



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

High Commissioner on National Minorities

www.osce-hcnm.org

Statement by
Knut Vollebaek

OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities

Early warning to the (special) Permanent Council on 14 June 2010

[Check Against Delivery]

Vienna, Austria – 14 June 2010

Mr. Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the establishment of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, my predecessors and I have been actively engaged in Kyrgyzstan. Since I have taken up my position, I have closely monitored the inter-ethnic relations in the country. As you may recall, I addressed the Permanent Council on 6 May 2010 after I had just visited Kyrgyzstan. Under my mandate, it is my responsibility to bring a situation to the attention of the OSCE Permanent Council if I deem it particularly serious. At the PC meeting of 6 May I expressed the fear that the inter-ethnic situation might further deteriorate, and I gave you a detailed account of my reasons for this. I referred to the acute problems of physical security and protection of property. Many of my interlocutors at the time asserted that the police do not command the trust of the population. I also pointed to activities by criminal groups. On this occasion, I mentioned that "post- uprising Kyrgyzstan represents one of the OSCE's biggest challenges since the 2008 war in the Caucasus". Unfortunately this is even more true today and we should rise to meet the challenge.

In the weeks following my visit I continued to monitor the developments closely and I decided to visit Kyrgyzstan again on 5 June 2010. During my discussions with minority representatives they expressed deep concern and asserted that relations between Kyrgyzstan's titular nation and its national minorities were deteriorating rapidly. Among their grievances was the absence of a responsible interlocutor on the side of the authorities.

After my return the situation has continued to deteriorate and over the last days we have witnessed a dramatic escalation with over a hundred people killed (there are unconfirmed reports of several hundreds killed), more than a thousand wounded and tens of thousands of people fleeing. As the information currently available is limited to the larger cities of Osh and Jalalabad, and as the situation in the villages is so far unclear, the real number of casualties might be much higher. The development is particularly dramatic in the south of the country where we witness attempts of ethnic cleansing.

After my meetings with the leader of the provisional authorities, Ms. Roza Otunbaeva, I am convinced of her understanding of Kyrgyzstan's multi-ethnic character and of her good intentions. It has, however, become evident that the provisional government does not possess the power to enforce law and order in the country. Whatever the reasons for this might be – and there may be several – groups of ethnic Kyrgyz attack ethnic Uzbeks in a systematic manner, killing, looting and burning, sometimes provoking counter-attacks.

In view of the above, on 12 June I invoked Art.13ff of my mandate and issued an early warning which I communicated to the Chairperson-in-Office, State Secretary and Minister of

Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Mr. Kanat Saudabaev. In my letter to him I expressed my fear that the inter-ethnic situation will deteriorate even further unless effective and immediate action is taken. I stated four reasons for my warning:

1. From talks I have had with all sides it seems that the provisional government has insufficient capacities to deal with the issues at hand, first and foremost the inter-ethnic violence. There is hardly any trust in the provisional government on the side of the minorities.
2. The provisional government appears to have major difficulties controlling the situation in the whole country. If they do not manage to establish the rule of law, this might destabilise the whole region.
3. The situation has deteriorated considerably over the last few days and weeks and the trends do not point in the right direction. It seems that nationalism has also found its way into the daily lives of people, therefore threatening the complete breakdown of inter-ethnic relations.
4. The population, in particular national minorities, live in fear of attacks. There is a perception that their fears are not countered and that ethnic minorities are easy prey to criminals and others who have an interest in destabilizing the situation and taking advantage for their own goals.

I stand ready to enter into further contact and closer consultations with all parties concerned with a view to addressing inter-ethnic tensions. It is my strong conviction, however, that the most urgent task is to re-establish law and order. Only when security has been restored, can we address the more long term issues. For this purpose, immediate international assistance is required.

In view of the present situation, I believe that the OSCE as a regional organisation under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter should request an urgent meeting of the Security Council with a view to taking immediate action in order to restore public safety and the rule of law. A Security Council resolution authorizing the UN itself or an appropriate regional organisation constitutes the best legal basis for such action.

It is my assessment that an independent international commission should be established in order to investigate the inter-ethnic violence. Such an investigation is necessary in order to re-establish trust between the different ethnic communities.

Furthermore, I recommend that a power-sharing agreement should be considered which would oblige Kyrgyzstan to include ethnic Uzbeks and representatives of other national minorities in all state institutions, including law enforcement agencies, judicial bodies and public administration at all levels. In addition, it is imperative that the Kyrgyz provisional

government establishes an authoritative institution that is responsible for communication with the different minority groups.

As already mentioned, the current crisis has resulted in large numbers of refugees and IDPs. I call upon the international community to provide the necessary humanitarian assistance and I commend Uzbekistan for accommodating a great number of them.

Finally, in view of the dramatic situation I appeal to all of you, the participating States of the OSCE, today to take the necessary decisions for immediate action in order to stop further ethnic violence, including by bringing this matter to the attention of the UN Security Council.