

22nd Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, Belgrade
Statement by Ambassador David Stuart, Head of Delegation for Australia
4 December 2015

ENGLISH only

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We congratulate Serbia on their successful chairmanship of the OSCE in 2015, and thank you for your hospitality here in Belgrade. We would also like to thank Switzerland for its chairmanship of the Asian Partners Contact Group this year; and thank you to the government of the Republic of Korea for hosting this year's Asian Partners Conference. We wish Germany well, as it takes up the OSCE Chair for 2016.

Australia shares the concern that many Participating States have expressed at the ongoing violence in eastern Ukraine. We again urge Russia to abide by its international obligations, including to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. We will not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea. And we call on Russia to halt its campaign of destabilisation in eastern Ukraine, including through: withdrawing all support to separatists; removing all its military forces and assets from Ukraine; and fully implementing the commitments made in the Minsk II package of agreements, including allowing Ukraine to regain full control of its borders.

Australia has welcomed the strong engagement in the Normandy Format, and the September recommitment to the Minsk ceasefire, which resulted in a much-needed reduction in fighting. It is therefore disturbing to observe the increase in violence in November.

Australia is not immune to the consequences of the conflict in Ukraine. We continue to grieve the loss of 298 innocent people on board flight MH17, including many who called Australia home. The report of the Dutch Safety Board Investigation into the causes of the crash was both meticulous and compelling. So it is therefore a matter for genuine disappointment that Russia vetoed the draft UNSC resolution on the establishment of an MH17 international criminal tribunal on 29 July this year.

Australia wants to ensure those responsible for the downing of the plane are held accountable, as demanded by UNSC resolution 2166. Australia, along with the countries represented on the Joint Investigation Team - the Netherlands, Belgium, Malaysia and Ukraine - is working hard to ensure the completion of the criminal investigation as soon as

possible. We are also carefully considering the available prosecution options with a view to ensuring a prosecution can occur as soon as reasonably possible.

Australia reiterates its deep appreciation to the OSCE and its Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, for the assistance it provided us and others following the downing of MH17. The work of the SMM has only become more important as we move into the crucial period for implementation of the Minsk II agreement. We agree with the Participating States who have called for the SMM to be given unfettered access into conflict areas.

Australia stood in horror with the world at the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Beirut. Russia, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Turkey and Tunisia have all experienced the horror of terrorism recently. There have been many other examples this last year. The surge of violent extremism in the OSCE area and around the world is one of the most significant security threats we face, one which demands a collective response. The OSCE can make a contribution, through efforts to share information on CVE policies, including the regularly-updated inventory of Participating States' and Partners' policies on CVE.

Australia will further strengthen our engagement and cooperation with international partners against the terrorist threats. The recent spate of attacks shows that no country is immune from the threat of Daesh's poisonous ideology, including our own. We agree with many who argue that we must take the war to Daesh. That is why we are making a major contribution to the international coalition to disrupt, degrade and ultimately defeat Daesh, including supporting the government of Iraq through training and air operations. We also continue to advocate a political solution to the crisis in Syria and for reconciliation in Iraq, and to respond to the pressing humanitarian needs generated by these conflicts.

Another shared priority we have with the OSCE is to advance security and stability in Afghanistan. Australia is ready to play its part in helping Afghans secure a better future for themselves. There is a 250-strong Australian Defence Force presence in Afghanistan, as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission. Australia is committed to providing US \$100 million to sustain Afghan Security institutions until 2018. Our bilateral aid program (\$80 million AUD for the year 2015-2016) helps economic growth and governance, as well as empowering women and girls, building resilience and supporting at-risk populations.

One reason Australia became a Partner for Cooperation with the OSCE was our view that its principles and values were consonant with our own. We see the democratic and

human rights values embedded in the Helsinki Final Act as central to the OSCE's raison d'être. But these values are under attack from within the Organization.

In this regard, we see the role of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the OSCE's Representatives on Fundamental Freedom, including freedom of the media, as indispensable to the OSCE. We applaud their independent, energetic approach to implementing their respective mandates. We also have had the chance to see the very real contribution made to strengthening the rule of law, governance and human rights by the OSCE field missions to places such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo.

We also look to the OSCE to play a leading role in promoting gender equality and recognising that women and girls are particularly vulnerable to violence during times of conflict, emergencies and crises. We encourage those working to strengthen the 2004 OSCE Gender Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality. We recall this was one of the activities supported at the Asian Partners Conference Australia hosted in 2013. For our part, we are increasing our assistance to the efforts by the UN and others to address the impact of conflicts on women, and will soon consider the outcomes of the interim review of our National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.