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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Kazakhstan's Parliamentary Elections

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 6, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As we have stated on numerous occasions in this forum and elsewhere, the United States wants to do all it can to help Kazakhstan become a pillar of stability, prosperity and democratic reform in Central Asia and a country that exemplifies the principles of the OSCE, including its commitment to a government based on democratic institutions and respect for human rights. The Government and people of Kazakhstan deserve praise for the strides their country has made in fostering respect for human rights through, for example, the promotion of religious tolerance and inter-ethnic accord.

Last month, Kazakhstan held important Parliamentary elections. Like ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA) observer missions, the United States watched with great interest as the elections unfolded.

Like ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, we welcome indicators of progress such as inclusive candidate registration lists, extensive voter education, and increased transparency of the work of the Central Election Commission.

We also share, however, the serious concerns of the observer missions about the conduct of the elections, including a negative assessment of the transparency of the vote count in over 40 percent of the polling stations visited; preferential treatment of the ruling Nur Otan party by authorities and government-controlled media; and restrictive legal provisions that limited the right to seek public office, established a high vote percentage threshold for representation in the Mazhilis, and provided for parties to choose which candidates would become members of parliament only after the election.

The OSCE Observer Mission concluded that the elections did not meet international standards on a number of important grounds. We await additional information in the final ODIHR report. We remain concerned about the lack of substantial progress on an array of democratic reforms, including those that would promote independent media, freely elected local self-government, and an easing of registration requirements for political parties.

While the United States welcomes Kazakhstan's aspiration to serve as Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, the most recent elections in Kazakhstan raise important questions about its readiness to serve in this leadership role. As the OSCE Ministerial Council concluded in Brussels last December, any country applying for the Chairmanship of the OSCE must exemplify the principles of the Organization, including developing democratic institutions and respecting human rights. The United States reaffirms its desire to do all it can to help Kazakhstan meet the high standards expected of the Chairman-in-Office.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.