

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN RUSSIA



September 27, 2007

**Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Washington: 2010

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The Helsinki process, formally titled the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. As of January 1, 1995, the Helsinki process was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The membership of the OSCE has expanded to 56 participating States, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

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Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe Washington, DC

The briefing was held at 10 a.m. in room 2212 of the Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, Hon. Alcee L. Hastings, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, moderating.

Commissioners present: Hon. Alcee L. Hastings, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Panelists present: Karinna Moskalkenko, Human Rights Attorney and Head of the Russian Affiliate, Center of Assistance to International Protection; Neil Hicks, Director, Human Rights Defenders Program, Human Rights First; and Maureen Greenwood-Basken, Advocacy Director for Europe and Central Asia, Amnesty International USA.

Mr. HASTINGS. Good morning. My apologies for not being able to be four places at once.

I just came from a meeting with Secretary of Defense Gates, and—most illuminating, in an informal setting, that didn't require all of the structure. And I think we accomplished a great deal.

I'd like to welcome all of you and the members of the press. And I'd particularly like to welcome and thank the members of our distinguished panel for finding the time to share their experiences with us this morning.

It's a special privilege to Karinna—how about if I don't try to say Moskalkenko?

Ms. MOSKALENKO. Oh, it's very difficult. [Laughter.]

Mr. HASTINGS. I get called Alice, and my name is Alcee, but it looks like Alice when it's written.

I know that her insights on the day-to-day challenges that human rights defenders face in Russia will be invaluable. And I personally would like to commend your efforts and your resilience.

Our other two panelists, Neil Hicks and Maureen Greenwood-Basken are experienced human rights advocates who represent organizations that have made major contributions to the defense of human rights in Russia.

If you've not done so yet, I hope you will avail yourselves of the opportunity to pick up a copy of our guests' biographies on the corridor table.

We invited representatives of the Russian Government to participate, and I have done this in the past and will continue to do so in the future, but unfortunately they declined the invitation.

As Russia rebuilds its economy and takes a more aggressive stance on the international stage, there's concern among human rights defenders and civil society advocates that these trends have been accompanied by a significant retreat from human rights and civil liberties.

Today we're going to hear about the efforts by Russian non-governmental organizations, human rights activists and legal experts to try and halt this retreat and the difficulties that they face.

I note that at the annual meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly this past summer in Kiev, the participating parliamentarians, myself included, and a very strong delegation from America were pleased to pass a comprehensive resolution on strengthening OSCE engagement with human rights defenders and national human rights institutions.

As chairman of the Helsinki Commission, I take that pledge seriously, whether it be by examining the situation as I have urged at Guantanamo Bay, or by assisting individuals and organizations beyond our borders to secure the rights to which they are entitled by virtue of their own human dignity and reinforced by the institutions of international law.

For example, in my meeting with Secretary Gates this morning, I advised him of a human rights issue that is developing of major magnitude that the United States has a responsibility with reference to, and that is with those persons who are displaced persons in Iraq because of the ongoing conflict there, both those that are internally displaced and externally.

And I think the Secretary received my message well in that regard.

Let me, however, reiterate what I've stated in the past. The Russian Federation is far from being the most repressive country in the world today. That should be clear to any objective observer.

Moreover, human rights also have some relation to basic social justice concerns such as having heat in the winter, getting paid on time, and getting and being safe in a home.

In terms of economic opportunity and material abundance, much progress has been made in Russia under President Putin's leadership. I commend him for working to improve the standard of living of the average Russian citizen, and I would urge that he do more.

But basic needs are also met in some of the world's most repressive regimes. It's my hope that the Russian Federation will come to understand that our Nation and any nation, in order to flourish, must have social and economic rights. And you will hear a good deal more from our witnesses in that regard.

Repressive regimes do not make good neighbors or trading partners. They do not seek to improve the welfare of their citizens or the safety of our planet. Need we look any further in today's news than Myanmar and the activities ongoing there to realize what I just said?

Not only for the intrinsic value of protecting and promoting human rights, but for the well-being of our own fellow citizens in this country, I wish to see Russia with a rule of law state that is committed to human rights and democratic governance.

And now I would ask that Ms. Moskalenko share her thoughts with us and then follow with you, Mr. Hicks, and Ms. Greenwood-Basken. And then we will move to questions.

And what I try and urge is that the media offer questions first. I don't know whether we passed out questionnaires to guests. We did.

And then I think we have an opportunity for you, if time permits, as persons that are here to participate with us.

Karinna?

Ms. MOSKALENKO. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman Hastings and members of the Commission. I want to thank you for inviting me to speak here today.

I also want to thank those who have come to this briefing and, of course, my fellow panelists.

I very much appreciate the work the Commission is doing to focus attention on democracy, human rights and rule of law in Russia. It's a great honor and, of course, great responsibility for me to take a presentation today, and I'm grateful for the opportunity.

In order to avoid—I mean, to be more structured and to follow the text, I wrote the presentation. I'm very sorry. Normally, in Russian I would never read, but you will forgive me. And after that, I will spontaneously answer your questions. I believe there is going to be some questions.

The [inaudible] of power in today's Russia is contrary to the principles of civil society. In my country, it is society that serves the authorities and follow their instructions, not vice versa, as it is in true democracies.

In countries which are authoritarian and where their decisionmaking process is centralized, the authorities feel no need to listen to civil society or to those who disagree with their policies, because they are not accountable. The authorities have no need to be responsible.

On the contrary, civil society is viewed as an obstacle to those in power. They proceed from the idea that the people and the society are too young or too naive to understand what they need and are not able to make right decisions.

Hence, the concept of so-called [inaudible] democracy was born in Russia. Under this concept, Russia shall follow its own specific way insofar as the development of democratic society is concerned.

Moreover, this way is different from that of other democracies. In the opinion of sovereign democracy theorists, power resides in the government itself. Fair elections, separation of powers, human rights—all are secondary.

And when civil society insists on their democratic rights, the power in Russia views it [inaudible] and illegitimate.

The same position underlies the government's attitude toward our NGOs. The independent NGOs are not needed by government and are often considered obstacles. As a result, NGOs are, one by one, being smothered by the government, which manipulates and abuses their formal legal system to crush them.

The government's tactics include [inaudible] complaints, criminal proceedings against the heads of the NGOs who are accused by the government of being either extremists or basic criminals.

