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United States Mission to the OSCE



Response to EU on Journalists' Arrests at "Occupy Wall Street" demonstrations

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 17, 2011

There are few issues of greater concern to the United States than the state of Media Freedom within OSCE participating States. We have frequently addressed the issue as a matter of peer review in this hall, and we recognize the reasons for the concerns expressed by the European Union today and by the OSCE's Representative on Freedom of the Media on November 11.

The United States supports the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, and we defend the independence of the Representative to make public statements on media freedoms — including to highlight perceived shortcomings in my own country.

As we have said on previous occasions, the Government of the United States neither believes nor pretends that it is beyond reproach on any issue—or that we cannot do a better job of implementing our OSCE commitments — including on media freedom. We certainly can, and we see self-assessment on our performance in the defense of fundamental freedoms as a sign of strength.

To that end, we note the RFoM's concern that there have been occasions over the course of the last two months in the United States where journalists appear to have been mistakenly arrested or wrongly detained. As many of you have had the opportunity to observe, the very well-covered demonstrations taking place in the United States under the 'Occupy' framework have frequently involved hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of demonstrators.

As we briefed this body last month in response to our Belarusian colleagues, the 'Occupy' demonstrations have been almost entirely peaceful. These demonstrations have shown in practice our respect for the right of people everywhere to join together peacefully to voice their common concerns in exercise of their freedoms of opinion, expression and peaceful assembly. These freedoms are precious. As Mayor Bloomberg in New York said on November 15, "From the beginning, the City (of New York) had two principal goals: guaranteeing public health and safety, and guaranteeing the protestors' First Amendment rights."

Whether in the case of journalists or regular citizens, allegations of wrongful detention would be subject to review and investigation. Mr. Chairman, the United States regrets any incident where any journalist has been treated unfairly. The U.S. Constitution has strong protections for freedom of expression, including for members of the press. It is a matter we take extremely seriously. The United States will continue to monitor these events closely and will provide additional information at a future date.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.