

ENGLISH only



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Georgia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 26, 2009

Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman.

The United States will also like to commend OSCE, EU, and UN coordination of the February 17-18 round of Geneva talks, and welcomes the agreement to open new lines of communication to prevent new clashes and defuse tensions. While we would have liked to have seen further agreement on the modalities of the mechanisms to prevent and manage security incidents, we welcome this first step.

Good-faith implementation of the agreed incident prevention and response mechanisms is critical. We strongly urge all parties to meet regularly with international monitors to address continuing security incidents and abuses and prevent them from escalating into wider conflicts. In this regard, Madam Chairwoman, we recall in our last regular Permanent Council meeting one delegation accused the OSCE military monitoring officers of a direct provocation on the February 10 incident, which led to our own OSCE monitoring officers' detention by South Ossetian militia. We would appreciate hearing any further clarification the Secretariat might have on this issue. We also call on all parties to allow for joint visits, together with international monitors, to the site of incidents. These mechanisms should become operational as soon as possible.

Access for international monitors to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia is essential. Repeated incidents of violence, including kidnappings and killings of Georgian policemen and civilians, underscore the need for uninhibited access to the whole of Georgia. Together with international monitors, the incident prevention and response mechanisms can help deter violence, ensure the safety and protection of civilians, promote human rights, and further the implementation of the August 12 and September 8 agreements. We also call on Russia to ensure the rule of law and respect for human rights are upheld in those areas of Georgia where Russian military forces are present.

We regret that the Geneva talks failed to produce agreement on access to the South Ossetian region of Georgia for shipments of humanitarian aid. It is difficult to understand why the South Ossetian and Russian participants could not accept a one-time delivery of humanitarian assistance by the UN and the EU via the cheapest and safest route, that is, from undisputed Georgian territory to Tskhinvali. We call on all parties to allow the "free" and "unhindered" flow of humanitarian assistance, and I put emphasis on those two words— free and unhindered, because it is directly called for in point three of the August 12 Medvedev-Saakashvili cease-fire agreement and in the UN Security Council Resolution 1866. We also fully support the Co-Chairs of the Geneva discussions in calling for the resumption of the talks in March or April to discuss the critical issues of security and non-use of force. This is no time for delay.

Like other delegations, we are convinced the OSCE has played and can continue to play a vital role in restoring stability in Georgia. We note the valuable work of the OSCE, and our Chairman-in-office, in restoring natural gas flows from undisputed Georgian territory to the South Ossetian region, and urge South Ossetian representatives to honor their pledge to guarantee water supplies throughout the conflict zone. We believe the OSCE can offer unique expertise in these efforts. We urge all parties to carefully consider the recommendations of the recent OSCE assessment of irrigation and potable water supply systems, and to work together to find a practical, mutually beneficial solution.

Madam Chairwoman, the United States believes a continued OSCE presence in Georgia is critical. We welcome your constructive proposal to allow the OSCE to continue its important work in South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia without violating any OSCE member State's redlines regarding South Ossetia's political status. We urge all delegations to work with the Chairmanship here in Vienna in a spirit of good will and collaboration to reach agreement on the basis of your constructive proposal.

The United States will continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, and will help in all ways to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.