The power also harasses NGOs by seizing office equipment and increasing rents for NGOs which really have limited resources.

Even if the prosecution does not bring the activity of our NGOs to a standstill, their efficiency drops as a result of the harassment and constant pressure.

At the same time, the authorities always find a way to substitute real NGOs with fake ones, like in Soviet time. The best example is our public chamber organization.

The majority of its members are appointed by the president and the government. Supervisory boards are created within some ministries and other governmental departments, supposedly to regulate their work.

In reality, let me give the example. Public council have been created within the ministry of defense. The council [inaudible] attempt to establish youth organizations to express their support for the authorities and their decisions.

Among recent examples are the rally in front of the Estonian embassy and the persecution against the United Kingdom Ambassador.

But what the people do not understand is that these organizations are frauds, because they are created by the government itself. It's not a human rights movement at all.

The authorities rely on the media, which remains under their control, to defame the human rights activities and their organizations. The authorities accuse them of gaining funds from foreign security services and accusing of even espionage for the benefit of foreign states.

Government propaganda insinuates that the NGOs that accept foreign grants work for foreign states. And it is just last 2, 3 years when it started.

Besides human rights activities, independent lawyers, and journalists who cooperate with human rights NGOs are subject to prosecution. Criminal and administrative proceedings are initiated against them.

If even lawyers and advocates are being attacked, then ordinary people and society become more and more vulnerable. For example, 5 years ago the legal aid department of my organization—is called International Protection Center. We receive some 300 letters per year.

Today we receive this number every day. All of these letters contain numerous complaints against human rights violations.

Most correspondents are people who are disappointed with domestic system of justice and they ask us to submit cases to the European Court of Human Rights, which, by the way, becomes more and more popular among our people and makes more and more nervous our government.

Answering these letters and assisting these numerous people is really heavy burden. However, the growing number of the complaints we receive highlight the need for human rights NGOs, the necessity of our existence.

I have described here the political environment in which we work. But let me make it clear that our work is in no way political. This makes us more protected because we are practicing professional lawyers, and we always do our work in legal frames.

But at the same time, we become more, as I am allowed to say like this, dangerous for the government. And they are looking for the way to prosecute us.

So I would like to provide some—as I am a witness today—it's not very usual for me to be a witness—probably the first time in my life for 30 years of legal practice.

But I would like to provide with some facts indicating the persecution of the authorities against the NGOs.

Our organization have been existing more than 12 years. During the first 10 years, we had no problems. In November 2005, the authorities suddenly started a tax audit against us. And that has been not terminated up to now.

What is there to audit? During 2 years, we are just a nonprofit [inaudible] parent organization existing on international grants, with total grants amounting to U.S.\$200,000 per year.

Moreover, we produce our reports to our grantors four times a year and make all financial reports public. What to audit, for 2 years—almost 2 years?

The purpose of government pressure is clear: To keep our organization under stress, to possibly intimidate our members and to create such problems that would make the organization protect itself rather than Russia people.

The tax audit of our organization has been accompanied by attacks against our members that share similar aims. These measures include questioning the activity of the organization by law enforcement agencies, accusing us of anti-state activity, especially if we are doing so-called Chechen cases, threatening to disbar lawyers working for our center.

If I tell you on which grounds, on which pretext, I was going to be disbarred—I was near to be disbarred some 2 months, 3 months ago—you will simply not believe me. If you have some questions, I can answer them.

This is no doubt that the authorities attack our organization because of the clients we represent. They include victims of torture and inhumane treatment in Chechen Republic and in other regions throughout Russia.

Among them, families of victims of the Nord-Ost and Beslan—I think you know these two cases—who have launched complaints against the government, and we assist them. Because we were unsuccessful in Russia, we went to the European court with our complaint on this matter.

Several so-called spy cases concerning people who just have relationships with foreigners. They work with them and suddenly been accused in committing espionage, though they are not real spies.

Then human rights NGOs. We represent them because the authorities have tried to close them down. Every day we have more and—the list longer and longer.

The Yukos case, in particular, Mr. Khordokovsky, for whom I am defense counsel, is clearly a politically motivated case. And this second round of charges they started this year allows the government to criminalize legitimate business activity.

And we are trying to prove it, but we were shut down because we are prohibited to disseminate any information on his charges, although the government is perfectly and every day doing this, and doing in wrong way.

Then I have to mention my client and my friend Gary Kasparov, the authorities' main political opposition.

I shouldn't forget about several journalists in which cases we are involved with who were threatened or even murdered—Anna Politkovskaya. I'm very grateful that you have pictures here today.

I cannot forget—I have no right to forget—our colleagues from Nizhny Novgorod-based Russian-Chechen Friendship Society have been subjected to similar pressure.

Here, the authorities have managed to close down the organization and to hold its head criminally liable. He was convicted. Probably you know about Stan Dmitrievsky. The prosecution is ongoing, still ongoing, and just 4 days ago they called me saying that new round of treatment they face, too.

After criminal proceedings were initiated against the head of the famous organization Educated Media Foundation, this organization was also closed down. It had been involved in training independent journalists.

Our colleagues from North Caucasus, the Chechen Republic and Ingushetia have been still in worse predicament. During the last 3 years, the authorities have tried to close down the organization of Chechen National Salvation Committee three or four times.

Just this year, they had three checks of their organization under various pretexts. Four days ago, they contacted me informing that another audit have been launched against them.

And Mr. Makhmut Magomadov, a lawyer for this organization, was abducted and subjected to real torture, and we have all the description what been done with him in 2005. If it is not for the application with the European court, he would have died.

Yesterday members of the Memorial, situated in the Ryazan region, called me to tell me that the authorities are accusing them of violation rules and regulations under the NGOs law.

So I realize that I have painted a sinister picture. However, it does not mean that Russian human rights NGOs have given up. This is an incredibly bad time for us now. But we continue our work.

The practice has shown that we are not unsuccessful. Governmental prosecution is certain proof of our successful work, I think.

And I personally would remember what could happen if 15 Members of the Congress would not sign the letter of support in my favor when I faced my disbarment. And thanks to this solidarity I'm probably still a lawyer.

Together with the United States, other countries, with international solidarity, we will continue our work.

I'm afraid I was too long, but thank you for your attention and for your patience.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you.

