



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Ivar Vikki, Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan

As delivered by Patrick Connell, Political Adviser,
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 8, 2010

Ambassador Vikki, the United States also warmly welcomes you back to the Permanent Council and thanks you for your comprehensive report.

The United States sees Tajikistan as an important partner in Central Asia, including as a contributor to border security in the OSCE area and as an important link to implementing our Ministerial Decision in 2007 on intensifying the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan. We fully support you and the work of your able staff in working with the Government of Tajikistan in these areas and across all three dimensions towards the concept of comprehensive security.

There are indeed many successes that deserve to be noted from this past year, including the enactment by Tajikistan of a new Criminal Procedure Code, the establishment of the Tajik Media Council, and the adoption of the National Border Strategy in April. We also want to voice our support for the excellent cooperation that the OSCE Office in Tajikistan has accomplished in its work with the Ministry of the Interior to bring about important police reforms.

Yet, while all of these achievements, and others not mentioned here, deserve our approbation, there also continue to be serious problems with the implementation of OSCE commitments by Tajikistan.

There is simply no good reason why the government refuses to permit the International Committee of the Red Cross from having access to prisoners in Tajik custody and we call on the government to rectify this situation.

Developments in the wake of the passage of the new Law on Religion are very concerning. The ban on Jehovah's Witnesses should end immediately. The arrest and conviction and harsh sentences of Muslims identifying with the Salafi school of Islam or who work with Jamiati Tabligh represent serious infringements of Tajikistan's OSCE commitments on religious freedom.

According to ODIHR's findings and our own, the February 2010 parliamentary elections were marked by widespread fraud and ballot box stuffing. We urge the Office to work with the Central Election Commission to help implement ODIHR's recommendations in preparation for the 2013 Presidential elections.

And we are concerned by the libel lawsuits brought by Tajik judges against five independent newspapers. We call on the Government of Tajikistan, and all participating States that criminalize free speech, to decriminalize defamatory words and to prohibit the use of legal processes to inhibit protected speech.

We also urge the government to pass the draft law aimed at providing greater protections to domestic violence victims. In this regard, we must express my thanks, Ambassador, for the

event made possible by your staff at the Human Dimension Supplementary Meeting on Gender here in Vienna. The stories of the women involved in the Women's Resource Centers were truly moving and memorable.

We would also like to underscore the importance of the work the OSCE Office in Tajikistan has already done to strengthen border security and promote cross-border cooperation with neighboring states, through both its own programs and the Border Management Staff College. Work on demining also is making an important contribution to improving border security. We will count on the continued good efforts of the Office in this realm over the course of the next year and hope to see even more projects come to fruition, particularly involving Afghans.

The Office should continue to play a key role in preventing illicit drug trafficking and drug awareness in Tajikistan, as part of the police assistance program and the border security and management program. Similarly, we support the plans for developing a Central Asian Mine Action Cooperation Council within Central Asia.

Finally, the Office should also continue to lend its support to the Human Rights Ombudsman Institution and to increase the capacity of judicial bodies to appropriately respond to human rights violations in Tajikistan in whatever form they may take.

Ambassador Vikki, we thank you for your report and the dedicated efforts of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan. We wish you continued success in your work with the government and civil society in order to strengthen Tajikistan's adherence to its OSCE commitments for the betterment of all its citizens.