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United States Mission to the OSCE

Abduction, Detention, and Sentencing of Ukrainian Citizens by the Russian Federation

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 3, 2015

While the OSCE was on recess, a Russian military court sentenced Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov to 20 years in prison and Ukrainian activist Oleksander Kolchenko to 10 years in prison. In an attempt to justify these sentences, the Russian court relied on unfounded allegations of plotting terrorist attacks and other activities in Russian-occupied Crimea. This is a clear miscarriage of justice. Mr. Sentsov and Mr. Kolchenko reported abuses by Russian authorities, including restricting their access to lawyers, family, and others while they were in pre-trial detention for more than a year. Russian authorities ignored Mr. Sentsov's allegations of beatings, suffocation, and other ill-treatment he experienced in detention, refusing to open an investigation into these claims. Amnesty International reported that prosecutors used a confession and testimony by witness Gennady Afanasyev against both men, which was allegedly gained through torture by Russian security officials, in violation of Russia's international obligations and contrary to its OSCE commitments.

We strongly condemn the Russian court's sentencing of Mr. Sentsov and Mr. Kolchenko, and call on the Russian Federation to honor its international commitments by releasing, without delay, all hostages and illegally detained Ukrainian citizens – including Nadiya Savchenko, who has already spent over a year in detention in Russia. The continued detention of Ms. Savchenko is totally unacceptable. I would like to bring to your attention that Ms. Savchenko's case is part of our "Free the 20" campaign which highlights the cases of 20 women political prisoners and prisoners of concern in advance of the 20th anniversary of the Beijing conference and was launched on September 1 by the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Samantha Power. We continue to have serious concerns about Ms. Savchenko's treatment in detention and are watching her trial very closely.

Russia continues to ignore its commitments under the Minsk agreements, including those related to the release of all hostages and illegally detained persons. We again call upon the Russian Federation to implement those commitments by immediately releasing Oleg Sentsov, Oleksander Kolchenko, Nadiya Savchenko, and all other remaining hostages.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.