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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Geneva Discussions

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 15, 2010

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The United States was pleased to participate in the March 30 round of the Geneva discussions on security and stability arrangements in Georgia.

We welcome the co-chairs' continuing efforts to identify interim steps that can both improve the security situation on the ground and lay the groundwork for more far-reaching arrangements. We firmly believe that the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) can provide important fora for addressing issues of concern on a regular and pragmatic basis -- when they operate as envisioned. We urge participants to make full use of these mechanisms and to focus on achieving practical results. In particular, we urge the Russian Federation to use its influence to encourage the South Ossetians to participate fully in these mechanisms without delay.

We note, Mr. Chairman, that the failure to utilize agreed mechanisms on the ground has made it difficult to address a number of existing problems. Detentions and violent incidents persist, allegations of human rights abuses remain unaddressed, and civilians continue to suffer. Actions such as the signing on April 7 of an agreement allowing the Russian Federation to build a military base in the South Ossetia region of Georgia are far from helpful. Absent Georgia's consent, establishment of such a base would clearly violate Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and contravene the Russian Federation's commitments under its August 12, 2008 cease-fire agreement with Georgia. We have repeatedly called on the Russian Federation to honor the terms of this agreement, and we reiterate that call today. The Russian Federation committed not only to withdraw its troops to positions held prior to the start of hostilities, but also to provide free access for humanitarian assistance to the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia. We remind the Russian Federation that its characterization of these regions as independent does not relieve it of its commitments.

As we work to improve the security and humanitarian situation in Georgia, we will continue to urge respect for the human rights of all individuals in the conflict areas; to call for free and unhindered access to the whole of Georgia; and to seek the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees. We will also continue to urge the re-establishment of an OSCE presence throughout Georgia, as we remain convinced that the OSCE and other international actors can play a valuable role in resolving the ongoing problems and providing critical monitoring of human rights and humanitarian conditions.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, let me reiterate our firm commitment to Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.