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United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by Prime Minister, H.E. Bertie Ahern

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Joint FSC/Permanent Council, Vienna
February 27, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States warmly welcomes Prime Minister Ahern to the Permanent Council today and thanks him for highlighting the achievements of the Helsinki process.

This Organization has done much to develop and stabilize the political landscape of Europe in the past 30 years, without bloodshed or gunfire. Many people lead better lives today because of our collective efforts, and their rights and freedoms are sheltered by the commitments we have made. The Helsinki process could not have been successful without the thousands of brave individuals who over the years have stepped forward to speak out when Final Act commitments have not been met. These people, committed to the advancement of human rights, dedicated their lives to ensuring that the words of the Final Act were put into practice. Most did so at great personal risk, some paying for their activism with their very lives. This is why we welcome the particular attention paid by the OSCE to the plight of human rights defenders and urge continued focus on these brave men and women.

We agree fully with you about the importance of the OSCE's human dimension. The human dimension of the OSCE is one area where differences between principle and performance are most keenly felt in the daily lives of our citizens. As Congressman Steny Hoyer noted several years ago, true security and peace cannot be achieved in the absence of respect for basic human rights and the rule of law. It is precisely where the distance between commitment and compliance is greatest that the OSCE and its institutions, especially ODIHR, must continue to concentrate their efforts.

Mr. Prime Minister, we support your call for a return to implementation of the CFE Treaty by all parties. Under the CFE Treaty, openness and transparency regarding the major armed forces in Europe have replaced distrust and lack of information. The limitations intended to prevent new, destabilizing concentrations of military forces and the transparency to ensure compliance are not available through other instruments. That is a key reason why the CFE Treaty remains of significant value to the security of Europe.

The United States and other States Parties have been engaged intensively for the last several months in a serious dialogue on the CFE Treaty with the Russian Federation to achieve movement on Allies' ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty and Russia's fulfillment of its remaining Istanbul commitments. We call on Russia to reverse its suspension and join us by resuming full implementation of the CFE Treaty.

The CSCE and the OSCE have had their share of contentious problems, and there are serious disagreements about the course this Organization should take in the coming months and years. We must remain firm in seeking solutions to these problems while staying true to the principles of the Helsinki Final Act.

Will we take the path toward greater cooperation and more active promotion of comprehensive security, as we have done before? As Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns stated in Madrid, The United States intends to take the higher road of cooperation, compromise and dialogue as we continue to try to build a democratic peace in Europe. We hope you will all work with us towards this goal.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.