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**United States Mission to the OSCE****Response to Foreign Minister of
Tajikistan, H. E. Hamrokhon Zarifi**

As delivery by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 31, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States extends a warm welcome to Foreign Minister Zarifi. Minister Zarifi, we appreciate your joining with us to address the Permanent Council today.

We join you in commending the assistance the OSCE has provided to Tajikistan. The work undertaken by the OSCE Center in Tajikistan contributes significantly to the security and stability of Tajikistan, especially by recognizing that state security is inseparably connected to the fundamental freedoms and human rights of individual citizens.

The United States shares many of the concerns you have highlighted this morning. We hope to work closely with you in combating violent extremism and radicalization, as well as terrorism, trafficking in persons, and narco-trafficking.

We also share your belief that combating the threats emanating from Afghanistan deserves the effort and the attention of the entire OSCE. Transnational threats recognize no borders. This underscores the growing importance of Tajikistan implementing its National Strategy for Border Management. The beneficial and crucial role of OSCE's Border Management Staff College to the work of the OSCE in the region is increasingly evident.

The United States is a strong supporter of the college and we want to join with others in expressing our thanks to Tajikistan for providing the initial facilities for its establishment. Continued growth and success, however, will depend upon access to sufficient space. We hope that the legal problems will be overcome very shortly so that the Government of Tajikistan can provide the necessary conditions for the continued success of the BMSC.

We are mindful that OSCE support for Afghanistan and the region extends beyond the training programs at the staff college. We also support increasing the number and the effectiveness of the economic resource centers along the Tajik-Afghan border.

For the well being of the entire region, we hope to see the resolution of water and energy issues in a manner that reflects a sense of good-neighborly relations among all interested states and parties.

Mr. Minister, you drew our attention today to media freedom, one of the critical issues that we have discussed with your government at the OSCE and in Dushanbe. It is of paramount importance to us all to recall that it is we, the participating States, who have recognized and endorsed commitments to our citizens – not the other way around. Journalists do not have

OSCE commitments to the participating States, but States have commitments to media freedom and rule of law. And states should not design or impose law or standards that infringe on freedom of speech and media freedom, including excessive civil penalties or criminal statutes that cripple media outlets, threaten journalists directly and limit freedom of speech indirectly through self-censorship. In that context, we urge the government of Tajikistan to examine carefully the current incarceration of independent journalist Mahmadyusuf Ismoilov in Asht and to ensure that his detention and any proceedings against him meet the highest OSCE commitments and international standards of due process. And while we were pleased to see approval from the court recently for a counter-suit by Asia Plus in a defamation action brought against it, we urge Tajikistan, as we do all participating States, to decriminalize its defamation laws as quickly as possible.

On the issue of freedom of religion, we strongly urge the government to submit the draft Law on Parental Responsibilities to ODIHR for a review of its provisions, and we particularly urge amendments to the provision that would ban youth participation in religious communities. While we share your concerns about extremism, we believe that banning youth from mosques or churches, as well as religious education, is not an effective means to pursue this goal.

Minister Zarifi, you began your remarks today with the statement that Tajikistan is willing to contribute to the transformation of your region into a more secure and stable part of the globe. The United States welcomes that aspiration and reiterates our longstanding and firm support to you and to your Government in realizing that goal. We firmly believe that with the cooperation and the assistance of the OSCE, great strides can be made towards making that a reality. We thank you again, wish you every success, and we look forward to seeing you soon in Dushanbe.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.