



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Plenary, Any other Business: Statement on Turkmenistan

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, October 13, 2006

Mr. Moderator,

Although the United States has raised various concerns about human rights in Turkmenistan throughout this meeting, the U.S. delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its ongoing concern about the situation in that country. This is the fourth year in a row that the United States has felt compelled by the disturbing situation in Turkmenistan to make a special statement under time reserved for "Any Other Business." The United States believes it is important for the OSCE to maintain an ongoing focus on the continuing widespread human rights abuses in that country.

While we welcome the limited positive steps undertaken by Turkmenistan, a tremendous gap continues to exist between the commitments personally endorsed by President Niyazov in his signature of the Helsinki Final Act and their implementation. The government has tentatively eased some restrictions on freedom of religion and registered several religious communities. The April release of the dissident Mr. Gurbandurdy Durdykuliev, and the government's decision to allow the writer Rakhim Esenov to travel abroad, were welcome developments.

At the same time, however, extreme pressure is maintained on the media, in particular foreign media, resulting in a major lack of objective reporting capability in the country. Independent journalists are often prohibited by the government from attending OSCE-sponsored events, or are harassed after they have had contact with the OSCE. Journalists have also been detained and prevented from filing reports by having their telephones disconnected. Turkmenistan's government agents subject journalists to arrest, intimidation and violence. In May, the Government of Turkmenistan banned local journalists from all contact with foreigners unless specifically permitted. We urge the Government of Turkmenistan to lift its stifling restrictions on the media so that Turkmenistan's citizens may receive objective and comprehensive news about developments both within their country and abroad.

The United States is also deeply concerned over the circumstances surrounding the death in custody of Ogalsapar Muradova, as well as the welfare of her colleagues. We urge the Turkmen authorities to undertake a transparent investigation into her death, make public the autopsy results, and facilitate access to prisons as previously promised by the highest levels of the Government of Turkmenistan.

The United States is also troubled regarding the whereabouts of Kakabai Tedjenov, a vocal critic of President Niyazov. Tedjenov was, reportedly, forcibly admitted to a psychiatric hospital in Turkmenabat in January 2006, and has allegedly since then been moved incommunicado between hospitals. The United States calls upon Turkmenistan to provide

information about his welfare and whereabouts and to treat this case in accordance with OSCE commitments.

The United States is concerned about the December 2005 migration law that may be used to limit the ability of individuals to leave the country and from travel in general. We are also concerned about the government's continued efforts to deny emigration and travel out of the country for some members of minority religious groups, regime opponents and their families, and relatives of those implicated in the 2002 attack on President Niyazov's motorcade.

Unregistered religious activity remains illegal, police raids on registered and unregistered religious communities continue sporadically, and the former grand mufti remains jailed. The government recently denied exit visas for human rights activists – some of whom wanted to attend an OSCE seminar -- and has denied exit visas to some study abroad exchange program participants. We urge the Government of Turkmenistan to cease restricting migration and travel and to allow its citizens to enjoy their right to freedom of movement.

We support the involvement and recent visits to Turkmenistan by OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Ekeus. Nevertheless, we remain concerned about the lack of minority-language education as well as the lack of media in minority languages. No foreign newspapers have been allowed into the country since 2002, and the last Russian-language radio station, Radio Mayak, was closed in July 2004.

Despite repeated promises to U.S. officials, Turkmen authorities have still not granted full access for the ICRC to prisons. We urge the Government of Turkmenistan to provide ICRC access without further delay. In this regard, we remain concerned about the fate of those arrested and subjected to show trials in connection with the events of November 25, 2002 and sentenced under the “Betrayers of the Motherland Law.” In light of the disturbing circumstances surrounding the death of Ms. Muradova, we again renew our request for information on and access to those arrested in connection with these events, including our former OSCE colleague, Batyr Berdiev.

The United States calls upon the OSCE to continue to focus on the concerns raised in the Moscow Mechanism report issued in 2003 by Professor Decaux. While that report is now almost three and a half years old, the situation in Turkmenistan has not improved significantly and the recommendations remain valid.

Mr. Moderator, sustained OSCE engagement on these matters is necessary to counter Turkmenistan's self-isolation. We urge OSCE delegations to meet with NGO representatives from Turkmenistan whenever possible. We further urge ODIHR to step up efforts to engage Turkmen authorities in working to implement the recommendations contained in the Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur's report. The United States continues to believe a visit by ODIHR Director Strohal to Turkmenistan could be a useful catalyst to move forward – particularly if he were granted access to the above-mentioned prisoners.

Thank you.