

Canadian Delegation to the  
Organization for Security & Cooperation  
in Europe



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Délégation du Canada auprès de  
l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération  
en Europe

**DELEGATION OF CANADA TO THE OSCE  
STATEMENT BY FREDERICKA GREGORY, CHARGE D'AFFAIRES  
ON THE REPORT OF KNUT VOLLEBAEK  
OSCE HIGH COMMISSIONER ON NATIONAL MINORITIES  
742<sup>ND</sup> MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL  
27 NOVEMBER 2008**

Mr. Chairperson,

Canada has maintained nothing but the utmost respect for the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities. We warmly welcome the High Commissioner, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek, back to the Permanent Council and wish to thank him for his excellent comprehensive report. The Report's focus on Georgia, the Ukraine and on Central Asia are all areas of priority to Canada.

I was delighted to take part in the special celebrations in The Hague recently to mark the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). This OSCE institution was established to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to national minorities; to promote strong inter-community relations; and, more importantly, to identify and seek early resolution of ethnic or minority related tensions which could endanger peace, stability or friendly relations between states. Today, Canada believes that the office of the HCNM is more important than ever, because of the continued need to address unresolved conflicts and tensions in the OSCE region.

In carrying out its mandate, the HCNM was empowered by all OSCE participating States to conduct on-site missions; to engage in preventative diplomacy, conflict prevention and mediation; and to perform its duties independently of the parties concerned. Time and time again, HCNM reports have proven to be an invaluable tool and source of advice for us on both conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

Mr. Chairperson,

Moving now to the Georgia conflict, Canada is deeply troubled that the High Commissioner and his evaluation team were denied access to the South Ossetian region of Georgia. To carry out their important work, they need free and unfettered access to all areas of the conflict. Canada is even more troubled by the knowledge that some participating OSCE States have criticized the HCNM for making public the fact that he was prevented access on his visit to the South Ossetian region to assess the situation on the ground.

Discretion and quiet-diplomacy are hallmarks of the office of the HCNM and we fully support the High Commissioner's right to publicly raise any situation or event that might be construed as impeding his ability to perform his duties in an efficient and independent manner. Under the HCNM mandate to protect the rights of minorities, it is incumbent upon the HCNM to voice concern over any situation that is troubling, and then to suggest how it may be redressed.

Canada shares the view of the High Commissioner that there has been a downward trend in many areas relating to our common purpose and to our common values. Within the current geopolitical climate, it is imperative that OSCE participating States unite in a spirit of cooperation in an effort to achieve the ultimate goal: the prevention of conflict. We hope this spirit of cooperation is with us at the OSCE Ministerial in Helsinki.

To conclude, allow me to underline that Canada shares the High Commissioner's view on the need to find the right balance between integration and a respect for diversity. This is one of the High Commissioner's most difficult challenges and one that Canada is striving to achieve through our own model of pluralism.

In closing, allow me to extend Canada's best wishes to High Commissioner Vollebaek as he continues on what promises to be a very active and important programme that has Canada's full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.