



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on Religious Freedom in Turkmenistan**

As delivered by Patrick Connell, Political Officer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
October 28, 2010

The United States is deeply concerned about the news of a conviction of Protestant Pastor Ilmurad Nurliev in Turkmenistan on October 21 and the general state of religious freedom in Turkmenistan. Pastor Nurliev was reportedly sentenced to four years in prison. An American diplomat who traveled to Mary to attend the trial was refused admittance at the courthouse in contravention of OSCE commitments.

Pastor Nurliev's wife and fellow-church members strongly deny the authorities' allegations of large-scale swindling and insist the charges have been fabricated to punish Pastor Nurliev for his religious activity. His friends and family remain seriously concerned for Pastor Nurliev's health, as the court ordered forced treatment for alleged drug addiction, and he suffers from diabetes. Pastor Nurliev is a 45-year-old grandfather who leads the Light to the World Pentecostal Church in Mary. The church has been repeatedly denied registration since 2007, the same year that Pastor Nurliev was reportedly placed on the country's exit blacklist without explanation from officials.

We also note that in September a Jehovah's Witness, Ahmet Hudaybergenov, who conscientiously objects to compulsory military service, was sentenced to one and a half years in prison. According to our information, his case brings to ten the number of sentenced Jehovah's Witness conscientious objectors. Eight are serving labor camp terms of between 18 months and two years, while the other two are serving non-custodial sentences.

The United States calls upon Turkmenistan to abide by its international obligations and OSCE commitments to respect religious freedom. We urge the government to review Pastor Nurliev's and Mr. Hudaybergenov's cases and to ensure that there is no official hostility toward religious groups in Turkmenistan.

Thank you Mister Chairman.