



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

### **Release of Human Rights Reports**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
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On June 25, Secretary of State John Kerry released the 2014 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. These reports, commonly known as the Human Rights Reports, cover the status of human rights in countries around the world.

While our reports continue to focus on the behavior of governments – which are ultimately responsible for the protection of human rights in their territories – the year 2014 will be remembered as much for the atrocities committed by non-state actors. The 2014 reports also highlight two trends: the use of technology to advocate for human rights and the persistence and pervasiveness of corruption in authoritarian governments.

Mr. Chair, even as authoritarian governments become more aggressive in cracking down on freedom of speech and the use of new media, civil society is emerging as an increasingly powerful actor, as people in every country become more connected and better informed. A number of civil society organizations are successfully advocating the protection of rights online, developing technologies to protect freedom of expression, and calling out human rights abuses. Civil society and NGOs have used satellite imagery, video, and crowdsourcing technologies to gather information and document human rights abuses in areas where security and accessibility have made such reporting challenging. Technology is also being used to verify data and help provide governments and the United Nations with accurate information regarding protests, destruction, and violence. It is also being used to help increase transparency. And yet, authoritarian governments often use technology to control use of the Internet within their borders. Governments in some participating States are increasingly blocking access to standard and social media sites, and in some cases, human rights activists who use the Internet for exercising their rights have been tried as criminals and punished as terrorists.

An endemic feature in almost every authoritarian government is persistent and pervasive corruption, coupled with a lack of transparency and accountability. In 2014, corruption prevailed in too many societies and too many unrestrained rulers used it to cement their overall grip on power. In many cases, citizens who promoted independent efforts to combat corruption were themselves prosecuted. Corruption also reduced the effectiveness of security forces, weakened governance, undermined the independence of judiciaries, and damaged economies.

We publish the Human Rights Reports because human rights matter. Human rights are at the core of our OSCE commitments.

The United States does not deny that it too has human rights concerns to address. We welcome constructive scrutiny of our human rights performance by human rights groups,

other governments, and multilateral organizations, including the OSCE and its institutions. We are mindful of, and take seriously, advice from domestic and international civil society about how we can improve. **As we have said before, this is about universal human standards who apply to everyone, including ourselves.** We expect respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms to be upheld everywhere, on equal terms.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.