



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Ambassador Vikki, Head of Center, Almaty

As delivered by Deputy Political Counselor Katherine A. Brucker
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 28, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to join others in warmly welcoming Ambassador Vikki to the Permanent Council and to thank him for his thorough report. We thank him and his staff as well, for their energetic work in support of the parliamentary elections held on September 19.

These elections, coupled with the second round on October 3, were the central feature of the reporting period and an important measure of reforms undertaken recently by the Government of Kazakhstan.

We agree with the assessment of the OSCE/ODIHR that they fell short of international standards. We therefore welcome the Center's willingness to facilitate expert meetings on election legislation and best practices as a means of improving the conduct of presidential elections in 2006.

We are quite favorably impressed by the wide range of activities the Center is undertaking. These activities are well spread across all three dimensions and reflect needs of the host country, follow up to events such as the Economic Forum, as well as general OSCE priorities.

We are especially pleased to see so many activities aimed at promoting or facilitating economic activity. Political reform is only sustainable in the long term if people in a country feel they are truly better off, and economic well-being is the main measure of this.

Efforts to develop the tourism sector, reform the land code, train women entrepreneurs, strengthen the economic courts, and combat corruption and economic crime will have enormous positive effects and will help create a climate in which further political and social reform can be sustained.

We are also quite encouraged by the Center's constructive engagement on the complicated regional issue of shared water resources. We congratulate the Center, as well as the Kazakhstani and Kyrgyz authorities for their collaboration in the framework of the interstate water commission.

We hope this will lead to mutually satisfactory and rational use of water in the region, and that the cooperation can serve as a stepping-stone for continued work to address other issues of mutual concern.

Mr. Chairman, we have raised on several occasions our concerns about media freedom in general in Kazakhstan as well as the case of Sergey Duvanov. We are pleased to hear that Mr. Duvanov has been able to participate in public events both at home and abroad since his parole in July.

Moreover, in hopes that the OSCE can help Kazakhstan manage the transformation to free and independent media, we are pleased to see the Center's active engagement to train journalists on a wide variety of substantive and professional topics. We also welcome the Center's offer to assist the Government of Kazakhstan in drafting a new media law that conforms to OSCE commitments.

I would also like to mention the case of opposition figure Galymzhan Zhakiyanov, who was recently released from jail to a prison colony. Given his poor health, I find it hard to understand why the Kazakhstani authorities have ordered him to perform manual labor outside and why he must move into the barracks when his wife is not visiting him.

Finally, I would like to say that we very much welcome the Center's ideas about future orientation and its interest in seeing that OSCE projects focus on key priorities. From what we can see, the Center in Almaty is well on its way to achieving this goal.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.