



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to High Commissioner on National Minorities, Knut Vollebaek

As delivered by
Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Jeffrey Vandreal
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 18, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman,

The United States joins others in warmly welcoming Ambassador Vollebaek back to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his thorough and thoughtful report.

Mr. Ambassador, we share your concern about the problem of increasing segregation along ethnic lines in education. We support your efforts to operationalize OSCE commitments in this field, including through your assistance to Ukrainian and Russian authorities on the educational situation of their minority populations and to Macedonia to address ethnic segregation in primary and secondary education. Your efforts to enhance regional cooperation in Central Asia on key issues of common interest to the States – primarily related to education – are also laudable.

We fully agree with you on the importance of representative democracy, including the participation of individuals from the different ethnic, racial, or religious groups that form the fabric of the society in the governance of their country. In the United States, the strength of our democracy is rooted in majority rule, with strong protection for the voting rights of individuals, without discrimination on the basis of race, color, or membership in a language minority group. The U.S. Government has invested a great deal in outreach to minorities, and has made an effort to include them in the consultation and decision-making process wherever possible. We view this as critical to increasing understanding and integration of minorities in society and ultimately, to preventing conflict.

We strongly support your activities in Georgia, where your efforts to call attention to the rights and needs of ethnic minorities and internally displaced persons are particularly important. Your September 2008 trip to Georgia, including the Abkhazia region, and your office's participation in the joint HCNM/ODIHR assessment mission a month later, were valuable contributions to efforts to protect vulnerable communities there.

In your November 2008 joint report with ODIHR on human rights in the war-affected areas of Georgia, you rightly indicated that serious human rights and humanitarian concerns remain. We reiterate our call for the immediate implementation of the report's recommendations, and once more urge a follow-up assessment to ascertain the current human rights conditions in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia.

We hope you and your office will expand your work throughout Georgia, including in the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in order to foster peace and stability and to ensure human rights are respected.

We commend your essential work to advance human rights and improve interethnic relations throughout the OSCE area and wish you every success in your work for the upcoming year.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.