

**OSCE Ministerial Council
National Intervention
The Netherlands
4 december 2008
H.E. Maxime Verhagen**

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ENGLISH only

Mr. Chairman, dear colleagues,

First of all I would like to thank the Finnish Chairman-in-Office for the warm hospitality offered here in Helsinki.

I applaud Finland for the leadership it has shown over the last turbulent year. Like the icebreakers that keep the Gulfs of Bothnia and Finland navigable in the heart of winter, Finland has kept the OSCE on course.

Mr Chairman,

Needless to say that I align myself to the statement made earlier by my French colleague Bernard Kouchner in the name of the French EU Presidency.

I look forward to our discussion today on the future of security in Europe. As the past year has shown, the OSCE as a forum for political dialogue continues to have its relevance in today's globalising world.

In principle, the OSCE and other institutions offer us all the necessary tools for the political challenges we face. We don't need new international institutions to get things done. We only need the common political will to make present institutions work as they were intended to do.

Mr. Chairman,

The Netherlands, like other participating States, deeply deplores the crisis in Georgia and its consequences. There were many victims, one of them a Dutch cameraman. He died as a result of a cluster munition, propelled into the Georgian town of Gori on 12 August 2008.

Cluster munitions are known to cause unacceptable harm to civilians. For this reason, I, together with representatives from more than 90 other countries, signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions in Oslo yesterday. More countries will follow today.

The Convention has not been signed by all of us here. I call upon all states that have not yet signed the Convention to do so in the near future.

I also call upon all states to abide by the general rule of international humanitarian law that parties to an armed conflict must always clearly distinguish between military targets and civilians. The use of any type of weaponry must be carefully weighed to avoid disproportionate loss of civilian lives.

Mr Chairman,

The Netherlands is a strong advocate of the notion that human rights apply to all people, in all places, at all times. My country has, since long, strived to make its contribution to spreading the concept of human rights, the rule of law and democracy in the world.

In line with our support for international law in general and as international seat of many legal institutions, the Netherlands attaches great importance to the legal status of international organisations.

As you all know, last year the participating States have agreed in principle on a text for a draft convention that would provide the OSCE with an international legal personality, privileges and immunities.

I would like to plead with you today to finally agree to the adoption of the convention, so that the men and women working in the OSCE no longer need to perform their tasks in a legal vacuum. However, a decision to pursue a dialogue on strengthening the legal framework of the OSCE will keep the discussion on the draft convention alive.

Mr Chairman, dear colleagues,

The storms have not abated yet; the navigation still needs our attention, also after this ministerial meeting in Helsinki.

With more than 3000 islands scattered across the Aegean and Ionian Seas the Greeks too are well placed to steer the OSCE through the many challenges that lie ahead.

I wish my colleague Dora every success in her endeavours!

Thank you.