



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Alexandre Keltchewsky, Head of OSCE Center in Astana

As delivered by Charge d'Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 2, 2011

The United States extends a warm welcome to Ambassador Keltchewsky; Ambassador, thank you for your thorough report. The last year has been momentous for the Center and for Kazakhstan. You and your staff supported a High-Level Tolerance Conference, an NGO Forum, a Parallel OSCE Civil Society Conference, and the first OSCE Summit in 11 years - all with great skill and grace.

As you note, there were critical events this past year in Kazakhstan: the referendum on voiding elections, the ensuing constitutional battle, followed by the snap presidential ballot. We noted that the preliminary report issued jointly by ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly found technical improvements over previous years. It also indicated that Kazakhstan's "legal framework has key shortcomings inconsistent with its OSCE commitments," particularly in the fields of freedom of assembly and media. In addition, processes such as candidate registration and adjudication of electoral disputes lacked transparency, and many local authorities intervened to increase voter turnout. Finally, serious irregularities took place in the voting and tabulation. No election since Kazakhstan's independence has been deemed to have met OSCE commitments or international standards. Active steps need to be taken to counter this trend.

Making meaningful reforms before parliamentary elections next year would be an excellent demonstration of Kazakhstan's efforts to develop its democracy and we urge the Center to support real government reforms.

As your report notes, President Nazarbayev declared reform a top priority. We urge Kazakhstan to implement credible judicial reforms, including equal access to justice and adherence to due process. The OSCE has a role to play in helping to implement the strategies and legislative acts aimed at reform -- especially the "National Action Plan for Implementing Human Rights 2009-2012," and those aspects that remain behind schedule, including legislation on freedom of assembly, media freedom, the Ombudsman institution and the National Preventive Mechanism in line with the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture. We also hope Kazakhstan will follow through on its commitment at the July 2010 High-Level Conference on Tolerance to bring its religion law up to international standards and to promote religious tolerance.

We particularly urge the Center to continue working closely with the government to address what many observers cite as backsliding on media freedom commitments. We must point out that despite assertions to the contrary, Kazakhstan has still not decriminalized defamation. It has only reduced the manner and means by which a person may be convicted and sentenced to jail for what they say. We urge the government to follow through with its

stated intention on this important and symbolic measure and to address other shortcomings in its media legislation. We also wish to express our regret that Evgeniy Zhovtis and Ramazan Yesergepov are still in jail, and we hope to see them included in the upcoming amnesty.

We wish to express our appreciation to the Government of Kazakhstan for the support it has given to the Center on the second dimension, especially in Kazakhstan's efforts to become EITI compliant and to address the tragedy of the Aral Sea and other water management issues.

In the Politico-Military Dimension, the Center's work to help Kazakhstan combat terrorism and trafficking in narcotics and human beings and to reform law enforcement agencies -- especially bringing these efforts in line with democratic standards and human rights -- is essential to OSCE's work in Central Asia. The Center's efforts to reduce Small Arms and Light Weapons in Kazakhstan will add to peace and security. The Center's work with training Afghan police officers in Almaty is a creative and useful way to implement the 2007 Madrid Decision on intensifying engagement with Afghanistan. We commend the efforts between the Center and the Government of Kazakhstan for last October's conference on preventing terrorism, and welcome the upcoming workshop on "Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE)" to be held in Almaty this October, as concrete examples of cooperation in counterterrorism.

Thank you again, Ambassador Keltchewsky and please be assured of our best wishes and support.

Thank you, Chair.