



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Statement on Belarus Political Prisoners**

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
September 4, 2008

Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes the August 20th release of the last two Belarusian prisoners of conscience, Andrey Kim and Syarhey Parsyukevich. This follows closely the August 16th release of former Presidential candidate Alyaksandr Kazulin. The release of all prisoners of conscience is a positive step. This is a development in the right direction by Belarus to abide by the commitments it undertook as a member of the OSCE to respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic norms.

To signal our support for the release, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Merkel traveled to Minsk on August 21 to 23 to develop a dialogue with Belarusian government officials and deepen our contacts with the democratic opposition. He had productive meetings with Foreign Minister Martynov, Presidential Administration Deputy Chief Petkevich, and Central Election Commission Chairwoman Yermoshina. He also met with opposition and civil society leaders, including Mr. Kazulin.

Continued steps by the Government of Belarus that show they are truly committed to democratic reform could lead to a significant improvement of relations between the United States and Belarus, including the removal of visa and economic sanctions. Ensuring a conducive environment for free and fair parliamentary elections on September 28th, both during the run-up and on election day itself, will be important in this regard.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.