



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Draft Law on Religion in Kyrgyzstan

As delivered by Political Counselor Casey Christensen
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 20, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States genuinely welcomes the positive steps the Kyrgyz Republic has taken to expand religious freedom and tolerance since its independence. In that spirit, we share the concerns of the ODIHR advisory council on freedom of religion or belief regarding the draft law on religion passed by the Kyrgyz parliament on November 6th.

As reported by ODIHR, the new law adopted by the parliament does not appear compatible with several OSCE commitments on freedom of belief and assembly. According to ODIHR, provisions in the draft law impose burdensome constraints and barriers to registration; they would also restrict freedom of expression, including the dissemination of religious material. Other provisions in the draft law are vague, and could invite confusion and variations in its interpretation and application by authorities.

Taken together, we believe the effects of the draft amendments would fall disproportionately on religious minorities, effectively resulting in diminished religious freedom and tolerance in the Kyrgyz Republic. This is not an outcome that any of us can want, as it would invariably be interpreted as a significant step backward in a country that has come so far.

We hope the Kyrgyz mission to the OSCE will relay these concerns in the spirit they were offered, and urge President Bakiev to return this draft legislation to parliament for further review.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.