



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Turkmenistan and the Moscow Mechanism

As delivered by Ambassador Larry Napper, Head of Delegation
to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw
October 8, 2004

Mr. Moderator,

Although the United States has raised various concerns about human rights in Turkmenistan throughout the week, I would like to take this opportunity to express our ongoing concern about the situation there. We note that there has been some progress in Turkmenistan: exit visas were lifted, four religious minority groups registered, harassment of religious groups has decreased, four prisoners of conscience were released, and a dialogue has been started between Turkmen authorities and the ICRC concerning prisoner access. We appreciate these initial steps, however, we remain concerned about the remaining violations of human rights in Turkmenistan.

As we have said in previous statements this week, although exit visas were lifted, the government maintains a "black list", which prevents some people from leaving the country. We urge Turkmen authorities to quickly give access by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to visit prisons in Turkmenistan and to have access to all prisoners. In this regard, we remain concerned about the fate of those held in connection with the armed attack on the president's motorcade on November 25, 2002 and sentenced under the "Betrayers of the Motherland Law." We again ask for information on and access to our former OSCE colleague, Batyr Berdiev, as well as others who were arrested in connection with these events.

We have already raised concerns here about the situation in Turkmenistan including the lack of religious freedom, the lack of free movement of persons wishing to travel outside of Turkmenistan and the forced resettlement of some inside the country, the lack of any independent media, and the lack of fair trials. We also would like to note the importance of allowing civil society to work in Turkmenistan. Although the registration of 89 public organizations is an improvement, it is important that NGOs of various outlooks be allowed to register, and that criminal penalties be removed from the NGO law.

We also note that Turkmenistan apparently is not willing to invite the OSCE to observe the parliamentary elections, which will take place on December 19. Although Turkmenistan continues to have only a one-party system, undermining any credibility that the election could be free and fair, Turkmenistan nevertheless has an OSCE commitment to invite OSCE observers. As you all know, the United States has invited the OSCE to observe our upcoming elections, and we expect no less of Turkmenistan.

We regret that the Government of Turkmenistan did not renew the accreditation of the Head of the OSCE Office in Ashgabat, Parachiva Badescu, and hope that authorities will work constructively with her successor. We also urge that the Government of Turkmenistan work

closely with OSCE CiO Personal Representative Ahtisaari, as well as invite OSCE High Commission on National Minorities Ekeus to visit Turkmenistan in the near future.

Mr. Chairman, last year, for the first time in ten years, OSCE participating States found the human rights situation there alarming enough to invoke the Moscow Mechanism. The decision to invoke the Mechanism was not taken lightly, but was warranted by the imposition of a widespread human rights crackdown by Turkmenistan authorities. Last year at this meeting, the United States also made a statement under Any Other Business expressing our ongoing concern. As human rights violations remain in Turkmenistan, we believe it is important for the OSCE to maintain an ongoing focus on this issue.

Recalling that President Niyazov personally signed the Helsinki Final Act on July 8, 1992, we urge Ashgabat to implement fully Turkmenistan's OSCE commitments. It is important that the OSCE community remain focused on the concerns raised in the Moscow Mechanism report issued last year by Professor Decaux. While that report is now almost a year and half old, the situation in Turkmenistan sadly has not improved significantly and the recommendations remain valid. Indeed, sustained OSCE engagement on these matters is necessary to counter Turkmenistan's self-isolation. We urge ODIHR to step up efforts to engage Turkmen authorities in working to implement the still-valid recommendations contained in the Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur's report, and 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. Finally, we urge OSCE delegations to meet with Turkmenistan NGOs here and in other capitals where that opportunity may arise.