



United States Mission to the OSCE

Reply to Belarus

As delivered by Political Counselor Bruce Connuck
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 23, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In the September 9 meeting of the Permanent Council, the distinguished Ambassador of Belarus raised the issue of freedom of assembly in the United States. He made reference specifically to demonstrations occurring around the Republican National Convention held in New York City from August 30 to September 2.

Freedom of assembly is not only an OSCE commitment, but also a fundamental right enshrined in the United States Constitution and the various state constitutions.

In the run-up to and during the Convention, hundreds of thousands of individuals protested in New York. On August 29 alone, up to half a million people marched through the city peacefully. The sheer scale of the demonstrations and proportionally low number of arrests belie the claim that any authorities in the United States had sought to stifle dissent.

We would point out to our Belarusian colleagues that they were able to learn about the demonstrations in New York City because of a vibrant free press and thriving civil society in the United States. We are hopeful that one day, the media and civil society will be able to provide a similar watchdog role in Belarus.

To sum up, we believe the protection of freedom of assembly in the United States as well as our commitment to the rule-of-law were on display in New York City in late August and early September.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.