



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Geneva Co-Chairs and Head of the EUMM Ambassador Haber

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Joint FSC/Permanent Council, Vienna
June 17, 2009

It is a pleasure to welcome our distinguished guests to today's meeting. The United States greatly appreciates the leadership of Ambassadors Morel, Verbeke, and Christopoulos in coordinating the Geneva discussions, and commends their tireless efforts to ensure constructive talks. We also greatly appreciate Ambassador Haber's leadership of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, and commend the Mission's valuable engagement on the ground, and would like to thank Ambassador Salber for his report on the work of the OSCE's military monitors; people who have carried our banner proudly with professionalism, valor, dignity and honor, and I would ask him to please pass on our thanks to all of them for all the work they have done.

The United States firmly believes that the Geneva discussions are critical to enhancing security, stability, and respect for human rights in Georgia. We believe the European Union, the UN, and the OSCE together possess the expertise needed to tackle the challenges inherent in the process, and look forward to continued fruitful cooperation among the three organizations.

We hope the July 1 discussions in Geneva will yield concrete results, and urge all parties to demonstrate a constructive and creative approach. In advance of next month's talks, we again urge the good-faith implementation of the incident prevention and response mechanisms agreed in February, and call on all parties to allow for joint visits, together with international monitors, to the sites of incidents. We are convinced the OSCE should continue to participate in the Geneva process, despite Russia having rejected the compromise proposed by the Chairmanship that would have prevented the closure of the OSCE Mission to Georgia.

We deeply regret that on June 15, Russia vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that would have extended the current mandate of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) by two weeks to allow for negotiations on a substantive mandate to continue. Russia objected to a reference to UN Security Council Resolution 1808, which includes an explicit statement of Council support for Georgia's territorial integrity. Russia voted in favor of Resolution 1808 – and even after its August 2008 recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it voted yet again for two other UN resolutions invoking Georgia's territorial integrity.

The entire international security architecture in Georgia, built up over many years to promote human rights and create conditions for the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees, is being undermined by one participating State's insistence that the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia be recognized by the international community as independent countries.

Despite these setbacks, we will continue to urge free and unhindered humanitarian access to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia (as agreed in UNSCR 1866 last February and in the August 12 cease-fire agreement); we will continue to call for full respect for the human rights of all individuals in the conflict areas; and the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of internally displaced persons.

The EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia is a crucial stabilizing factor, and plays a key role in the implementation of the incident prevention and response mechanisms. It also is critical to the international community's efforts to monitor compliance with the August 12 cease-fire agreement and the subsequent implementing measures of September 8. Unfortunately, these efforts cannot be fully effective as long as Russia denies international observers access to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia.

Accordingly, we repeat our call for Russia to honor the commitments it made in the August 12 and September 8 agreements, which call for Russia not only to provide free and unhindered humanitarian access to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions, but also to withdraw its troops to the positions and numbers held prior to the start of hostilities. We remind Russia of its responsibility to ensure respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in those areas of Georgia under Russian occupation.

We note once more that many Russian actions in Georgia, such as its establishment of military bases in the breakaway regions and its deployment of FSB border guards to the administrative boundary lines, have undermined rather than enhanced stability in the region. The same holds true for Russia's decision to reject the Greek Chairmanship's status-neutral proposal for a continued OSCE presence in Georgia, and to force the departure of the OSCE Mission to Georgia and its valuable military monitoring officers.

Madam Chairwoman, we have said before that if we cannot effectively address and resolve issues like these, it is unlikely we will make any genuine headway on a Europe that is more secure and at peace. Progress would help restore trust and confidence and facilitate any discussion of European security – and would be most welcome as we approach the informal ministerial meeting in Corfu.

In closing, the United States again thanks the ambassadors here today, and commends their extraordinary work. We remain committed to finding a peaceful resolution to the conflicts in Georgia, and will continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.