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**STATEMENT BY MR. KAREL DE GUCHT,
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE KINGDOM OF
BELGIUM, AT THE SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE
MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE**

Helsinki, 4 December 2008

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. Secretary General,
Ministers,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great interest that I take part with you in this important meeting for the future and strengthening of security in Europe.

First of all it permits us to talk frankly about our vision of security in Europe and our respective concerns regarding the stability of the European continent.

The European continent is stable on the whole, but security tensions have reappeared at the regional level on the European continent itself, as witnessed by the military conflict in Georgia last August. Other regional conflicts continue or could emerge.

There are also tensions in other areas, as illustrated by the serious difficulties encountered for a year now in the control of conventional arms in Europe. Belgium is particularly attached to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty). It has permitted a substantial reduction in conventional arms in Europe. Above all, however, it has increased the transparency and predictability of the respective conventional armed forces, in this way helping to heighten the level of mutual confidence. It is thus vital to do everything possible to preserve it and to ensure that the adapted CFE Treaty enters into force.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need to take a determined stance in the light of the re-emergence of these security tensions so as to be able to reduce and ultimately eliminate them.

We can do this first of all by reaffirming our shared commitment to the principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris, which are more relevant today than ever. We must also emphatically reaffirm our commitment to the respect of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The settlement of a conflict will not endure unless it is

of a political nature based on our shared values and negotiated if possible within a multilateral framework.

We must then respond to them by quietly examining the causes of this re-emergence of security tensions. Is it a question of a different or erroneous perception of the threats by some of us? Do we need to update our existing instruments for the control of conventional arms or confidence- and security-building measures so as to adapt them to the present situation and to increase their effectiveness? Or is it a question of defending spheres of influence at all costs?

Shedding light on the causes for our concerns is a second condition for finding an effective common response and defining our shared security aims for the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we all know, the security of the European continent is no longer solely dependent on security in Europe. Threats have become global, more diffuse, delocalized, often outside our continent. Their nature, be it civil or military, depending on the aim, has also changed. Moreover, they are shared increasingly by all of us and, above all, they can no longer be overcome at the national level alone. They call for a concerted response and a multilateral approach.

To ensure that our future generations can live on a European continent that is safe and stable, we need to co-operate with one another. We all require the co-operation of each of us and the future of security in Europe is thus more than ever one of co-operation.

We are therefore open to discussion of the suggestions made recently by the Russian President, Mr. Medvedev, and the current President of the European Union, Mr. Sarkozy.

We were very interested to note the suggestions made recently by President Medvedev and President Sarkozy in Evian, where the idea of a summit was voiced. It is an option worthy of consideration but it should be prepared seriously. The OSCE framework is ideal for a discussion of this nature. It is 18 years since the Charter of Paris and 33 years since the Helsinki Final Act and it could well be an opportune moment to review the question of a European security architecture. It is too soon at present to speculate on the evolution of this architecture but it is already clear that a reform process of any kind will have to include the preservation of the *acquis* of the three OSCE dimensions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Another important question on our agenda is the added value of the OSCE regarding the security consequences of climate change. We support this role by the OSCE, which is part of its economic and environmental dimension and also its multidimensional approach to security. It occupies an ideal position between the security dimension and the human dimension and is one of the most important challenges facing the Organization today and in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to conclude with a subject that is particularly important to me. I should like to stress the importance of maintaining the OSCE Mission to Georgia. I appeal in good faith to you all to reach agreement on a renewal of its mandate. It is also essential that the OSCE military observers can have access to South Ossetia.

During the Belgian OSCE Chairmanship in 2006 we launched the Economic Rehabilitation Programme in Georgia, which was and still is aimed, via a new transitional mechanism, at promoting economic and commercial contacts between Georgian and South Ossetian communities so as to build confidence between the populations of these regions and contribute in this way to a political solution.

The spirit of the Economic Rehabilitation Programme is the same spirit that prevailed during the establishment of the European Union. One of the great achievements of the European Union from the outset has been to ensure that its members no longer suffer the scourge of war. I sincerely hope that this spirit will reign in Georgia as well.

Thank you.