



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Looming Enactment of New Repressive Legal Measures in Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 15, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

A U.S. State Department press statement of December 2nd expressed deep concern over new proposed amendments to Belarus' criminal code that would further institutionalize government repression. We take this opportunity to reiterate our dismay with the continued advancement of these amendments through the Belarusian legislature.

The amendments were explicitly initiated by President Lukashenko and include a new article on "Discrediting the Republic of Belarus" that would establish tough penalties for disseminating allegedly false information about the country. There are also new penalties for participating in activities of liquidated or suspended organizations or for preparing for so-called group actions that violate public order.

Belarus has a record of enacting laws with vaguely-defined definitions of proscribed activities and applying them in a political fashion against independent civil society, political parties and media, which lack recourse to an independent judiciary. It is clear that the amendments are aimed at intimidating Belarusian society and critics of the regime in the run-up to the Belarusian presidential elections in 2006.

Enactment and implementation of this new legislation threatens to violate any number of OSCE commitments on freedom of expression, assembly and association. Numerous distinguished individuals and organizations have expressed similar concerns, including the OSCE Office in Minsk; the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media; Adrian Severin, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Belarus; the EU; and the International Helsinki Federation.

The United States joins them in calling on Belarus, once again, to desist from enacting these new repressive legal measures and to take concrete steps to fully comply with its OSCE commitments in the human dimension.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.