

23 April 2009

ENGLISH only



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Georgia

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 23, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

The United States joins other delegations in deploring the April 21 detention of two unarmed OSCE military monitors near Nikozi, south of the administrative boundary line. We concur with the Chairperson-in-Office, who declared their detention by South Ossetian authorities “wholly unacceptable,” and urge all forces in the area to refrain from provocative acts.

Further, the United States would like to call attention to the April 14 statement of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, which expressed serious concern about developments in the Gali district of Abkhazia, Georgia. We agree fully that limitations imposed on ethnic Georgians’ rights by the de facto authorities, including through compulsory “passportization” and restrictions on freedom of movement, are unacceptable and have led to a deterioration in the security environment.

We exhort the de facto authorities to rescind these limitations and fully respect the human rights of all people in the region. We also call on Russia to ensure respect for human rights is upheld and international humanitarian law observed in those areas of Georgia controlled by Russian military forces.

In addition, we urge the immediate implementation of the recommendations of the November 2008 ODIHR/HCNM human rights assessment mission report, and call for an urgent follow-up assessment to ascertain the current human rights conditions in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia.

The fragile security situation, including continued reports of violence and human rights abuses in the zone of conflict, underscores the need for free and unfettered access by international monitors to the whole of Georgia, including South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It also illustrates the need for a robust OSCE presence throughout Georgia. The United States continues to believe that the departure of the OSCE Mission would remove an important mediating voice and limit the ability of the international community to build confidence and strengthen what remains a fragile security environment.

The United States believes the Chairmanship's April 8 draft decision on an Office in Tbilisi and an OSCE monitoring operation provides a good basis for agreement. The Chairmanship's proposal is a useful compromise precisely because it avoids the divisive issues of status and instead focuses on practical arrangements that would allow the OSCE to contribute positively to conflict resolution efforts in support of the Geneva process. We urge all delegations to work with the Chairmanship in a spirit of good will and collaboration to reach swift agreement on the basis of this proposal. We would view any effort to reinsert contentious issues that prejudge status disputes as unhelpful and not aimed at a good-faith resolution.

We urge a constructive approach at today's meeting of the Geneva process incident prevention and response mechanism for the Georgian region of South Ossetia. We hope this meeting, together with the next round of Geneva discussions on May 18 and 19, will contribute positively to reducing tensions in the region and furthering implementation of the August 12 six-point agreement. In particular, we look forward to concrete progress being made in Geneva on the urgent problem of humanitarian access to South Ossetia from Gori.

The United States will continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and will help in all ways to find a peaceful resolution to this conflict.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.