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United States Mission to the OSCE

Human Rights Report Released

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman.

I just wanted to inform the Permanent Council that yesterday in Washington, in addition to her very important consultations with our Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Bakoyannis, Secretary of State Clinton announced the publication of the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008. These annual reports speak to America's continued support for those fundamental freedoms embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and our OSCE commitments.

As Secretary Clinton said in the preface of the Report, "The promotion of human rights is an essential piece of American foreign policy. Not only will we seek to live up to our ideals on American soil, we will pursue greater respect for human rights as we engage other nations and people around the world." This commitment to human rights is also an essential piece of foreign and security policy that is also a unique feature of our Organization.

As noted in the Report, the OSCE region continues to face many challenges, including: government restrictions on and repression of human rights NGOs, persistence of hate crimes and hate speech, a slide toward authoritarianism in some countries, a number of elections that failed to meet our common democratic standards, attacks on journalists, as well as legislation that often restricted rather than protected freedom of expression, and military operations that reportedly involved the use of indiscriminate force and resulted in civilian casualties.

Human rights concerns are also not limited to the eastern portion of the OSCE region. A number of well-established democracies wrestled with continuing challenges resulting from the large influx of new migrants from the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere which led to restrictive practices and many charges of mistreatment. There were manifestations of anti-Semitism both east and west of Vienna, and members of the Roma community and other ethnic groups were targets of societal violence.

Since the days of our nation's founding, the United States has endeavored to correct injustices and fully promote respect for fundamental freedoms for all of our citizens. We do not consider views about our performance voiced by others in the international community to be interference in our internal affairs. The U.S. government will continue to hear and reply forthrightly about our own practices.

In that spirit, we hope also that these reports will be a source of information and accountability for governments and societies everywhere. When we circulate this statement over the delegates' network, it will also include the website link on which the country reports can be found: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008>.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.