Mr. Hicks?

Mr. HICKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to you and to the Commission for convening these important hearings on the situation of human rights defenders in Russia.

It's a particular honor for me to be on this panel with my colleague Maureen, who I've known for many years, and of course particularly with Karinna Moskalenko, who is a lawyer whose work we admire greatly and who is supporting many of the other human rights defenders that Human Rights First is actively trying to help and work with in Russia at the present time.

These hearings come at a time when there can be no doubt about the antidemocratic direction of the Russian Government when the non-responsiveness of the Russian authori-

ties to pressure or even friendly advice from the United States or other governments is at a post-Soviet high point.

Nonetheless, the need for such pressure to encourage the Russian authorities to abide by their international obligations and commitments in the human rights field remains great.

It has become habitual for senior Russian officials to dismiss Western criticisms of human rights violations or backtracking from democracy as insincere and as being issued in pursuit of ulterior motives.

We should entertain no illusions that we will find common ground with the present Russian government on the desirability of preserving and strengthening the trappings of democracy as we would understand them, including executive power held in check by an independent legislature and judiciary, a free press or a strong independent human rights organization, the particular subjects of this hearing.

Nevertheless, it is the challenge facing this commission, the U.S. Government and all of us who would wish to give our support to those in Russia who stand for human rights and democratic values in the face of scorn, hostility and persecution from their own government to find consistent, effective and principled ways to demonstrate and articulate that support.

Human rights defenders in Russia continue to make clear to us the value that they attach to such support from governments, especially when the United States is able to speak clearly in one voice with its democratic allies in Europe and elsewhere, and from international civil society.

International attention can offer a degree of protection to vulnerable activists who continue to speak out against violations in Russia.

Just as importantly, at a time when human rights activists in Russia face threats, provocations, defamation, criminal prosecution and even murder, it becomes an ever more urgent obligation for us to hold firm to these universal principles for which our friends and partners in Russia today are paying such a steep price.

The Russian Government has the power to intimidate its internal and external critics, including other governments. And it has shown itself willing to do just that through its control of energy resources vital to its European neighbors, for example, and even through the threats of military force.

It is no longer easy for Russia's neighbors to speak up for human rights. Such criticism has become contingent on other considerations. In these circumstances, the need for U.S. leadership in holding Russia to the universal human rights principles to which it is bound in law is ever greater.

In that regard, we wish to commend Chairman Hastings for his prompt action in protesting what he rightly termed Russian strong-arm tactics in seeking to exclude a non-violent Russian human rights organization, the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, from participating in an OSCE meeting in Vienna earlier this month.

This incident is not yet over. The OSCE human dimension meeting opened in Warsaw on Monday, and the Russian delegation threatened to withdraw from the meeting if this Russian NGO was permitted to register for the meeting.

The RCFS is registered for the meeting and its delegates arrived in Warsaw last night and will be present for today's sessions.

Strong resolve from the United States and other OSCE member states will be required in order to resist Russian efforts to depart from OSCE commitments, to the detriment of the rights of Russian human rights defenders.

It is worth emphasizing at this briefing, I think, some of the elements of U.S. policy that in recent years have made U.S. encouragement of Russia to abide by human rights principles less effective than it otherwise might have been.

The perception that the United States is not abiding by the same principles that it is applying to the conduct of others naturally undermines the credibility and effectiveness of such exhortations.

Second, the Russian government is highly attuned to double standards in the U.S. Government's criticism of the human rights practices of other states.

If the United States appears to be holding another government to a different standard from Russia, the Russian authorities have been swift to object and to characterize such behavior as further evidence of U.S. bad faith and cynicism.

In that regard, the United States faced a decision over whether to concur in the selection of Kazakhstan to preside over the OSCE in 2009.

On September the 21st, Human Rights First joined with seven other leading U.S.-based human rights organizations in urging Secretary Rice not to support a Kazakhstan OSCE presidency while the government's record on human rights and democracy remains poor.

There is, however, a telling difference in the approach of the U.S. Government and its Western allies who have departed from the rule of law and engaged in human rights violations, including torture, and sometimes even tried to justify such violations, and that of the Russian Government which not only unapologetically violates rights and disregards law in the name of counterterrorism but also seeks to undermine, discredit and deny the right of existence itself to independent human rights organizations that expose and object to such violations.

This is an important distinction that reflects the difference between an authoritarian government and a democratic one that may commit serious violations but will not systematically destroy the essential counterbalancing repositories of influence and power in society, of which the human rights movement is one.

With television, regional governments and parliaments all firmly under the control of the executive branch, human rights organizations are among the final independent voices left in Russia, leaving them vulnerable to attack from the Putin administration.

Foreign financial support of Russian human rights organizations has been a particular target of official criticism and rumor-mongering.

For example, at the Munich Security Conference in February, President Putin stated that these organizations, referring to human rights organizations in Russia, are formally independent, but they are purposefully financed and therefore under control.

What he meant was that they are not under his control and therefore they do not accord with the government's vision of a centrally controlled not-for-profit sector.

President Putin has accused such NGOs of working for foreign puppet-masters, and he used a speech to the FSB security agency to demand that it protect society from any attempts by foreign states to use these organizations for interfering in Russia's internal affairs.

Stories that human rights organizations are, in fact, spies representing a variety of foreign intelligence agencies have proliferated in the state-controlled media, even the activists excluded from the airwaves and therefore powerless to respond to such baseless charges.

While state and state-approved funding for NGOs in general is increasing in Russia, human rights organizations that criticize the government policies with respect to counter-terrorism or the conflict in Chechnya and the North Caucasus are unlikely to receive such funding.

Moreover, the harsh treatment meted out to Yukos and the Open Russia Foundation has effectively deterred the business sector from providing support to independent human rights organizations.

In the circumstances, with little or no access to private or public Russian funds, human rights organizations are left with no alternative but to seek support from international sources.

President Putin and other Russian leaders may or may not believe the [inaudible] of wild allegations made against Russian human rights organizations.

But there is no denying that the government has created an effective construct with which to frustrate international and domestic efforts to promote human rights and democracy in Russia.

Intergovernmental efforts to support such activities are under increasingly strident attack. For example, in Munich President Putin referred to the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe as a vulgar instrument designed to promote the foreign policy interests of one or a group of countries.

