



United States Mission to the OSCE

United States Statement on Belarus

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
January 13, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States has observed with great disappointment events in Belarus over the past few weeks, including a presidential election vote count that we cannot consider legitimate, the beating and jailing of Belarusian citizens, and continued raids targeting civil society groups and individual pro-democracy activists. The charging of five of nine opposition candidates in the wake of the election represent a step backwards in the development of democratic governance in Belarus.

The Government of Belarus's decision to terminate the mission of the OSCE Office in Minsk is another blow to respect for democracy and human rights. The Office was founded to assist the Belarusian government in institution building, promoting the rule of law, and encouraging outreach to civil society. All 56 OSCE participating States, including Belarus, stressed in the Astana Declaration "the importance of the... OSCE field operations... in assisting participating States with implementing their OSCE commitments." The United States believes that the OSCE Office in Minsk has served and would continue to serve a role beneficial to Belarus, were the government to decide to meet its commitments to the OSCE.

Moreover, given the tightly controlled media and political environment that persists in Belarus, the observation mission's conclusion that this election failed to meet OSCE commitments should not have come as a surprise to Belarusian authorities.

What the United States and others seek for the citizens of Belarus is a real commitment by the government to meeting the standards laid out by the OSCE and other international instruments to which the Government of Belarus is a party. These include respect for the rule of law, ending harassment of independent media and political actors, and respect for freedom of assembly and association. We also reiterate the January 4 call by Secretary Clinton and European Union High Representative Lady Ashton for the immediate release of all those detained in the post-election crackdown on civil society and independent media.

Finally, like the European Union, the United States remains willing to assist Belarus in meeting its OSCE commitments in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.