



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY
TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT ON THE UNITED STATES' COMMITMENT TO
UPHOLDING CIVIL RIGHTS ON THE BASIS OF RULE OF LAW

Delivered by Ambassador Steffen Kongstad to the Permanent Council
Vienna, 4 June 2020

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chair,

On 25 May, the death of George Floyd in police custody in Minneapolis sparked a wave of protests across the United States that has continued into this week. The protests, along with the responses by some state and federal authorities, have raised concerns about the freedom of assembly, the freedom of the media and the safety of journalists, as well as police violence as a human rights violation. We appreciate that the United States is raising the issue of its commitment to upholding civil rights on the basis of the rule of law.

Peaceful assembly is a fundamental freedom to which every participating State of the OSCE is committed. In fulfilling this commitment, states have a duty to facilitate peaceful assembly. Those protesting have a corresponding duty to do so peacefully. Abuse of this freedom to incite violence or criminality is unacceptable, and does not help solve the real problems of police violence and entrenched racial discrimination. Governments and their subordinate agencies have an obligation to maintain the peace. In doing so, it is important to take the utmost care not further to enflame the violence through excessive use of force.

The media has a crucial role to play in covering protests and enabling public access to reliable information on the ongoing events. We share the RFOM's concern about the numerous incidents of violence against journalists by both police and demonstrators. In order to protect the freedoms of expression and the media, law enforcement has an obligation not to prevent or obstruct the work of journalists during public

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demonstrations. Authorities must exercise restraint and ensure that journalists can work safely and report freely, without facing violence, arrest or intimidation.

While everyone shares in the responsibility of calming the situation, the burden of this responsibility depends on the authority of one's position. The rule of law, in the United States as elsewhere, requires limitations on the use of force, and the necessary restraint and compassion by those who wield it. It is also important to refrain from the divisive rhetoric and acts of incitement that may already have contributed to escalating the situation. Acknowledging the challenges, we must all strive to uphold the principles, commitments, and values that brought us together as the OSCE.

Thank you