



## United States Mission to the OSCE

# Statement on Repression and Recent Events in Belarus

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Paul W. Jones  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
July 29, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States is deeply concerned that the Government of Belarus continues to breach fundamental OSCE principles and commitments. We are particularly concerned about the ongoing repression of civil society in Belarus, including the Belarusian government's current assault on academic and media freedom and the right of assembly.

Specifically, we are greatly concerned by the Belarusian authorities' action on July 21 to terminate the lease of the European Humanities University.

There appears to us to be no justification for the European Humanities University to lose its lease, or for its rector, Anatoly Mikhailov, to be forced to resign. The University and Mikhailov make vital contributions to intellectual thought and academic pluralism in Belarus, which are essential if Belarus is to make progress on the path to democracy.

We hope that the Belarusian government will immediately end its assault on the University and will promptly begin upholding its OSCE commitments regarding educational and cultural rights.

We are also disturbed by the use of force by Belarusian police to disperse a July 21 gathering of pro-democracy activists in Yakuba Kolas Square in Minsk. While the United States understands the obligation of security forces to maintain public order and security, it did not appear that the Belarusian citizens who were physically removed from the square and arrested posed a threat to public order and safety, but were merely expressing their views peacefully. It is appalling that the police would prevent a group from unfurling a banner by beating and kicking demonstrators. People everywhere should have the right to peacefully express their views. The behavior of the Belarusian police violates OSCE commitments guaranteeing the right of peaceful assembly and prohibiting cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.

Equally alarming is the Government of Belarus' punishment of the Minsk bureau of RTR, a Russian state-owned television network. Reporter Dmitri Petrov, who was exercising his normal journalistic responsibility, filmed the July 21 pro-democracy demonstration and RTR aired this footage. Yet the Belarusian authorities decided to close the RTR office in Minsk and to strip Petrov of his accreditation for "gross distortion of facts."

As we have said in previous statements, these actions should not take place in OSCE member States, and we hope the Belarusian government will take immediate steps to meet OSCE standards.

Thank you.