



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Russian NGOs

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 30, 2014

It is with deep concern that the United States must raise the actions taken by the Russian Federation's Ministry of Justice to dissolve the Russian Memorial Society, an independent human rights group. The steps taken against the Russian Memorial Society exemplify the Kremlin's ongoing effort to silence non-governmental organizations and independent voices in Russia, in apparent contravention of its OSCE commitments to freedom of association and freedom of expression.

The Russian Memorial Society, which was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by the European Parliament in 2013, was created in the 1980s by Soviet dissidents to preserve the legacy of the victims of Stalinist repression. Memorial board member Natalia Estemirova, who had been investigating murders and abductions in Chechnya, was herself abducted and fatally shot in Ingushetia in 2009. In recent months, Memorial has been critical of Russia's involvement in Ukraine.

We note that other well-respected human rights groups have also faced harassment recently. The Committee of Soldiers' Mothers has for many years advocated on behalf of the rights of soldiers enlisted in the Russian army, including by investigating the circumstances of Russian soldiers killed in recent months in Ukraine. On October 18, police arrested a 73-year-old member of the group and held her in jail for two days. She was later released, but still faces charges of fraud based on allegations dating back four years.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.