Russia is also increasingly hostile to the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, an animosity that will only increase as the number of judgments against Russia continues to mount.

There are troubling reports of witnesses in such cases being targets of state retribution and of lawyers and organizations that bring such cases becoming the victims of threats and official harassment, as Karinna just described to us.

The particular challenge of promoting human rights and democracy in Russia is that conventional efforts to mobilize international support for activists at risk or suffering persecution are distorted through the inverting lens of official propaganda to be portrayed as evidence of the subversiveness and inauthenticity of such groups.

The Russian Federation is a state party to international human rights treaties and a number of international organizations that include the promotion of human rights and democratic values as part of their mission, including the OSCE.

These obligations and commitments by which the Russian government is bound are the standard to which the Russian authorities should be held by the international community and by the U.S. Government.

We recognize that the question of whether to engage with Russia in such institutions is a subject of debate. Some have advocated the exclusion of Russia from such democratic clubs as the G-8 or the OSCE or the Council of Europe as punishment for its failures to meet the high principles on which these organizations rest.

We advocate the firm and consistent application of these standards and principles as a yardstick by which to measure Russian practices in the human rights area.

If the Russian Government chooses to turn its back on its engagement with these or other institutions because of such principled, well-founded and constructive criticism, that will be its own choice.

Fortunately, we have not yet reached this point, and there would seem to be little advantage in the United States and its allies forcing the issue.

The consistent application of these multilateral instruments remains an important tool at the disposal of the U.S. Government and all others seeking to support and protect human rights defenders in Russia.

The United States should use its influence in the OSCE to build a broad consensus in support of the Human Dimension commitments relating to the work of human rights defenders as a safeguard against attempts by the Russian authorities to marginalize specific organizations and activities.

To conclude, I would say that in standing up to the abuse of force and the strong-arm tactics of the Russian Government, Russian human rights defenders are engaged in a struggle that is not only vital to the future of democracy and human rights in Russia but also have serious implications for the situation of independent human rights activists in other repressive countries, where Russia's example is closely watched, and for such pressing global issues as the security of energy supplies to Europe and the resolution of conflict in the North Caucasus, a continuing source of aggrievance for radical Muslim political movements around the world.

Even if the Russian Government seems disinclined to listen to our advice, we should not cease to offer it. Governments and non-governmental organizations all have a part to play in breaking through the elaborate siege the Russian authorities have carefully constructed around independent human rights defenders to prevent them from building a constituency of support within Russia for a more accountable, more transparent, more responsive government that will better serve the interests of Russia and its people in the years to come.

Thank you very much.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you, Mr. Hicks.

Ms. Greenwood-Basken?

Ms. GREENWOOD-BASKEN. Thank you very much, Chairman Hastings and Co-Chairman Benjamin Cardin, U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, for holding this incredibly important briefing today on human rights defenders in Russia.

I thank you also, as my colleagues have said, for your bold leadership in commending the U.S. delegation for walking out at the OSCE mission when Spain did not register the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society. And I'm glad to hear Neil today that they were allowed to participate.

This testimony will cover specific cases of human rights defenders in Russia, the significance of human rights defenders in Russia, a comparison to the United States in Iraq, and recommendations.

Amnesty International is the oldest and largest grassroots human rights organization, active in more than 55 countries. Amnesty International's vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

Amnesty International is independent, bipartisan, and independent of any government funding.

Human rights defender, as has already been mentioned, includes anyone fighting for the promotion and protection of universally human rights—recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including members of non-governmental organizations, human rights lawyers and officials, activists, academics, intellectuals, religious leaders, trade unionists, and public officials.

Amnesty International welcomes, as has already been mentioned, the OSCE's efforts to highlight the work of human rights defenders—in particular, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institution and Human Rights' draft report, "Human Rights Defenders in the OSCE Region: Threats and Challenges from September 2007."

Amnesty International works on behalf of human rights defenders around the world, and we also work on human rights defenders within the United States.

And I would just mention that we have concerns in the United States about conscientious objectors to military service, particularly cases such as Mr. Ehren Watada, whose second court-martial trial is expected to begin on October 9th.

We also appreciate the concerns that you raised about Iraqi IDPs, displaced persons and refugees. We have a mission there ourselves looking at the refugee situation right now, and this is of great concern to Amnesty International.

Now, let's turn to Russia. In the past year in terms of the overall human rights picture in Russia, human rights defender and independent civil society came under increasing pressure.

The authorities clamped down on the peaceful exercise of rights to freedom of expression and assembly. The authorities failed to adequately tackle racism and discrimination against people because of their ethnic identity or sexual orientation.

Racist and homophobic attacks, some of them fatal, continued. Violence against women in the family was widespread. And the state failed to provide adequate protection for women at risk.

Police frequently circumvented safeguards designed to protect detainees against torture. Extrajudicial executions and forced disappearances and abductions and torture, including in unofficial detention centers, and arbitrary detentions continued in the North Caucasus region; in particular, in Chechnya. In Chechnya, impunity remained the norm for those who committed human rights abuses.

People seeking justice face intimidation and death threats. The government failed, as has already been mentioned, to cooperate fully with international human rights mechanisms.

And human rights violations also continued by Chechen armed groups, particularly as Chechen armed groups attacked police officers and convoys of Federal forces and planted car bombs.

In terms of human rights defenders in Russia, if you look at the display, we have a sea of faces of human rights defenders that are now under threat in Russia.

From Moscow to Krasnodar, from Orel to Grozny, journalists, human rights defenders and lawyers face administrative harassment, threats, and intimidation and, in some cases, death.

Many prefer not to talk about it publicly. And in recent years, Amnesty International has received credible information from human rights defenders and journalists about serious threats made against them by state and non-state actors.

It's an honor to be on a panel with Karinna Moskalenko and Neil, as has already been mentioned. We were quite concerned when, in May, she was threatened with disbarment for inadequately representing one of her clients.

And we are quite glad to hear that the Moscow Bar Association found no evidence to substantiate this complaint.

But the harassment is widespread. Just yesterday the Washington Post ran a story about the use of a new law on extremism that's used to harass academics and activists, including—it accused Andrei Piontkovsky, who was recently here as a Heritage Foundation visiting scholar—it accuses him of inciting violence against Russian Jews and Americans because of his books.

