



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Rule of Law in Uzbekistan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 26, 2012

The United States wishes to express its serious concern about the April 6 administrative trial of independent journalist Elena Bondar in Uzbekistan. The trial appeared to violate Uzbekistan's own laws and procedures involving the rights of defendants. The case also raises procedural due process concerns, as well as questions about the government's adherence to its OSCE rule-of-law, free speech, and human dimension commitments.

On April 6, a district court in Tashkent found Ms. Bondar guilty of inciting hatred and fined her the maximum amount possible for this offense under Uzbekistan's administrative code. Ms. Bondar was accused of posting inflammatory remarks on the internet despite the effective absence of evidence linking her to the online statements.

The administrative hearing brought against her was, according to reports, unreasonably rushed and marked by numerous procedural deficiencies. The authorities only informed Ms. Bondar and her lawyer about the hearing by telephone less than 24 hours before it commenced, and denied several requests to continue the matter for her attorney to prepare her defense. Also, critical documents were not translated from Uzbek into Russian, a right Uzbek law affords to defendants who do not speak Uzbek, the state language, and the file lacked a "protocol of administrative offense," a document required for all administrative cases. Finally, the ill-defined charge lodged against Ms. Bondar of inciting hatred via inflammatory internet remarks highlights a worrisome trend toward restricting media freedom and freedom of speech in Uzbekistan.

We call upon the Government of Uzbekistan to investigate all of the alleged irregularities in Ms. Bondar's hearing and to reevaluate whether the charge itself is in line with the country's own laws, as well as its rule-of-law, human dimension, and free speech commitments. We look forward to the results of Ms. Bondar's pending appeal.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.