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DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

Statement
On the Situation in Armenia
Delivered by Ambassador Jivan Tabibian
At the 704th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council
March 6, 2008

Mr. Chairman,

Before I proceed to the substance, may I remind you that the Armenian delegation had invited all delegations, and there seemed to be some interest in, to an informal meeting for this afternoon.

Let us first come to what Armenia's present public policy, government policy and the situation are. We heard some interesting and sometimes self justifying comments. We are reassured that there is concern, that is, somebody cares about Armenia. I was very distraught when I heard a speech by the current opposition leader when he said that he was very saddened; presumably an American political person, a diplomat, though as usual he is not very clear, had told an Armenian: "Armenia does not matter". This is not our experience, and not because how I feel about myself, but it is not my experience, that for whatever reason the United States of America does not think that Armenia matters. Of course the opposition leader went on lamenting that we got ourselves into this position, where we represent no value to the United States of America. Yet, one of the sort of tactical methods of this opposition has been to degrade the credibility of the ODIHR as a partisan, soft, unprincipled and easy to please institution who believes in incremental progress and does not have the guts to tell what is bad. It is in the logic of the same opposition leader to make sure that ODIHR's judgment is considered inadequate, irrelevant, invalid. Instead this opposition wants to be the sole judge of these elections and to look for supporters abroad who would agree with the opposition's assessment and to suggest equally the possibility of the invalidation of the ODIHR's findings, which in spite of some irregularities and flaws in the electoral process established the fact that the elections were "mostly in line" with standards and commitments.

On the question of the state of emergency mentioned by certain delegations, it is suggested that we should lift it, and to lift it as soon as we can. But if the emergency was liftable why it was imposed? The real issue is, whether the imposition of "emergency" rule was justifiable and necessary. And of course, it was done in a manner provided for and allowed by the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia. When it conforms to constitutional requirements, the state of emergency is legal. If one does not agree with its motivation or the necessity, one has a different assessment of the challenges and as to

how they should be met; for those who do not agree with those assessments the emergency appears unnecessary, a case of overreaction.

This is not a clear cut, black and white thing. “Emergency is bad so lift it” they say. Well, a state of emergency was imposed by the authorities, our government because of their perception of threats to national security on the ground and given the unlawful methods used by some. Therefore the question of lifting it is interesting. There is no curfew. It is only in Yerevan where the emergency decree applies. There are occasionally and at certain times searches in certain areas. There is no overreaction due to the state of emergency.

Another very interesting question: the house-arrest of the former president is a canard. Our government, through our Minister of Foreign Affairs has publicly reiterated to the international press what has been told to the former president himself. He is not under house-arrest. He has been given, as he had asked, a security detail. He is now told simply, that if he does not want a security detail, he is free to go and come as he wishes. However if he chooses not to want a security detail and chooses to move around on his own, then the State does not assume responsibility for his security. So far, he has declined that option and that alternative. He has preferred to be protected by the very “criminal” regime that is trying to guard him. He is protected. As to not receiving people, he receives foreign journalists and gives press conferences and fortunately, now that he is not in the street, he has time to write a rather “profound” but curiously interesting article which I read yesterday in the ‘Washington post’.

Let us come to the issue of the recommendations from all good willed delegations who with regret, expressed their frustrations and gave us recommendations: the thing revolves around the question of dialogue. Later, at the informal meeting there will be more we can discuss and answer.

We think the question of dialogue is central since we are a political organization and everybody says “the way out is through dialogue”. The problem with dialogue is that it takes two to tango. In my life there have been situations where I have extended my arm to shake someone’s hand and for whatever reason he pulls his hand back. Dialogue has been offered and mentioned. Dialogue has been attempted and the best proof of it is that the number three candidate has already joined and accepted the offer of collaboration and cooperation in a new government. Other candidates have responded. The fifth is getting ready and has already switched its position because he says if we do not unite into a government of cooperation, maybe even the bigger notion of a government of national unity, we are not going to get out of this situation. This offer to talk, this attempt has been continuously rejected by the candidate whose supporters believe that that is not the path to success, that the street is a better way to power than the voting booth. Since they claim the voting booth is corrupt, bad, unreliable, and fraudulent then it makes sense for them to go to the street at any cost.

People who presumably are trying to encourage the building of democracy should discourage giving credibility to this thinking, that the street is a legitimate path to democracy.

I am going to say the following because it has been confirmed to me by two different sources. Last week we had Ambassador Jan Kubiš, the former Secretary General of the OSCE here. When he was in Yerevan he went to meet the head of the opposition party: respect, curiosity and duty of the Council of Europe. My bilateral Armenian colleague to Slovakia took him back to the airport and accompanied him. In a slightly amused, bemused and incredulous way Ambassador Kubiš presumably told my colleague that the former president Ter-Petrosian when receiving him had said 'you know, you are visiting the President of Armenia. My next meeting with you within ten days will be in the Presidential Palace. We definitely got 65%, (even though he had previously claimed 95% to the press,) - we got fully 65% and therefore we are not going to give up'. I think that Minister Kubiš must have been taken back a little, as to whether it was bravura, conviction, reality or a state of illusion or delusion. When I first heard this, I thought it might have been an exaggeration. And then, here outside this room a person who sits here with whom Ambassador Kubiš had had a meeting, came with a slight smile, sarcasm and humor to tell me not knowing that I had already heard it, that Ambassador Kubiš had said that it was a bizarre experience to go to his residence and be told that I am talking to the real President of the Republic of Armenia. This was before the state of emergency.

That is the context in which these things have to be understood. We would like to agree with the European Union statement, which rather delicately, urges "all" the political forces to dialogue.

Our experience is that, in our capacity as the ODIHR, as the OSCE and as a group of Ambassadors we have some leverage on authorities. We know however how hollow is our ability to influence oppositions. We have only two tools on bilateral bases. Some countries, some delegations actively encourage oppositions with whom they may have had or have certain political ideological relationship, to exercise restraint. At other times thinking that an opposition is the one that is worthwhile, a bilateral mission either practically encourages or feeds hopes, perceptions and anticipation of outside support.

These are the items that we would like to discuss. As to specific things with people who may want to know how many people were wounded, etcetera, as of our latest information, there were 133 wounded people 72 of whom were policemen. There were some fatal casualties, 8 dead, and we more than anyone else, lament them. Armenia is in mourning that its citizens and its own public authorities had to confront in such circumstances.

Ultimately, if we are not here to protect human life, why are we here? We hear the phrase that somehow, violence is unacceptable. Anyone who knows anything about history of public and government actions, knows that states do not indulge or not indulge in it because it is unacceptable; as sovereigns and as authorities they decide when it is necessary and against who.

The day we can resolve this dilemma we shall all move to a higher degree of human consciousness, except for arbitrary and sadistic violence for its own sake in some dungeon. Violence is practiced by people with authority who usually ask others to do it because they see it as necessary, not because they like it, accept it or enjoy it.

I leave this deliberately hanging so that if anyone wants to discuss it more and ask me more direct questions, I am available.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.