This article also mentions cases against Putin critic Gary Kasparov, human rights activist Lev Ponomarev, and political analyst Vladimir Pribylovsky, all under the new amendments to the law on extremism.

And I should just mention on a personal note that when the law was first being drafted, I personally—not my organization—but supported that new law because I thought it was a way that sentences could be used against perpetrators of anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and race-based attacks and they would get charges higher than just hooliganism. So the article was put in the criminal code for inciting inter-ethnic hatred.

Now, my fellow human rights activists in Russia warned me that this could be used against human rights defenders. I actually at the time thought they were being paranoid. Well, I was wrong.

In addition to using that article, there are also violence and threats, and it's hard, as has already been mentioned, not to talk about the death of famous journalist Anna Politkovskaya, the 1-year anniversary of her death on October 7th.

Despite the fact that on August 27th 12 people were detained in connection with the murder, but several were released when it was conspired that they had alibis.

One year after her death, not only does the murderer still remain to be identified, but there appears to be no progress in the investigation as to who actually ordered the death.

Her colleagues from the newspaper, Novaya Gazeta, during the past year have been satisfied with the prosecutorial team that identified those suspects, but the person in charge of that has now been replaced.

And there is widespread concerns that while they may be able to go after the lackeys that actually did the murder, the people who actually ordered the murder will never be found.

And also on the table there's an interesting Moscow Times article from yesterday which raises some curious questions about the actual investigation.

Also, on a personal note, I can say that while, you know, Amnesty International also campaigns for accountability and impunity for such human rights-related murders, I could tell you that no amount of arrests are going to make those of us who knew her feel better. She was an incredible person, and it's not going to bring her back.

I will just mention a few other cases of human rights defenders, but I will just note that in our written materials we have cases of numerous—numerous, so I'm not too repetitive with the cases that have already been mentioned.

But I do want to mention other physical beatings. Activist Galina Kozlova faced a physical attack last January which left her hospitalized for 11 days. She was an activist for the protection of the Mari language, which revolves in the family of Finno-Ugric languages and culture from the Republic of Mari El.

There also was continued harassment of Vadim Karastelyov from the Novorossiysk Human Rights Community and Frodo in Novorossiysk, Krasnodar region, for their ongoing work on behalf of ethnic minorities in Krasnodar.

In January, they were holding a meeting with foreign visitors on a public school, the group was discussing tolerance among youth. At that point, the Federal security service, FSB, and Federal migration service conducted a raid on them.

They're constantly getting subjected to intimidation by the police, and they were fined for holding an unsanctioned meeting.

There's also a legal administrative harassment that continued on human rights defenders, in addition to the physical violence and threats. More than 1 year after the law on NGOs was passed in Russia, the flaws in the law are more and more visible. And implementation of the law reveals that changes are urgently needed.

And I would just say that President Putin told Secretary General of Amnesty International Irene Kahn in a meeting a year ago July that he would review—that some changes and amendments might be needed to that law, and it's quite clear now that amendments are needed to be designed.

For example—and this is just sort of a case that illustrates the administrative nature of the harassment. In addition to the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society being closed, the NGO Youth Human Rights Movement in Nizhny Novgorod learned in August 2007 that they had been closed.

They learned that 2 months after a district court had already closed them and they were officially taken off the register. The reason that they were taken off the register was because they had allegedly failed to provide reports about their activities to the Federal registration service.

To their understanding, they had filed all their papers correctly. The Federal registration service had sent the request for papers to an address that they hadn't used in more than 3 years. So they were closed in absentia, and they now are appealing.

Dmitri Makarov, who's a coordinator, is hopeful that they can be reopened, but they were sort of shut down without them ever even knowing.

Time is way too short here to report all the cases, but I would also like to highlight the reprisals against people who have filed cases at the European Court on Human Rights.

Another amazing case was Sumaya Abzueva, a 76-year-old mother who was beaten in January as a reprisal for her court case on the streets in Argun.

She allegedly walked up to the market. A group of men got out of a car and beat her and told her that she had to stop her court case at the European Court on Human Rights because she had put in a case about her son's disappearance.

These were allegedly some of the same folks that had disappeared her son. They were members of the Anti-Terrorist Center, an armed group under the control of Ramzan Kadyrov which had unclear legal status at the time and has since been disbanded, but whose members have been subsumed into other armed structures. And they have been suspected in the killing of her son.

The other names of human rights defenders harassed—Bulat Chilaev, Mutsol Ogov, Fatima Slisova, Imrad Egiev—there's too many names to mention.

I would just also just mention, as a theme, fair trials issues in criminal cases concerning espionage or divulging state secrets—there's longstanding concerns about the targeting of scientists and journalists for having exchanged information that was allegedly already publicly available.

And they're also concerned about a targeting of independent lawyers. The prosecution and convictions of Igor Sutyagin, Valentin Danilov, lawyer Mikhail Trepashkin have long been of concern.

Amnesty International also takes the view that there's a significant political context to the arrest and prosecution of Mikhail Khordokovsky, the former head of Yukos company, and other individuals associated with Yukos and has expressed conditions related to the independence of the judiciary, access to effective legal counsel, conditions of detention and the use of torture and ill treatment to extract confessions.

In addition to the attacks on individual human rights defenders, there's also been limitations on peaceful marches, hampers on freedom of assembly. Riot police have repeatedly used violence to disperse peaceful dissenters' marches in St. Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow.

Hundreds of people were detained, charge with violations of the administrative code and prevented from attending unsanctioned as well as sanctioned meetings.

Additionally, Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov in May banned a planned gay pride parade. And on the day of the parade, several European and other activists had presented a petition to Mr.—tried to present a petition to Mr. Luzhkov, and they were severely beaten.

So we can list a litany of cases, but I'd like to take a moment to just focus on the significance of human rights defenders in Russia. Why do they matter?

Well, I'd like to stress their roles. In an open society with free speech, regular and fair elections, freedom of assembly, there are many sources of information and many sources of social change, many sources of social justice.

In a society in transition, with limitations on freedom of speech, without a full functioning independent parliament or independent courts, the courage to speak out is more significant and the silencing of the human rights defenders all the more important.

I'd like to take a moment on the context of human rights defenders. They are harassed all over Russia on numerous topics. But a particularly controversial issue is human rights issues related to Chechnya.

