



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Tajikistan

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 12, 2010

The United States notes with sadness and growing concern recent events in Tajikistan, including the deaths of 20 Tajik National Guard personnel in an October 6 helicopter crash in the Rasht District; the deaths of 28 members of the Tajik military following a September 19 ambush attack near Garm; the deaths of two individuals in a September 3 car bomb explosion in Kujand; and the deaths of six prison officials during the August 23 escape from a Dushanbe pre-trial detention facility of more than 20 prisoners. We deeply regret this loss of life and extend our condolences to the families of those slain.

In and of themselves, each of these matters is cause for concern. When viewed in their entirety, however, they are particularly troubling.

The Government of Tajikistan should know that the United States supports its efforts to fight the spread of terrorism and extremism that leads to violence and instability. At the same time, we urge the Tajik government to ensure that all efforts to combat these threats fully comply with international human rights standards and Tajikistan's OSCE commitments.

Governments that protect fundamental freedoms and are accountable to their people are inherently more stable. We are, therefore, concerned about increased restrictions on religious freedom, particularly the recent ban on women's participation in public prayer, the discouragement of children's presence in mosques, and government pressure on women not to wear the hijab.

We are likewise concerned about media freedom in Tajikistan. Draft media legislation that gives journalists greater access to information and requires faster government response to journalists' inquiries is welcome, but a provision banning the publication of material that supposedly "defames the honor and dignity of the state and the president" is worrisome.

Mr. Chairman, let me take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Vikki and his staff at the OSCE Office in Tajikistan. Their full, steady reporting has been an excellent source of information. Recent events underscore the importance of the work they engage in on a daily basis addressing many of the underlying issues of concern in Tajikistan. They have our full support in their continued efforts.

We also look forward to working closely with our colleague, Ambassador Shamsov, on developing programs to support Tajikistan in combating the threats the country faces.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.