



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

# **Findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression in Tajikistan**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate M. Byrnes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 17, 2016

The United States wishes to echo the concerns outlined in the preliminary findings of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, David Kaye, whose visit to Tajikistan concluded March 10, 2016.

During a March 10 press conference on his initial assessments, Mr. Kaye expressed grave concern over widespread blockage of Internet content and cellular telecommunications. He also predicted that the May 22 referendum on proposed constitutional amendments will be held without space for open discussion or debate, and would be subjected to the influence of the political elite. He criticized the government's steps to silence voices of peaceful political opposition at home and abroad, including as related to the activities of Group 24. He voiced concern over the ban on the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and decried the government's efforts to block him from meeting with jailed IRPT members.

In accordance with Tajikistan's international obligations and OSCE commitments, we urge the Government of Tajikistan to ensure that the May 22 referendum is free and fair, and to fully protect space for citizens to freely express their views on the proposed amendments. In that vein, we also reiterate our previous calls on the Government of Tajikistan to refrain from impeding the people's access to media and communication services. Finally, we call on the Government of Tajikistan to cease its efforts to silence members of peaceful political opposition groups, both at home and abroad.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.