President Putin would have the world believe that U.S. efforts in the war on terror in Iraq are parallel to Russian efforts in the war on terror in Chechnya. It's a profoundly compelling but misleading comparison.

Putin said earlier this year in Munich—he compared the death of journalists in Russia with the deaths of journalists in Iraq.

The context for human rights defenders related to the U.S. forces in Iraq differs greatly from the context for discussing human rights defenders related to Federal—Russian Federal and Chechen forces in Chechnya.

In Iraq, while there's some limitations on freedom of speech, for the most part journalists can report whatever they want. They're limited by the danger.

Embedded journalists may be limited by the military censors. Al Jazeera may be banned by the Iraqi Government in Iraq. But other than that, U.S., other journalists, can write what they want. And U.S. and Iraqi non-governmental organizations can publish reports at their will.

In Chechnya, the situation is quite different. The Russian state-owned TV fails to cover human rights violations in Chechnya. On the rare occasion when Russian TV crews go into Chechnya, they film officials, the rebuilding, but they carefully keep anything on human rights out of the picture.

The most famous journalists that has covered human rights violations in Chechnya are murdered or under great threat. And they are only circulated in small circulation print or radio, not TV.

Foreign journalists are not allowed to enter Chechnya or have to get in with authorization, which is greatly difficult to obtain.

Just imagine the context. It's as if in all of Iraq there were only a handful of U.S. journalists that were willing to go in and interview Iraqi civilians, talk about human rights violations, as if all those journalists faced—the key one had been murdered, all of them faced threat, it was just as if it was a U.S. national TV news blackout on any issues related to human rights violations in Iraq. Silence.

A second big difference is NGOs. The key NGO covering Chechnya, the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, was closed this year on the grounds of inciting inter-ethnic violence because it published a nonviolent speech by a Chechen government official.

Until recently, international human rights organizations have not had permission to enter Chechnya.

Imagine, it would be as if Amnesty International and all the key NGOs monitoring the human rights situation in Iraq were financially investigated, a court case was opened against my own boss, Larry Cox, for inciting inter-ethnic violence, he was convicted, and then Amnesty International was completely shut down.

So what can be done to influence the human rights situation in Russia, especially in the run up to the elections? For Russia, endorse all the recommendations in the OSCE ODIHR report, including to allow human rights defenders to operate freely, ensure legislation in conformity with international standards, including changes—amendments to the NGO law, provide security for human rights defenders, respond to violence and impunity, refrain from [inaudible].

It should also cease harassment of all the human rights defenders mentioned today.

For U.S. policy, what can the U.S. Government do? First, Amnesty International would like to commend Representative Smith and the House of Representatives for passing H.Con.Res. 151 on the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, the official title of which is “Noting the Disturbing Patterns of Killings of Numerous Independent Journalists in Russia since 2000 and Urging President Vladimir Putin to Authorize Cooperation with Outside Investigators in Solving Those Murders.”

We commend the House on passing this resolution. We'd like to call on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to move a bit speedier—it's been sitting there since June—to mark up this resolution.

Second, we'd like to ask the administration to offer its support in investigating the Politkovskaya murder, since she was a U.S. citizen.

Second, we'd like to ask the U.S. Government to expand support for human rights defenders, including implementing a new provision in this year's foreign operations appropriations bill committee report that calls for the creation of a new senior-level staff person at U.S. Embassy Moscow who'll be responsible for monitoring human rights defenders and trial observations and visits.

Third, continue and expand initiatives by the U.S. Department of State, Democracy, Human Rights and Labor on human rights defenders, including the Global Human Rights Defenders Fund, NGO principals and two annual Freedom Awards.

Fourth, continue U.S. foreign assistance both to Russian NGOs in general and for humanitarian projects in the North Caucasus.

AIUSA highly commends the State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor for its small grants program in the North Caucasus, including support for human rights NGOs.

Fifth, continue and expand refugee admissions from Russia, including Chechens, persecuted minority groups, especially from Krasnodar Krai and other refugee groups.

And six, take note of what Neil has already said about how the U.S. efforts are sometimes interpreted and make sure to work multilaterally with other governments and institutions as much as possible.

In conclusion, to quote President Bush, freedom by its nature must be chosen and defended by its citizens and sustained by the rule of law and the protection of minorities.

Our goal is to help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom and make their own way. The long-term prognosis for human rights in Russia depends on our current support for these human rights defenders.

These are the people who are working for the values in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and these defenders can shape Russia far after the current presidency.

If they are quashed, what kind of Russia will there be?

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you very much, Ms. Greenwood-Basken, and Mr. Hicks and Ms. Moskalenko.

I shared with Ms. Moskalenko the fact that I, too, am a lawyer, and as I listened, I can do little to give you comfort, but I can share with you that 50 years ago I came to this city as a student to go to law school.

Within a year of being at law school, the sit-in demonstrations began in North Carolina to achieve basic rights that were being denied to Negroes.

I left school with six of my colleagues and no money and went to participate in those demonstrations. Later, of course, I became a lawyer. And like you, I worked on behalf of numerous people and organizations 43 years ago.

And I did not think at all about the harm that could come to me, and my life was threatened, as yours. Our home was shot in, too.

I was arrested, received the worst circumstances you can imagine in court, and I say that advisedly because I can only imagine that yours were worse than mine.

But all of that said, the one thing that kept me motivated was hope. And notwithstanding sovereign democracies—and I like your words—and their restraint, the simple fact of the matter is that hope abounds.

And in the spirit of every human being is the notion that we generally describe as freedom, but a real desire to have expression and to participate in a meaningful way in the society.

In Russia, when I met with Foreign Minister Lavrov 3 years ago, we talked about mutual respect. And it is something that I still believe, and so I won't have questions.

I'll ask the media to begin, and use the microphone. But I do want to make a statement about a couple of things that are in the media now.

Ms. Greenwood-Basken referenced the article that appeared in the Washington Post that I'm sure, Karinna, you must have seen.

In that article, former Prime Minister Gaidar Aliev is quoted as saying that it's the worst thing the West can do when it lambastes Russia and say that it should be a democracy because the West wants it to be.

I would say to the former prime minister that there are many of us who see it in our national interest to pursue democracy and that we will continue.

