



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Report by the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Amb. Knut Vollebaek

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 17, 2010

Mr. Chairman,

The United States warmly welcomes Ambassador Vollebaek back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his comprehensive report.

As we mentioned during last week's Copenhagen Anniversary Conference, treatment of minorities is at the heart of many of Europe's potential, active and frozen conflicts. The persistence of tension and conflict over minority issues means it is imperative for us to do even more to address not only the causes, but also the conditions or actions that can exacerbate conflict.

This applies most urgently in the case of Kyrgyzstan. Two days ago, the participating States adopted a consensus statement expressing deep concern over recent developments in the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan. We reaffirmed our readiness to provide assistance in resolving the crisis, preventing spill-over of tensions and promoting post-conflict rehabilitation.

We believe the three problems you highlighted at the beginning of May, after your visit to Kyrgyzstan, are still true – people are disillusioned with politics; physical security and the protection of property rights remain acute problems; and closed borders are having continued negative consequences. In this climate, members of ethnic or national minorities have become very vulnerable to attack. Many have now chosen to flee the escalating violence in the south of the country.

We believe that the OSCE, together with the international community, must redouble efforts to help restore rule of law and ensure the safety of all persons. We are working closely with participating States to frame an appropriate set of next steps in Kyrgyzstan which we believe should include an OSCE borders monitoring team and an OSCE police task force. Both projects are designed to help resolve the current crisis, and prevent spillover of tensions in the region, in order to promote post conflict rehabilitation, as we agreed in our statement on Monday. We also hope to see the important work begun by your office after the April outbreak of violence to continue, as soon as circumstances permit, to begin the urgent process of mediation and reconciliation desperately needed in Kyrgyzstan.

Over the years, the situation for minority populations has generally improved across the OSCE, as democratic norms have taken hold in more and more participating States. Unfortunately, however, the situation for some minorities – most prominently Roma and Sinti – has deteriorated, sometimes significantly, especially in places where nationalism and social intolerance have risen to the surface after lying dormant for decades. We urge participating

States to seek new and meaningful ways to fulfill our commitments in connection with the 2003 Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area.

Ambassador Vollebaek, your efforts play a crucial role in reducing tensions within and among States through addressing sensitive issues related to national minorities. We are encouraged by the interest expressed by the governments of a number of participating States to implement your recommendations. We also welcome that the de facto authorities in Abkhazia are prepared to cooperate with your office.

It is clear that while definite advances have been made, particularly in the Balkans, there are still significant problems related to minority education in the OSCE area. The restrictions in several States on the ability of persons belonging to national minorities to have adequate opportunities to be educated in their mother tongue are cause for concern. Such restrictions are always worrying, but particularly so when they take place in separatist areas such as Abkhazia and Transnistria, where the situation is already tense. We agree with you, Mr. High Commissioner, that such restrictions have the potential to further increase tensions in the region.

Conferral of citizenship, when used as a political tool in inter-state relations, also has the potential to increase tensions between states. Like the High Commissioner, we would have concerns over the conferral of citizenship in situations involving *en masse* citizenship, the absence of genuine and effective links between the state and its nationals, or when designed to undermine the sovereignty of another state and disturb friendly relations.

We continue to support High Commissioner Vollebaek and his team, and their persistent and even-handed focus on improving education, participation by minorities in public life, the conditions of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area, and relations between states and minorities in neighboring states with whom they share affinities.

We look forward to continuing discussion of these issues at the upcoming Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.