



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Freedom of the Media in Belarus

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires, a. i. Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 19, 2011

Thank you, Mister Chairman.

The United States condemns the May 14 conviction of presidential candidate Andrey Sannikau and other democratic activists in Belarus. We consider the presidential candidates and other activists, who are being tried after being arrested as part of the crackdown related to the December 19 presidential elections, to be political prisoners. The harsh sentences handed down on May 14 and the ongoing trials are clearly politically motivated.

The United States also takes note of the May 16 statement by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media condemning the two-year conditionally suspended jail term imposed upon journalist Irina Khalip in connection with the December 2010 post-election demonstrations. We concur with the call by Representative Mijatovic that journalists in Belarus must be able to work freely, without being intimidated, and that repression of the media needs to end immediately.

We also note with serious concern the efforts by the Belarusian Government to interfere with the presentation of an independent report prepared by the Special Rapporteur of the Committee on International Control over the Human Rights Situation in Belarus. Members of the International Observation Mission have been arrested and expelled from the country and forbidden from returning for a period of time. Ukrainian human rights defenders have been prevented from entering the country. These are further violations of OSCE commitments and international standards.

We call on Belarus to immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and cease continuing human rights violations against critics of the government, who remain at risk of harassment and arbitrary arrest. The results of ongoing trials will be taken into account as the United States continues to review its relations with Belarus and consider further measures.

We also call for the opening of space for the free expression of political views, the development of a civil society, freedom of the media, and entrepreneurial empowerment.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.