

Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis
Opening Statement for Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe
hearing: "Freedom of the Media in the OSCE Region"
Thursday, August 2, 2007

Thank you Chairman Hastings and Co-Chairman Cardin for holding this important hearing. I also want to commend our witnesses for testifying before us today.

Freedom of the press is a basic value in America, as outlined in our Constitution's Bill of Rights. Media freedom is the foundation of any successful responsive democracy, and keeps governments accountable in challenging times. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about the challenges to media freedom in the OSCE region.

I am particularly interested in developments in Russia, where threats to journalists are real and dangerous. The high murder rate of journalists in Russia is simply unacceptable. We must continue to strongly urge Russia to respect basic freedoms such as freedom of the press and end any intimidation of journalists, especially threats of violence.

Freedom of the press is especially important as countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan face upcoming elections. The press plays an integral role in educating voters about the positions candidates and parties take on important issues. Without media freedom during the campaigns and elections of public officials in these countries, the United States and the Helsinki Commission are left question the outcome of these elections, because voters are at best uninformed or at worst misled.

We must also encourage states in the OSCE region to repeal any laws that make criticism of a country's government a crime. Azerbaijan has charged at least 60 journalists for speech-related offenses for simply doing their jobs.

As we work with countries to establish or improve freedom of the press in countries where it is very limited, we must also foster progress for states that have made some improvements but need to maintain and expand upon freedom of the press. With the U.S. State Department's recent country report on Turkey, I am concerned that the country could be regressing to limit media freedom.

Again, I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony. I look forward to our continued work together to promote freedom of the press and human rights in the United States, throughout the OSCE Member states, and around the world.