



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Vice Prime Minister and State Minister for Reintegration of Georgia, Temur Yakobashvili

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
March 19, 2010

It is a pleasure to welcome Vice Prime Minister and State Minister for Reintegration Yakobashvili to today's meeting.

The United States welcomes the Georgian government's adoption of a new engagement strategy with the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, and strongly supports the strategy's objectives. The strategy is a constructive step towards easing tensions, and a way to reach out to all residents of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.

We believe firmly that no government should hinder the free flow of information, or opportunities for contact between individuals, and we believe such engagement will contribute to mutual trust and understanding.

We remain committed to a long-term, peaceful resolution of the conflict in Georgia. The Geneva discussions and the Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) have an important role to play, as they provide key fora for addressing issues of concern on a regular and pragmatic basis. We urge all participants to make full use of these fora and to quickly reconvene the IPRM for the South Ossetia region, which has failed to meet for several months due to a boycott by the South Ossetian participants.

We believe that through the Geneva discussions and in other ways, the OSCE and the international community can play a valuable role in resolving ongoing problems and monitoring the security, human rights, and humanitarian situation on the ground. In this regard, we remain convinced that an OSCE presence in Georgia is essential.

As you know, Mr. Minister, we fully support Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We have repeatedly called on Russia to honor the terms of the August 12 cease-fire agreement, and today we again urge Russia to withdraw its troops to positions held prior to the start of hostilities and to provide free access for humanitarian assistance to the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. As we have said on numerous occasions, Russia's characterization of these regions as independent does not relieve it of these commitments.

Thank you for joining us, Mr. Minister. We look forward to additional constructive steps towards easing tensions in Georgia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.