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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE TO THE 16TH OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
OF THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
Helsinki, 4-5 December 2008**

*Delivered by Mr. Johan Verbeke,
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia*

It is a pleasure to greet all those gathered in Helsinki, the birthplace of the OSCE, for the 16th Ministerial Council of your organization.

Recent events in your region have riveted the world's attention and challenged existing arrangements for peace and security. Indeed, following the tragic fighting in Georgia and the South Caucasus in August, and in light of persistent instability in the area, we may have to re-think our respective roles on the ground. The conflict also demonstrated that the lack of a meaningful political process over an extended period of time can lead to conflict. This lesson should be borne in mind when considering all protracted conflicts in the OSCE area.

We must therefore do our utmost to ensure the success of the Geneva International Discussions. The constructive attitude displayed by the parties during the last round of discussions was encouraging, and I hope will be in evidence again when talks resume two weeks from now. Meanwhile, all sides must turn their immediate attention to the most pressing short-term problems: security and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

The OSCE and the United Nations have also worked together during the past year to shore up peace and stability in other areas. In Kosovo, the OSCE Mission remains a central element of a reconfigured UNMIK. In Afghanistan, the OSCE's experience in border-management, counter-narcotics and police reform can make an important contribution, and the United Nations has taken note of your decision to increase your support. I encourage the OSCE to consider further electoral assistance activities, including the deployment of a support team during elections scheduled for next year.

New avenues of cooperation have opened up in Central Asia. The United Nations has established a Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, which looks forward to working with the OSCE on peace-making initiatives in the region.

Our cooperation also extends to human rights, including the human rights aspects of electoral processes and conflict and post-conflict situations. We are working hard to prevent statelessness in South Eastern Europe and to strengthen border management capacities in Central Asia. And the United Nations attaches great importance to our common efforts to address environmental concerns in the OSCE region, in particular climate change.

Your deliberations come at a time of challenge and change for the region and for your organization. The United Nations and the OSCE are good, strong partners, and I look forward to strengthening the bonds of cooperation further still, in the interest of peace and stability throughout the region and beyond.