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Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

PRESS RELEASE

OSCE/ODIHR criminal justice forum for Central Asia charts directions for reform

DUSHANBE, 17 June 2010 - The 2010 Expert Forum for Central Asia, organized by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and OSCE field operations in the region to bring together policymakers, academics and professionals to discuss developments and trends in criminal justice reform in Central Asia and beyond, opened in Dushanbe today.

Some 120 participants attending the two-day annual event will discuss the challenges facing criminal justice systems in the region and propose potential solutions based on the experiences of other OSCE participating States.

"The Forum is a unique opportunity to discuss comprehensive reforms of the criminal justice sector in the region, which is a key element in upholding the rule of law in any democratic country," Ambassador Ivar Vikki, the Head of the OSCE Office in Dushanbe, said in his opening address.

Jumakhon Davlatov, State Adviser to the President of Tajikistan on Legal Policy, said: "We are pleased to host this important regional event in Tajikistan this year. Tajikistani officials at the highest levels will participate in the Forum discussions to present their views and gain insight into the approaches of other countries."

Participants will also discuss recent reforms introducing the requirement for judicial authorization of pre-trial detention in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and reforms in two participating States expanding people's participation in the administration of justice.

"At the Forum we will present the findings from the two research projects on judicial authorization of pre-trial detention and jury trials in Kazakhstan. We believe that the recommendations stemming from these projects will be useful for all countries of the region that have embarked on or are considering similar reforms," said Carsten Weber, the Chief of ODIHR's Rule of Law Unit.

Other topics on the Forum agenda include the role of evidentiary rules for upholding equality of arms, approaches to the reform of administrative offences and alternatives to criminal prosecution.

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