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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Switzerland Regarding Maryland's Abolition of the Death Penalty

As delivered by Chargè d' Affaires Gary Robbins
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 21, 2013

On Friday, March 15, the Maryland House of Delegates voted 82-56 in favor of legislation to replace the death penalty with the punishment of life without parole. Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley has stated his intent to sign this bill.

We thank Switzerland and other participating States for their interest in capital punishment in the United States. The use of the death penalty in the United States is a decision of democratically elected governments at the federal and state levels and is not prohibited by international law, nor does it violate any OSCE commitments. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) specifically recognizes that countries may impose the death penalty for the most serious crimes, carried out pursuant to a final judgment rendered by a competent court and in accordance with appropriate safeguards and observance of due process.

The United States recognizes the intense debate on the issue of the death penalty both within and among nations. As we have said many times in prior meetings of the Permanent Council when the subject of capital punishment is raised, the ultimate decision regarding this issue must be made through the domestic democratic processes of individual states and be consistent with their obligations under international law.

Thank you, Madam Chair.