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United States Mission to the OSCE
Response to the Head of the OSCE
Program Office in Astana,
Ambassador György Szabó

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate M. Byrnes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 13, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The United States welcomes Ambassador Szabó to the Permanent Council, and thanks him for his report.

We are encouraged that, since the adoption of the new mandate, the Program Office remains able to respond to new challenges and engage in activities that address the full range of OSCE commitments.

The United States supports the Office's work in all three dimensions, including countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism while respecting and promoting human rights and the rule of law, combating corruption, countering terrorist financing, promoting democratic policing, supporting penal and criminal justice reform, assisting with the development of independent media, combating human trafficking, promoting gender equality, addressing domestic violence, and working with civil society.

We continue to support the work of the Program Office – along with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights – to assist Kazakhstan in implementing reforms to strengthen its capacity to hold free, fair, and democratic elections in keeping with its international obligations and commitments. In this regard, we are concerned about recently adopted legislation that would effectively prevent independent candidates from participating in presidential elections by requiring five years of government experience.

We are also concerned about freedom of religion or belief for Jehovah's Witnesses. On June 29, an Almaty court suspended the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan for 90 days for alleged administrative violations involving its video security system. We urge the government of Kazakhstan to uphold freedom of religion or belief throughout the country.

Ambassador Szabó, we thank you again for your work, and for the work of your staff, as the Program Office assists the Government of Kazakhstan in implementing its OSCE commitments in all three dimensions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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