

Remarks at OSCE Ministerial Meeting

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SECRETARY KERRY: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Secretary-General, colleagues, all. Before I address the priorities of the OSCE, let me just, first of all, say thank you to Sergey for his condolences to the American people regarding the events, and I want to express my personal condolences to the families of the victims of yesterday's shooting in San Bernardino, California. Obviously, all of us – too many people around this table have had similar incidents of one kind or another in the past years, and our thoughts and our prayers are with the 14 Americans who were lost and the many others wounded in this attack.

We don't yet know all of the facts of this incident, and though there may be superficial hints, we don't yet know why these shooters would perpetrate this vicious and this heinous crime. But I think everybody here knows that indiscriminate violence of any kind, in any community, in any country, cannot be tolerated. And we know, every single one of us – I think this is in keeping with what Sergey said in his comments about the OSCE at this moment of history, and measured against the road we have traveled – we have to do more. We have to do every single thing in our power to protect and defend families and communities, but equally importantly, to protect and defend an idea. After all, the Helsinki Accords are an idea; they're an expression of our hopes and our aspirations. And we need to, as leaders, exercise responsibility on behalf of our governments for our citizens – all of us.

We are observing this year the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. And as President Obama said in his declaration yesterday, we each have a continuing responsibility to uphold standards of that landmark document, to recognize the inherent dignity and human rights of every person; to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of every member-state; to refrain from the illegal or unjustified use of force across the OSCE region.

These aren't new ideas. These are principles on which this organization was founded, and these principles grew out of the terrible experience of the 20th century with two world wars. And Sergey referred to the failure of leaders to come together and make the decisions they needed to make to avoid that war. These principles provide the foundation for this organization, they're the reason for our being here, and they are the key, frankly, to empowering us to be able to respond with unity and with effect to the challenges of the 21st century.

Three weeks ago, as we all know, the people of Paris confronted one of those challenges – the scourge of violent extremism, and of what we know is a distortion, the hijacking of a religion. And since then, we have seen the citizens of France and the citizens of the world come together with France with determination to reject Daesh's sick ideology.

Sergey, we would extend to you our condolences for another demonstrable, heinous act of evil that was executed yesterday when a Russian citizen was grotesquely beheaded in the same fashion as other citizens that we've seen of my country and other countries – Japan, Britain, elsewhere – in one of the most grotesque fashions conceivable – an arrogance of evil, really.

Earlier this week, President Obama visited the Bataclan theater to send a very clear message from the American people that we stand in solidarity with the victims of terror not only in the City of Light, but those lost in recent weeks from Turkey, Lebanon, Russia, the United Kingdom, Egypt, and elsewhere.

And my friends, all you have to do is listen to that list and you understand that a year ago President Obama said we were at war with Daesh. Recently, President Hollande said we are at war with Daesh. And we are. We need to act like that in every respect in the choices that we make for our governments.

We are determined together to defeat Daesh. We have to defeat Daesh. There's no negotiation. There's nothing to negotiate about with people who license the rape of women not just as an instrument of war, which we have tragically seen in the past, but who license it as a daily matter of how you should live – who say that that rape of a non-Muslim woman is in fact a form of prayer, it's an expression of the will of God. And all of us know the lie of such a statement.

So just yesterday, our campaign to degrade and destroy Daesh grew stronger when the United Kingdom voted to join coalition partners in striking targets in Syria. And we welcome the United Kingdom's decision, along with the announcement by Germany, to commit more troops and resources to this fight. Both of those steps are clear signs of the international community's unity and resolve.

But let me just say to everybody that I think we know it, that without the ability to find some ground forces that are prepared to take on Daesh, this will not be won completely from the air, and we know that. Part of the political strategy that we're trying to effect in the Vienna process is geared towards trying to get the political transition in place, because if we get a political transition in place, we empower every nation and every entity to come together – the Syrian army together with the opposition, together with all the surrounding countries, together with Russia, the United States, and others – to go and fight Daesh. Just imagine how quickly this scourge could be eliminated – in a matter of literally months – if we were able to secure that kind of political resolution.

