuals on account of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The United States has recently passed legislation that broadens the definition of hate crimes to include violent crimes that target individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity. We urge respect for the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals in the OSCE region and around the world.

We wish to note the critical role that civil society plays— and must be allowed to play without unnecessary hindrance— to further the promotion of tolerance and combat acts of violence and other human rights abuses.

In commemoration of International Human Rights Day, the U.S. Department of State presents awards for extraordinary actions in support of universal human rights principles. We would like to announce that the 2009 recipient of the Human Rights Defenders Award is Maksharip Aushev of Russia (awarded posthumously). This award is given to individuals or non-governmental organizations who show exceptional valor and leadership in advocating the protection of human rights and democracy in the face of government repression. In an increasingly deadly environment for journalists and other human rights defenders, activist and independent Web site editor Maksharip Aushev bravely continued to train a spotlight on abductions, torture, killings and other serious human rights abuses in Russia's North Caucasus, even after one of the web site's previous owners was killed in police custody in 2008. On October 25, 2009, unknown assailants fired more than 60 bullets into his car, killing him.

As we join people around the globe in observing International Human Rights Day and Week, we recall that the primary responsibility for addressing acts of intolerance and human rights violations rests with governments, and urge participating States to implement existing OSCE commitments in the fields of intolerance, non-discrimination and fundamental freedoms.

Thank you Madam Chair.