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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by the Minister of Culture and Information of Kazakhstan, H.E. Yermukhamet Yertysbayev

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 26, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Mr. Minister, for appearing at today's Permanent Council meeting to brief us on developments concerning the new media law in Kazakhstan, and on changes to your country's legislation regarding coverage of the upcoming elections.

The United States appreciates the fact that the Government of Kazakhstan is in the process of drafting a new media law. It is our hope that this law will meet Kazakhstan's OSCE commitments. We welcome the willingness of your Government to work with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in drafting this legislation. Consultation and cooperation with Mr. Harazsti's office to get Kazakhstan to meet OSCE standards are critical to passing a law that meets the needs of a modern, democratic Kazakhstan. Critical as well are openness and transparency in the drafting process and assuring that the concerns of journalists and NGOs are reflected in the final law. Regarding Kazakhstan's upcoming parliamentary elections, ODIHR is an excellent source of information and advice on the important role of a free and independently functioning media, particularly in the pre-electoral period. Fair representation and exposure to the differing political views of all the candidates by the media is absolutely necessary to ensure a truly open and fair election.

We understand that, on July 19th, a public council was established under the Central Electoral Commission in order to regulate media operation during the election campaign - which began officially on July 18th, and ends at midnight on August 16th. We urge the council, as well as the Central Electoral Commission, to make use of ODIHR's expertise to ascertain that Kazakhstan's electorate receives the benefit of open and fair media coverage during the upcoming parliamentary elections, including on candidates and party platforms.

The United States notes the pledge by the Government of Kazakhstan to extend all necessary support and assistance to the newly-deployed ODIHR Election Observation Mission to Kazakhstan. An analysis of the media environment during the campaign will surely be a key element of their long-term observation effort. The United States considers ODIHR and a strong contingent of unbiased election monitoring teams to be critical for the evaluation of a government's success in meeting a fundamental commitment to its people: that of the assurance of a free and fair election. In this regard, we take note of press reports indicating that there have been Government of Kazakhstan efforts to influence the composition of the applicant pool for the ODIHR observation mission. We underscore that that United States and other members of

the international community will scrutinize closely the nature and scope of Kazakhstan's cooperation with the ODIHR observation mission.

Again, Mr. Minister, thank you for addressing us today on developments on the media in Kazakhstan.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.