

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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REMARKS

**Secretary of State John Kerry
At OSCE Ministerial Plenary Session**

**December 4, 2014
Basel, Switzerland**

SECRETARY KERRY: Thank you, President Burkhalter, for hosting us, and thanks to you and your team for chairing the OSCE during a very turbulent year. Your excellencies, when this ministerial last convened, tens of thousands of Ukrainian citizens were on the Maidan. And they were not intimidated by police violence, the threat of further repression, or the freezing weather. They were warmed by a simple desire: to live in a country with an honest government. The people of Ukraine continue to persevere. Through – tested by external aggression, they are casting off the shackles of repression and opening a new and promising chapter in their nation’s history. Twice in the past year, they have chosen new leaders through genuine democratic elections, and President Poroshenko and Prime Minister Yatsenyuk have pledged to implement a robust agenda of reforms designed to make Ukraine more secure, just, inclusive, prosperous, and free.

As the people of Ukraine have fought for their country, the OSCE has played a pivotal role. The organization has proven to the world the value of collective security and human rights instruments that we have built there, and underlined how important it is that these tools be allowed to work. In Ukraine, the OSCE has deployed the Special Monitoring Mission and used the Vienna Document to send inspection teams. The High Commission on National Minorities and Representatives on Freedom of the Media have supported civil society, documented abuses, and defended the voiceless in Crimea and other parts of Ukraine. ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly organized the largest election observation effort in OSCE history, and the list goes on.

The international community is united in condemning the violence that has led to so much needless suffering in Ukraine, but the violence continues. Regrettably, Russia continues to supply new weapons and increase support for armed separatists. In doing so, it fails to meet its international and OSCE obligations and to live up to an agreement that it actually negotiated and signed. The result is damage to its credibility, and its own citizens wind up paying a steep economic and human price, including the price of hundreds of Russian soldiers who fight and die in a country where they had and have no right to be.

So let me emphasize: The United States and countries that support Ukraine’s sovereignty and rights do not seek confrontation. It is not our design or desire that we see a Russia isolated through its own actions. In fact, we are convinced that Moscow could rebuild trust and relationships if it simply helps to calm turbulent waters, if it takes steps now to implement the Minsk protocol in letter and spirit, end support for violence in eastern Ukraine, withdraw Russian weapons and fighters, use its influence on the separatists to release all hostages, guarantee safe and unfettered access for OSCE monitors, cooperate in securing and respecting the entire internationally-recognized Ukrainian-Russian border, and end the illegal occupation of Crimea. No one gains from this confrontation. The nations around this table

have too much work to do, too many common challenges, from terrorism and nuclear proliferation to epidemic disease and climate change.

My friends, more broadly, the crisis that we have experienced in Europe this past year is not the fault of the international system. It stems from the unwillingness of individual actors to abide by the rules and the principles of that system. When rules are broken, they need to be enforced, not rewritten. Despite numerous violations of Helsinki this year, the timeless wisdom of the final act – that sustainable security can only be achieved when fundamental freedoms and human rights are protected – has been reaffirmed. To build a more secure OSCE area, we need to acknowledge the serious failure of some member states to live up to their responsibilities, and these failures affect us all. In too many of the countries gathered here, the space for independent civil society and media is shrinking, breeding abuses of power and corruption. Laws have been enacted that repress religious freedom and unfairly punish legitimate political dissent. We have seen a rising tide of intolerance across the OSCE region, including hate crimes targeting Roma, Jews, Muslims, the LGBT community, and others. This organization is at its best when it sheds light where there is darkness and when it stands up against repression and for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including internet freedom. It is at its best when it speaks out, when we speak out, when society and independent activists and journalists – wherever people's rights are denied or in jeopardy.

In closing, I thank President Burkhalter once again for his stewardship, the people of Switzerland for their hospitality, and we look forward to working with Prime Minister Vucic and Foreign Minister Dacic during Serbia's chairmanship next year. And you will be sure that you will have our support as we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Thank you.

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