

ENGLISH only



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Recent Events in Armenia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 6, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States laments the injuries and loss of life in Yerevan over the weekend. We urge the Government of Armenia to lift the state of emergency, restore civil liberties, ensure a free press, and move to political dialogue to resolve the political issues that Armenia faces. Dialogue is the key to returning the country to normalcy. We call on all parties to maintain calm, show restraint, and respect the rule of law. Violence is unacceptable.

United States Government officials in Washington and Yerevan have been in close contact with the parties and urged them to avoid violence, act fully within the law, exercise maximum restraint, and resume political dialogue. We appreciate the diligent work of Heikki Talvitie, the special envoy of the Chairman in Office, who has worked to mediate between the parties and has met with members of the media and NGOs in Yerevan. Likewise, the EU Special Representative, Peter Semneby, has strongly reinforced these messages, as have many other respected international voices.

We are concerned at reports of harassment of journalists, and the shutting down of independent media, including RFE/RL. Immediately restoring freedom of the press is particularly critical so that opposition voices can be heard and legal channels for expressing dissent become available. An open press can help ensure that facts inform judgment. In a vacuum, rumor takes the place of real news, with potentially dangerous consequences.

Mr. Chairman, in the next days we can expect a follow-up report from ODIHR. We will read it with care as we pledge once again to work with the government and people of Armenia to help implement its recommendations.

It is a hallmark of democracy that parties address their differences through serious dialogue. Discussions in Armenia should take place in a spirit of compromise and in support of Armenia's commitment to human rights. We are confident that all Armenians aspire to no less than this for their country.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.