On another front, in Radio Liberty, Radio Free Europe's daily report yesterday, people were referred to—more specifically, the Nashi youth were referred to as—many Western commentators and members of the Russian opposition have compared Nashi and similar organizations to the Hitler Youth because of their dogged pro-regime loyalty, intolerance and aggressive tactics.

You reassured me a lot, Ms. Moskalenko. As a policymaker, I worry sometimes when we say things whether or not it is having an effect. And in your testimony, when you reflected that the letter that came from Members of Congress may have been of assistance in avoiding your disbarment, that is reassuring.

I shared with you a breakfast that I participated with three other Members of Congress with Vaclav Havel, and I was worried that maybe the thought of Radio Free activity was not as well received, and he informed me of his lengthy period of imprisonment and that his only contact with the outside world was the fact that he knew that there were people that were speaking out.

I have since met with wives of people in prison in different places of the world, and all of them, when I asked the question whether or not we should keep up our vigilance with reference to their loved ones, they all, to the man and woman, say that even though those persons are incarcerated, that what we do is important.

I have a tradition that I've initiated. It isn't old, because I'm new here. But I have a lot of questions that I would like to ask all of you, and I won't.

But I will have them submitted to you in writing, and then if you would answer them, we will post them on our Web site, and that will save some time.

And now I shut up and invite the media if they have any questions. Yes.

Any questions from any media representative? OK.

Let's turn, then, to the audience in general. If you have questions, if you would like, we'll have a mike over on this side and we can go forward there.

You all did such a good job until people don't have any questions.

But I then have concerns that political opposition in Russia appears to be weak and divided, and I'm wondering if any of you share that assessment.

I can tell you when I first went to Russia as an election observer, it seemed that there was a spirit, particularly at the municipal level and at the—I call it state level.

At that particular time, the speaker of the Duma was a person I got to know named Seleznev. A significant number of people were running for office, and there seemed to be openness.

I go back 4 years later and many of those persons are appointed by the sovereign democracy. And I'm just curious whether that is a fair assessment.

Does the Putin administration, because of this division, seem to be worried about a few hundred demonstrators in the streets? Just what is causing that?

And perhaps Karinna—

Ms. MOSKALENKO. Concerning your question, I would first of all refer to two very different phenomena. From one hand, it is very common opinion that the opposition in Russia is very weak. Everybody says like this.

It's probably very fair, because if we have—no, not we; I mean, my clients. I probably share their political views—probably not—but I defend them.

They do not have access to free media. How they can be powerful? Every day, every Russian family watching TV, TV, TV. People get much information from there. And whatever they know, it is exactly what the authorities said.

As my friend [inaudible] said in the Council of Europe—no, the European Parliament [inaudible] on behalf of the group of opposition—he said give us this media and this—all this [inaudible] for 2 weeks without any censorship and you will see what will happen.

If we tell them what I told you—this today, you will see how people can change their minds. Of course, people are somehow lying because the picture which they can see at the TV set—it's all for the government, the authorities.

The second phenomena is that sometimes the authorities say that the human rights community is not very popular among people. But after all the difficult events, after all the problems, people go to us.

And when they said how much the request to our activity increase from just 2, 3 years, even not compare with 10 years ago, just recently, you will see that it is not truth.

I mean, once in the OSCE meeting when representatives of the authorities wanted to publicly shut me down, they said, "Oh, you are not very popular among your population. We have some data of the statistics."

And I remember some Ambassador said how you treat your civil society. You must love them, because they probably give you information about some obstacles or problems you have to overcome. But our authorities do not realize how it is possible to work.

And this is also quite recently. We were accepted to visit prisons. For more than 15 years I have visited probably many dozens of prisons to check the conditions, to advise people from the penitentiary how to not violate rights in order—do not allow me to go to the European Court to complain against these conditions and may—I was always welcome.

But now it's 2, 3 years, we stopped in silence because we are not—we have no access anymore for all these institutions.

And just 2 weeks ago I had a radio broadcast on a very popular channel—Echo Moskvy. Echo Moskvy invited me for a challenging program which is called The People Against. And that time, people were against me. And after the debate was concluding, and they had the voting, [the audience] voted 94 percent for me.

That was such a big surprise for me, because I believed our authorities that we really are not very popular. And only 6 percent were voted against me, and not everybody has to love me, you know. My activity is very specific. I always defend unpopular people.

But these people—sometimes we say that these cases are the best way to monitor the court system. In effect to see these cases as test cases for our judiciary. But somehow 80 percent of the judiciary is OK. I mean, people plead guilty. They are doing their job—very ordinary.

But in, let's say, about 20 percent cases where people do not plead guilty, where they are trying to prove their innocence of all the charge with facts, they have no any hope of success.

And these cases are very important. And when I say probably our center's opinion is not very balanced about this situation in judiciary. Maybe. But we make our judgments on these cases.

People come to us expressing gratefulness for the judicial system. They come to us with these problems. And when we look at these cases, each and every one of these case can go to the European court on the basis of violation of fair trial requirements or illegal arrest and things like that.

So what is true? I don't know. I told you that I do not do politics. Completely not. I am not a specialist. And all people in our international protection center—we are doing all our job within the legal framework.

So it is difficult for us to say who is right, who is wrong. We go with the cases only individually. And what works, what is probably the last thing which can make our authorities worry, you know, is good faith, only the decisions of the European court, only the judgments of the court saying that this is—in this case—and general resolutions are very important, of course.

But they don't work without enough goodwill, good political will. What works in such a situation, the sovereign democracy, when the European court, for example, takes one judgment saying the person's rights were affected, this is violated like this, and please take measures of general character in order to avoid in future the same violation.

And then the authorities know that they could—that they can report. And they reported that we are doing this, we are doing that, but after—for example, the first—I'm sorry, I will finish, but I will give you example.

I started with the European court with Kalashnikov case. Now it is the most, you know, famous case I brought, the first hearing before the European court, and I couldn't speak proper English. I mean, that was the difficult time, but that was very important, because all the prisoners' rights could be protected if we win.

And we won. And now, until now, let's say 6 or 7 years, the government constantly report to the committee of ministers—this is a controlling body of the Council of the Europe—about the implementation of Kalashnikov judgment.

And they still cannot close the case because they still—we still have many, many facts of the same treatment of all the prisoners.

So my answer is I don't know. I don't know, simply. I have the right to not know. [Laughter.]

