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## UK Delegation to the OSCE

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### **Information to the 574th Plenary Meeting of the Forum for Security Co- operation on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2009 on the OSCE Code of Conduct: The UK Service Complaints Commissioner.**

Mr Chairman,

In the context of our obligations in respect of the OSCE's Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, in particular paragraphs 32 and 33 concerning the fundamental freedoms of members of our Armed Forces and their legal and administrative protection, I would like to draw pS attention to the recent report of the UK's Service Complaints Commissioner (SCC).

The new post of SCC was created in the UK by the Armed Forces Act 2006, with a remit to cover any complaint made by any service personnel after 1 January 2008. Dr Susan Atkins was appointed as the UK's first SCC on 1 December 2007 to provide independent oversight of the new Service complaints process. One of the roles of the SCC is to report annually on the fairness, effectiveness and efficiency of the Service complaints process to the Secretary of State. The SCC has published her first annual report for 2008.

The report acknowledges that the new complaints process is well designed and is working, but it also identifies areas for improvement. Many of the recommendations have already been the subject of work by the MoD over the past year. The Chief of the Defence Staff commented that "The effectiveness of the Armed Services depends upon mutual trust and respect amongst our people, so it is important that they have confidence in our system for investigating complaints. The process must deal with issues promptly and fairly, while underpinning the command structure that is fundamental to military operations. The Service Complaints Commissioner's independent oversight of the system is a key element in delivering the necessary confidence, and I welcome her first annual report. We will consider it in detail, and work with the Commissioner on addressing the recommendations."

A copy of the full report is available on the Internet on the Service Complaints Commissioner's website at <http://armedforcescomplaints.independent.gov.uk/>

Thank you Mr Chairman,

We would ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.