



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Georgia

As delivered by Deputy Chief of Mission Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 11, 2008

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

You announced two agenda items, one on the situation in Georgia and one on the firing on OSCE Monitors in Georgia. In fact, my statement will address both of those issues together.

Mr. Chairman, the United States condemns the December 10th attack on our unarmed OSCE monitors in the Zemo Khviti area of Georgia. This was a cowardly and provocative act. We call on all parties to facilitate a full and immediate investigation into the incident.

The United States also wishes to call attention to reports of ongoing violence in the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia, including the possible firing on December 5th of an anti-tank guided missile near the Georgian-administered village of Mereti, east of Tskhinvali. This was the second such incident in the region, occurring just weeks after a similar attack on November 21st. In addition, EU and UNOMIG monitors are reporting almost daily incidents targeting Georgian police along the administrative boundary of the Georgian region of Abkhazia. We are particularly concerned about provocations in the vicinity of the Enguri Power Station, whose joint operation in both Abkhazia and unoccupied Georgian territory plays a key role in maintaining some level of connectivity between the populations.

These multiple incidents provide evidence of Russia's continuing failure to guarantee the security of the areas under its control. Mr. Chairman, we are concerned incidents of this sort will exacerbate tensions in the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia and raise the potential for renewed violence.

The recent joint ODIHR/HCNM report on human rights in the war-affected areas of Georgia also indicates that serious human rights and humanitarian concerns remain in the zone of conflict. Problems of internally displaced persons, restrictions on movement across administrative boundaries, and widespread lawlessness will continue if not promptly addressed, and underscore the importance of gaining access for OSCE and EU monitors to the separatist regions.

We continue to believe OSCE and EU monitors must have unfettered access to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia, in hopes they can help prevent further violent incidents and ensure the protection of local populations. Such access is also necessary to allow for a meaningful needs assessment by international experts to ensure all vulnerable populations receive the assistance they require.

Additionally, we believe the OSCE must help establish an incident response mechanism to deal with prior and ongoing violence and human rights abuses, and participate in a process to ensure the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons, as called for in the Geneva talks on Georgia. We look forward to constructive discussions on December 17th

and 18th, and hope this process will foster practical cooperation to stabilize the situation in Georgia and reduce tensions.

The United States continues to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and will help in all ways to further peaceful conflict resolution. Toward that end, we again call on Russia to implement in their entirety the commitments made in the August 12th and September 8th cease-fire agreements, in particular the return of Russian forces to their August 7th positions, the free movement of humanitarian aid and international observers, and the return of displaced persons.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.