



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Concern about Freedom of Assembly in Russia

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

We note with continued concern that in Moscow on Saturday, May 28, a peaceful demonstration of Russians advocating for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, joined by international supporters, was forcefully disrupted by counter-protesters, and that Russian security forces then detained people from both groups, including American citizens. Some protestors were seriously injured according to media reports and participants' statements.

This is now the sixth year in a row that peaceful assembly by an LBGT group wishing to hold a pride parade has been banned. In two separate judgments, the European Court of Human Rights has ruled against unlawful restrictions or bans against the exercise of freedom of assembly by LGBT persons in the context of the organization of Pride parades.

While we acknowledge improvements made earlier this year in Moscow allowing certain rallies highlighting the right to peacefully assemble, we note with concern that detentions and dispersals of other right-to-assembly protesters still regularly occur. We are troubled by the detention of dozens of peaceful demonstrators in Moscow and St. Petersburg during the Strategy 31 protest on May 31.

Freedom of assembly is a fundamental right to which all participating States of the OSCE are committed, as enshrined in Copenhagen and Paris in 1990, in Helsinki in 2008, and reaffirmed at the Astana Summit. As nationwide parliamentary and presidential elections approach, constraints on the ability of Russian citizens to gather peacefully and express their views will be closely watched in evaluating the integrity of the electoral process. We call on Russian authorities to work with municipal officials to find better ways to safeguard these fundamental freedoms.

We are pleased that the Russian delegation is willing to carry the discussion to the Human Dimension Committee and we look forward to substantive dialogue on the issue on this important Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.