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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Knut Vollebaek

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 27, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes Ambassador Vollebaek back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his insightful report.

Mr. Ambassador, we also thank you for sharing your thoughts on the role of the OSCE in conflict prevention. Rarely have we heard such a clear assessment of the potential of the OSCE, and such a concise explanation of why the OSCE must play a fundamental role in conflict prevention and resolution.

We share your concern that there has been a shift away from a sense of common purpose and common values. In recent years, a few participating States have prevented effective OSCE action in support of the values and commitments which we have all pledged to uphold. We agree that the OSCE should indeed redouble its efforts to find solutions to the protracted conflicts in our region.

But to do this, the OSCE needs the support of all participating States. The OSCE's comprehensive definition of security, which includes the human, economic and political-military dimensions, is directly relevant to the challenges we face. We have the tools at hand – we just have to use them constructively.

Ambassador Vollebaek, we strongly support your ongoing efforts to call attention to the rights and needs of members of ethnic minorities and internally displaced persons in the region. Your September trip to Georgia, including Abkhazia, as well as your staff's participation in the joint HCNM-ODIHR assessment mission in mid-October, were valuable contributions towards protection of the vulnerable communities there.

We sincerely regret that you were denied access to South Ossetia, and regret that the assessment mission was denied access to Tskhinvali from the south. In the future, we hope access to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia will be granted willingly, not only to missions like yours, but also to OSCE and EU monitors. We also hope efforts like yours will help highlight the need for an incident response mechanism to deal with ongoing violence and abuses, and further the safe and voluntary return of internally displaced persons.

We support as well your efforts to assist in the resolution of the conflict in Transnistria through the organization of the November roundtable in Odessa for the 5 plus 2 Mediators and Observers.

The United States commends your essential work to advance human rights and improve policing and inter-ethnic relations throughout the OSCE area. Recent experience has unfortunately demonstrated that allowing inter-ethnic tensions to go unresolved poses the real possibility of open conflict.

Ambassador Vollebaek, we wish you every success in your work in the coming year.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.