



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Freedom of Movement

As delivered by Ambassador Larry Napper, Head of Delegation
to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw
October 6, 2004

Mr. Chairman, all participants here today exercised their right to freedom of movement to get to this meeting, many crossing national borders in the process. While most of us take this right for granted, repressive regimes often restrict freedom of movement within, to and from their own countries in order to prevent activists, journalists and others whose ideas differ from those of the authorities from interacting with other like-minded individuals, or as retribution. These restrictions are also used to extract bribes from citizens wishing to travel. These rules do not increase national security, but rather stifle pluralism, accountability, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

In Belarus, despite constitutional guarantees, the Government continues to restrict where citizens are allowed to travel and live. The process of mandatory address registration is merely cumbersome in Armenia, but in Azerbaijan it targets internally displaced persons (IDPs), who are prohibited from residing in certain cities. The Kyrgyz Republic and some regions of the Russian Federation, including Moscow, also continue to restrict citizens' right to live where they choose through the use of residential registration requirements. In Krasnodar, southern Russia, local authorities have consistently refused to issue residence permits to approximately 7,000 Meskhetian Turks who fled from ethnic conflicts in Central Asia, although Russia's constitution entitles them to Russian citizenship.

Registration requirements can also lead to corruption and abuse. Credible sources report that Moscow police continue to use document checks as a means to harass people with "dark-skin," who are perceived as coming from the Caucasus, Central Asia, or Africa, as well as Roma. According to reports from individual refugees, NGOs, and the press, these document checks frequently result in beatings, arrests, and extortion. While the U.S. understands the need to protect citizens from acts of terrorism, anti-terrorism measures must be carried out in a way that does not violate fundamental rights.

The U.S. also calls upon participating States to make provisions for the voluntary return of IDPs to their homes. The Uzbek Government should allow ethnic Tajiks evacuated from the Sukhandaria region of Uzbekistan in 2000 to return to their homes. We are concerned by the Turkmen Government's forced resettlement in January 2003 of approximately 2,000 ethnic Uzbeks from the border with Uzbekistan to a desert region that lacks water and arable land. We urge the Turkmen Government to end the forced resettlement of minority groups and to allow those individuals already forcibly moved to return to their original homes.

Finally, Mr. Moderator, the United States calls upon OSCE participating States to abolish systems that require exit visas. Uzbekistan requires exit visas, making it difficult for some individuals and their families to travel. We applaud the Government of Turkmenistan for eliminating its exit visa regime in January 2004, but remain concerned that the Government continues to maintain a "blacklist" of individuals,

including relatives and associates of those accused of involvement in the November 2002 armed attack against the president and anyone else deemed as opposed to the current regime. This "blacklist" prevents exit for an estimated five percent of those trying to leave.