



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

### **Statement on Events in Ukraine**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Gary Robbins  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
January 23, 2014

The United States is alarmed by the deaths of demonstrators and the continued escalating violence taking place in Kyiv as a result of the disturbing and anti-democratic legislation that was forced through the Rada on January 16. We call on the Government of Ukraine to resolve the two month political standoff by addressing protestors' concerns through constructive dialogue, and call for restraint on all sides. We urge the Government of Ukraine to listen to the voices of its people and lay a path towards a free, democratic, and prosperous future. Simply put, the people of Ukraine want and deserve better.

By passing legislation that restricts the right to protest peacefully, stifles freedom of speech, constrains independent media, and inhibits the operations of NGOs, Ukraine has fallen short of many OSCE commitments. In fact, these amendments, including the re-criminalization of defamation, represent a step backward for Ukraine. Even more alarming is the manner in which this undemocratic legislation was pushed through the Rada—without adhering to proper Ukrainian constitutional procedures, and without transparency or accountability. Overnight, Ukraine stripped its citizens of key democratic protections and fundamental freedoms that are non-negotiable.

We commend the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Swiss President Didier Burkhalter for his statement holding Ukraine to account for this troubling and anti-democratic legislation.

While the actions of Ukraine's leaders cast doubt on Ukraine's democratic trajectory, the Maidan has become a symbol of hope for political freedom, economic opportunity, and personal expression. The citizens of Ukraine have the right to guard their democracy through peaceful protests against encroachment on media freedom, political intimidation, and freedom of religion. However, we deplore violence and aggressive actions by groups and individuals that are inflaming conditions on the streets and undermining the efforts of peaceful protestors. We urge all sides to immediately de-escalate the situation and refrain from violence.

We have previously voiced our concern over the detention of peaceful protesters and noted deplorable attacks against journalists such as Tetyana Chornoval. There are many other events that have not gone unnoticed. These include the beating of former Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko and threats to strip the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox church of its registration for holding prayer services for protestors. This last incident is especially

troubling following Ukraine's efforts during its OSCE Chairmanship to adopt the Ministerial Decision on religious freedom.

As the former Chair of the OSCE, Ukraine's leaders are fully aware of the resources and tools the OSCE has to offer a nation in the midst of political standoff. We, once again, call on Ukraine to make use of the OSCE and its mechanisms for a way forward. We encourage the Government of Ukraine to exhaust all options – including requesting the involvement of OSCE institutions such as ODIHR and the Representative on Freedom of the Media – to conduct a thorough review of the recently-passed legislation or to seek the assistance of the OSCE-appointed experts to help secure a peaceful resolution to the ongoing crisis.

Mr. Chair, this week, as the United States celebrates the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr.—a great American leader who used civil disobedience as a way to fight against injustice and the denial, by his own government, of basic human rights—we call upon Ukraine's leaders to hear the cries of its own civic movement that seeks and demands change. We urge Ukraine's leaders to protect the rights and fundamental freedoms of its citizens embodied in the core principles and commitments of the OSCE—principles that Ukraine helped to advance last year in its role as OSCE Chair. The true test of whether Ukraine will build a free, democratic and prosperous future for its people is not in how it led the other 56 participating States seated around this table, but rather in how it ensures its most basic OSCE commitments are implemented at home, during this critical time. It is only through credible and concrete actions embodying these OSCE commitments that a nation in the midst of a transition can emerge strong, unified, and free.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.