Just two days ago on another front, many of us were in Paris for climate talks. It seems incongruous in the context of what I've just been saying about Daesh, but it is a challenge to the security of people all over the world. If you think refugees are bad today, imagine what will happen if nation-states cease to be able to provide food or water to their people. Think what happens when the Pacific Islands or others are literally forced to move in order to survive. Over the past years, our countries have collaborated to counter and largely defeat the Ebola virus. A million people were predicted to die by last Christmas. But because we came together and organized our

efforts, we were able to avoid that catastrophe. And now we're almost literally Ebola-free in those three nations that were most affected.

So in the face of all these challenges and more, my friends, we have to remain faithful to the ideals that were enunciated in the Helsinki agreement 40 years ago. We have to remain true to the core principles on which this organization was built, and it cannot be just in the words of an annual meeting. It has to be in every single action that we take through the year to give life to those principles. That's why today I join with many of you in reviewing our call – we've already heard it – with respect to Ukraine. And it's a call to both Ukrainians and the Ukrainian Government and Russia.

We need Russia to work with the separatists that it backs to fully implement the Minsk agreements, including the removal of Russian forces and equipment from eastern Ukraine, to provide unfettered access to this very organization, which still has not been able to put its people fully into the operation of monitoring.

We need elections in Donbas under Ukrainian law and under monitoring by ODIHR, and we need the return of Ukrainian control on the border and the release of all hostages and illegally detained persons. And from Ukraine we need to see them do their part to restore the full ceasefire to withdraw the heavy weapons and to negotiate in good faith the Donbas election modalities. We also have a chance to make real progress on agreeing on procedures for these free and fair elections, and those will be critical with respect to defining an end to the troubles of Ukraine.

So this is a time for concrete steps and to avoid what is a disastrous but unnecessary conflict, and to begin the process of rebuilding Ukraine's east.

We also need to strengthen this organization itself. We need to strengthen the OSCE. And that means supporting the budgets of its independent institutions, which are absolutely critical to our early warning and conflict prevention systems. If a country has a problem with a particular aspect of the work of ODIHR, the Representative on the Freedom of the Media, or the High Commissioner for National Minorities, then there are plenty of ways to express genuine issues, but it shouldn't be played out by trying to squeeze the budget and affect the funding of these bodies that have important work to do. These institutions and other shared aspects such as the Special Monitoring Mission need and richly deserve our support, and they need that support in more than the words of an annual meeting.

My colleagues, we have accomplished a great deal in 40 years, but our work clearly remains far from complete. Protracted conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan are still unresolved – the great frozen conflicts. And we need to move decisively to rebuild military transparency in Europe and to increase information-sharing among our armed forces – a process that should start with a substantive OSCE Vienna Document in 2016. And we have more to do to fully meet our collective promise to protect human rights, oppose bigotry, advance gender equality, and enable our citizens to enjoy the full benefits of freedom.

I heard this message this morning when I met with a group of people from countries in the region – civil society leaders from the OSCE area. And they came with suggestions about what we can do, all of us, to actually support the freedoms of expression and association and peaceful assembly, of conscience, and religious belief. I have to say that in too many countries, NGOs are being put under new laws, are being restricted. Journalism is restricted. The freedom of the press to be able to operate is put in jeopardy, sometimes by threat of force. These folks who are courageous on the front lines – you don't know their names. Some of them may go to a jail and never be known except to their families and their friends. But this organization was put in place to support them. And there is no excuse, no acceptable rationale, for abusing the rights of citizens, for preventing journalists from doing their jobs, or from silencing legitimate political dissent.

So today, I hope that we will all reaffirm these fundamental ideals. The enduring promise of Helsinki should inspire all of us to tackle these shared challenges with renewed urgency, and to continue our effort, our progress in building a Europe and a Eurasia that are whole, and free, and at peace.

So thank you, Minister Dacic and thank you, Serbia, for leading the OSCE throughout 2015. And we very much look forward to working with all of you and trust, as everybody does here, that the incoming chairman, Minister Steinmeier and Germany, the right country and the right leader at the right moment to help take us into 2016, to live out the full measure of the principles that we come here to affirm. Thank you.

<http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/12/250319.htm>