



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Ambassador Ivar Vikki, Head of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a. i. Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 12, 2011

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Vikki back to the Permanent Council. Your report provides a thorough picture of the state of affairs in Tajikistan and details the ways in which you and your staff are making a positive difference. We commend you for your work.

The United States greatly values its relationship with Tajikistan as an important partner in Central Asia. Few participating States can rival the efforts made by the Government of Tajikistan to implement our 2007 Ministerial Decision on intensifying OSCE engagement with Afghanistan. The trade resource centers along the Tajik-Afghan border are an example of this engagement, and we support increasing their number and effectiveness. Similarly, Tajikistan has been at the forefront of the OSCE's efforts on border security, not least through its support for the Border Management Staff College, which the United States also strongly supports. We were pleased to hear from you during your visit that some of the problems are currently being resolved. The contributions of Tajikistan prove that when Tajikistan chooses to lead, it makes a real difference.

Similarly, the annual OSCE-Tajikistan Task Force meetings that include NGOs, government, and the OSCE are a best practice that should be considered in other OSCE field missions. We congratulate you on this creative and collaborative approach which is producing results.

As your report notes, the security situation in Tajikistan has been difficult over the past 12 months, making all the more important the assistance the OSCE Office in Tajikistan has been able to provide. The destruction of more than 3,000 small arms last year alone is an impressive contribution toward greater stability. But there must be greater efforts exerted to stamp out drug trafficking and corruption, two serious drains on the health and stability of Tajikistan's society.

In addition, we remain concerned about significant human rights issues in Tajikistan.

For several years, we have urged the Government of Tajikistan to open its penal facilities to visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and we again exhort the government in the strongest terms to do so, and you to do everything you can to help in this area.

The draft law on parental responsibility marks a serious departure from several of Tajikistan's OSCE commitments. Despite concerns voiced from a broad cross-section of Tajiks, restrictive provisions remain in the draft, including a prohibition on children and young adults participating in religious communities or ceremonies. Such a ban is not in keeping with OSCE and other international religious freedom commitments.

Religious life remains tightly controlled by the restrictive 2009 Law on Religion. The ban on Jehovah's Witnesses remains in effect, and the government has refused to register Baptist churches, despite their efforts to meet the government's registration requirements. A Baptist church in Rumi District was recently closed by local authorities. A 2004 government-supported fatwah prohibiting women from attending mosques remains in effect.

In the area of media freedom, while there have been positive developments – including a decision by judges to drop their libel case against three independent newspapers – the overall state of media freedom remains poor. For example, we continue to be concerned over the lengthy pre-trial detention of independent journalist Muhammadyusuf Ismoilov and the fact that no one has been arrested in connection with the brutal assault on Hikmatullo Sayfullozoda.

One final comment, Ambassador Vikki, on coordination. Your comment about the work of your office in the second dimension as providing outreach and knowledge of the region to other organizations that provide technical expertise is another example of a good practice. As a regional security organization, the OSCE offers a platform on which others can build. We encourage all OSCE field missions to fulfill this important function of coordination with the international community and provide a platform.

Thank you again, Ambassador Vikki. We wish you continued success in the year to come.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.