



PERMANENT DELEGATION OF NORWAY TO THE OSCE

STATEMENT ON THE SITUATION IN GEORGIA

As delivered by Ambassador Guttorm Vik
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
16 October 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Referring to the conclusions of the recent GAERC meeting just presented by France on behalf of the EU, Norway also welcomes the successful deployment by the European Union of an independent observer mission to Georgia, and the subsequent withdrawal of Russian forces from the zones adjacent to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We call on all parties to implement all the commitments they have undertaken, scrupulously and in good faith.

Turning to the role of the OSCE, and in particular the OSCE military observers, I would like to reiterate our firm conviction that the OSCE military monitors should enjoy free and unrestricted access to the whole of Georgia, including to South Ossetia and, notably, the Akhagori region. Such access is needed, inter alia, to provide us with reliable information on the situation for the civilian populations, including those ethnic Georgians who still reside in South Ossetia, and to follow up the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. We are particularly puzzled and concerned over the continued *de facto* refusal to grant the original 8 observers unhindered access to the whole of their uncontested Area of Operation.

Let me in this context also express our regrets over the difficulties experienced by the joint mission undertaken by ODIHR and the High Commissioner on National Minorities in obtaining access to South Ossetia during their visit to Georgia this week. We urge the *de facto* authorities of South Ossetia as well as the Russian Federation to reconsider their positions in relation to future visits by OSCE, as well as other international and humanitarian organisations.

We note with some concern the news from the opening of international discussions in Geneva yesterday, under the joint auspices of the EU, the UN and the OSCE. We take some comfort from the agreement to resume the talks, but a delay of a whole month seems like a considerable loss of time, particularly in view of the situation of the affected populations, and notably the many displaced persons. We hope that the international community will unite to bring speedy relief for the affected populations, and would again like to emphasize the need for free and unhindered access to the whole area for both international monitors and observers and for humanitarian organisations.

We also hope that the international talks, when they resume, will provide for the long-term stability and security in the region, and that a peaceful solution will be found which fully respects Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Norway looks forward to taking part in the high-level conference of donors in Brussels next week and would like to join the previous speaker in expressing our gratitude to the European Commission for convening this event.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman