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**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM
TO THE 642ND PLENARY MEETING OF THE FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION
ON 6 APRIL 2011 ON THE OSCE CODE OF CONDUCT: THE UK SERVICE
COMPLAINTS COMMISSIONER**

Mr. Chairperson,

In the context of our obligations in respect of the OSCE's Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, in particular paragraphs 32 and 33 concerning the fundamental freedoms of members of our Armed Forces and their legal and administrative protection, I would like to draw participating States' attention to the recent report of the UK's Service Complaints Commissioner.

We have previously briefed the Forum on the role of the post of Service Complaints Commissioner: it was created in the UK by the Armed Forces Act 2006, with a remit to cover any complaint made by any service personnel. Dr Susan Atkins was appointed as the UK's first Service Complaints Commissioner on 1 December 2007 to provide independent oversight of the new Service complaints process. One of the roles of the Service Complaints Commissioner is to report annually on the fairness, effectiveness and efficiency of the Service complaints process to the Secretary of State for Defence.

The third annual report by the independent Service Complaints Commissioner was published on 31 March 2011. The report highlights the significant improvements made to the complaints system by MOD and the Services over the last twelve months, and during the Commissioner's first three years in post. Timeliness in the handling of complaints remains a particular area of concern for the Service Complaints Commissioner, especially in cases of bullying, harassment and discrimination. MOD welcomes the report and will consider in full with the Services, the findings and recommendations made. The Secretary of State for Defence will provide the Service Complaints Commissioner with a formal response in due course.

A copy of the full report is available on the Internet on the Service Complaints Commissioner's website at <http://armedforcescomplaints.independent.gov.uk/>

Thank you Mr Chairman,

We would ask that this statement be attached to the journal of the day.