



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **Invitation to Russia to Join the United States in Reaffirming Commitment to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
April 28, 2016

I take note of the statement by our distinguished colleague from the Russian Federation, and will share it with Washington. I would point out to colleagues that some of the events that he referred to in his statement have been covered in the press, and the version that we just heard may not be the complete version, so I would encourage folks to take a look at the press coverage that has come out in recent days and weeks about protests in Washington.

In general, I think the U.S. record on protecting freedom of peaceful assembly speaks for itself. When I say “speaks for itself” I don’t mean to say that we are perfect, but rather that we strive for perfection, and that we have courts that reliably protect the right of freedom of peaceful assembly, and that, when mistakes happen, leaders speak out, including President Obama in the last year. But even more importantly when I say: “it speaks for itself,” what I mean is that Americans widely recognize freedom of peaceful assembly as an engine for our progress as a country, whether it is on women’s rights, or civil rights, or LGBT rights, or other issues. And so, in that sense, I think freedom of peaceful assembly is alive and well, and well-protected, in the United States.

Several colleagues have commented to me, and we heard from our distinguished Russian colleague in his opening remarks, that the statement we heard today might be seen as the continuation of an unserious and disrespectful use of the Permanent Council by the Russian Federation. And when I say “disrespectful” I mean disrespectful to all of us, because if you’re not seriously and genuinely concerned about issues you raise, that’s a sign of disrespect to everybody around this table.

Some suggested that this statement that the Russian Federation delivered today has nothing to do with genuine concern for freedom of association or freedom of peaceful assembly or freedom of expression, but was only meant as a retaliation for our delegation having pointed out the embarrassing nature of the Russian Federation’s statement on "The rights of children in Norway" last week.

I understand why people have suggested that to me, but my delegation wishes to use this item on the agenda constructively, and to reach out to our colleagues from the Russian Federation, and to all colleagues around this table.

Mr. Chair, Russia and the U.S. both have elections this year. Indeed, the assembly to which the Russian Federation referred to in its statement was a gathering meant to draw attention to the

role of money in U.S. politics, something that is an active topic of free debate in this election year in my country.

And so, the delegation of the United States thought that, given that both Russia and the United States have elections this year, and given that freedom of peaceful assembly plays a crucial role in democratic political processes, including elections, and given that the Russian Federation has expressed its concern today that we live up to our common OSCE commitments, our delegation would like to propose to our colleagues from the Russian Federation that the United States and Russia jointly sign the statement my colleagues have just circulated hard copies of to all delegations in the room.

And let me just tell you a little bit about this text. This text is a restatement of existing commitments related to freedom of peaceful assembly. And our thought was that by signing on to it, and by inviting all our colleagues around this table to do likewise, the U.S. and Russia could together send a signal of our intentions to uphold these and all OSCE commitments this election year and, as always, to raise in good faith our concerns about shortcomings.

As I said, this text doesn't break new ground. It would be more of a good will gesture. But I would ask, Mr. Chair, that the delegation of the Russian Federation take this text and review it. And we would welcome, next week, the Russian Federation's announcement at the Permanent Council, that it will join us in signing this statement and join us in inviting all other participating States around this table to join with the U.S. and Russia in doing so.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.