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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement Regarding the February 21st Attacks on Embassy Belgrade

As delivered by Political Counselor Sam Laeuchli
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 28, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States condemns the attacks that occurred against a number of foreign diplomatic missions in Belgrade on February 21st. We are particularly disturbed by evidence that suggests police protection was pulled away from the U.S. Embassy and other embassies in Belgrade that were attacked.

Mr. Chairman, we would like to remind Serbia that, as a party to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, it has a special duty to provide adequate protection to all foreign diplomatic personnel and property on its territory. We hold the Serbian government responsible for the safety and well-being of our embassy employees and premises.

The United States thanks the Serbian delegation for its note verbale circulated last Friday condemning these attacks. We welcome Serbia's pledge to do everything it can to find and punish the perpetrators, as well as to ensure the protection of the diplomatic missions in the future. We urge the Government of Serbia to continue to make statements condemning violence against foreign diplomats.

We would welcome as well another pledge from the Government of Serbia: that officials at all levels live up to their promises, made repeatedly during negotiations over Kosovo's status, to refrain from inflammatory conduct or actions that would incite violence.

Since the attacks of last Thursday, Serbian government ministers have claimed that the international community did "violence" to Serbia in Kosovo, thereby implying that violence against international diplomats is a legitimate response. While the diplomatic actions of the international community to resolve Kosovo's status may not have been to the Serbian government's liking, violence is not an appropriate response.

For all the accusations of "violence" by others, however, it is ministers of the Serbian government—and ONLY they—who have in fact condoned actual, physical violence, whether on the streets of Belgrade or directed against UNMIK personnel in Kosovo, including the attacks on two border checkpoints on February 19th and on a third on February

25th. We are particularly troubled by Minister Samardzic's words welcoming the destruction of two border checkpoints as "consistent with the general policy" of the Government of Serbia and saying that: "the United States are to blame for all troubles."

By contrast, the ethnic Albanian community has not responded to provocations. The Kosovo government has again reiterated its commitment to build a peaceful, multi-ethnic society and has passed key legislation to implement the Ahtisaari plan. The irresponsible manipulation of language by ministers of the Serbian government can only redound against Serbia, in the form of increased international isolation.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the United States must condemn the violent attacks aimed at journalists that took place following the rally in Belgrade, and we call on the Serbian government to ensure the protection of all members of the national and international media.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.