



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Shooting of an OSCE Vehicle in South Ossetia

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Samuel C. Laeuchli
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 19, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

For several weeks, many participating States in the OSCE have expressed their deep concern regarding the increasingly unstable situations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the potential for further unrest. On June 14th in South Ossetia, we again saw how quickly diplomatic tensions can escalate into physical violence. As we all now know, an OSCE vehicle was hit twice by grenade rounds. The gaping holes in the rear and driver's sides of the vehicle indicate that only the vehicle's armor prevented the serious injury, or even death, of OSCE officials.

Though we are relieved that no OSCE personnel were injured, we lament that an 18-year-old boy died of his wounds from the firefight. It is regrettable that both sides of this conflict were not able to stop fighting until it escalated to a level resulting in loss of life. We strongly urge both sides to reduce inflammatory rhetoric and to instruct officials and the local population to refrain from violence or incitement to violence. We reiterate our support for a peace process that respects Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Chairman, this incident reinforces the importance of an increase in the number of OSCE monitors across South Ossetia, as part of an effort to increase transparency and alleviate tensions. Joint monitoring of the Roki Tunnel and the establishment of a checkpoint at the village of Didi Gupta would also serve to increase transparency, and we reiterate our call for these steps.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.