Mr. HASTINGS. I wish more of us politicians understood that right and said that to the people.

Let me ask you, Mr. Hicks and Ms. Greenwood-Basken, a lot of analysts have maintained that ultra nationalism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance are on the rise in Russia today.

What's your assessment? Do you think that is the case?

Mr. HICKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Yes. Unfortunately, incidents of anti-immigrant, anti-ethnic minority, anti-religious minority violence are on the increase in Russia today.

And we actually at Human Rights First have a project which carefully monitors such incidents throughout the OSCE region, and we are particularly concerned about the escalation of such attacks in Russia.

And I think the point that Maureen made in her remarks is important to underline here. The Russian Federation have adopted laws which are purportedly designed to combat this kind of violence within the society and these kinds of attacks on vulnerable groups.

But unfortunately, these counter-extremism laws, rather than being used against real extremists who exist and who are, indeed, inflicting great damage on Russian society, are being used against dissidents, including nonviolent human rights defenders.

And it's a great irony, but it's a great tragedy that the problem that is escalating within Russian society of extreme nationalism, religious extremism, is not being combated effectively by the state.

So those trends which, of course, are sewing the seeds for future problems are going unchecked. But meanwhile, the problem has been used as a pretext by a government for further repression against those very groups who do, in fact, combat this kind of problem through their work.

Mr. HASTINGS. Yes.

Ms. GREENWOOD-BASKEN. Yes, Amnesty International sees the rise of racial hatred, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, anti-Muslim sentiments as a tremendously large problem in today's Russia.

On a personal note, in the early '90s, that was one of my first jobs, was cataloging anti-Semitism and other race-based violence, incidents, for another non-governmental organization.

But in those days, mainly we were talking about speech issues. We were talking about, oh, an attack on a cemetery maybe a publication.

Just to give you a sense of the dramatic contrast, last year the SOVA information center reported, I think, more than 90 race-based murders in Russia, and I think last week I remember seeing a news clip that someone was murdered on the Metro.

So it's a tremendous—race-based murder and violations is a tremendous problem. And the impunity aspect of it is tremendous as well in that the Federal and local authorities do not file—adequately prosecute those perpetrators.

Mr. HASTINGS. Right.

If I may, to conclude our briefing, allow that you, Mr. Hicks, and then Ms. Greenwood-Basken, if you would, and then our honored guest—let her have the last word.

But if you would give us, in summary form, how best you think the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Helsinki Commission here in the United States

and ODIHR—if you can put all of them in one nutshell, tell us what you think we can do to enhance human rights in Russia.

Mr. HICKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The OSCE mechanisms—in particular, the ODIHR—have developed very strong commitments for member states of the OSCE with respect to the treatment of human rights defenders. And these are very important tools.

As I described in my remarks, the Russian Government is challenging these types of obligations by which it is bound. It is challenging other states to—testing their will as to whether they will object when Russia departs from these obligations.

It is vital, I think, that the line is held that these principles which have been negotiated carefully over many years in international law and in these OSCE commitments are, in fact, enforced by the states which stand by them in their public statements.

That's why the participation of the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society in OSCE meetings is an important principle, and why it's so fantastic that you responded quickly and that the U.S. Government and other European governments are standing by that NGO as it comes into threat at this time.

But that's just one incident, and we will see—we have seen and we will see repeated cases of that nature where the Russian government stands up and says, “It's not acceptable that you hold us to this standard. We refuse to be held by this standard. We don't recognize this standard. It's an ulterior attack on our interests. It's nothing to do with human rights.”

We're hearing that kind of complaint all the time from the Russian authorities these days. They must be challenged. They must be challenged repeatedly. Very often, the Russian government will react badly, in a very hostile manner.

But nevertheless, the principles stand. They're objective principles. They bind all governments. And they must be upheld.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thank you.

Ms. Greenwood-Basken?

Ms. GREENWOOD-BASKEN. I would support what Neil said, and I would also say that there is some debate now whether the OSCE is still a useful institution. Is it a cold war relic? Is it a needed institution?

I would say that today the headlines are on Iraq, on Afghanistan, on North Korea, today on Burma. But nevertheless, what happens in OSCE states in Central Asia, in the Caucasus, in Russia is still incredibly important for U.S. national security interest, for stability, for the rule of law, for human rights protections, for energy security.

And OSCE is one of the remaining mechanisms by which those actors can be in a dialogue. I would agree that it's very important to support the principles and also the individual cases, because each individual case on that wall that you all raise, that gets raised in an OSCE forum, has a ripple effect throughout the entire society.

So thank you for your work on that.

Mr. HASTINGS. I'll say thank you now to all of you, and then allow Ms. Moskalkenko the last word.

Ms. MOSKALENKO. Oh, how to use this last word? I wish so much, so much. I need immediately to change all these horrible situations in my country, to protect all the people.

But I cannot ask this from you. What I can ask from you—to monitor everything, to follow to all the issues and to react. This [inaudible] democracy is still very sensitive for the opinion from different countries, especially from this country, like the United States.

They can say whatever they want, but they still follow all the resolutions of all the opinion of your government, of your bodies who focus on the human rights.

We need observers for some trials. We need observers for—any independent observer in the Trepashkin case, in the Khordokovsky [inaudible] case, in the Stan Dmitrievsky case. Whenever they come, they come for all the scope of the violations [sic] of fair trial requirements.

In Nord-Ost case, in Beslan case, what do we need? We need an independent investigation. We have no chance in our country. Of course, we will obtain the European court decision that there was not a proper investigation, the violation of positive rights on the right to life.

But, I mean, victims still need to know truth, and they have much of the information. If you can organize this independent hearing, I don't know in which framework. I am not a very big specialist in your system. But whoever is doing it for us, we will keep our authorities thinking that not everybody is misled by the nice picture which they are trying to draw.

Follow this issue. Small grants for North Caucuses organization are very good. Thank you very much. But they are too small. And the National Endowment for Democracy did a lot for supporting these people. These people can be tortured every day, and some of them already been subject of torture.

Just do not forget us. This international solidarity gives us big, big hope. Thank you very much for coming, for listening, for your patience, to my presentation.

Mr. HASTINGS. Thanks a lot. [Applause.]

That concludes our briefing. I thank you all for coming.

[Whereupon the briefing ended at 11:27 p.m.]



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