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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANVAR AZIMOV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 September 2010

**In response to the report by Mr. Werner Almhofer,
Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo**

Mr. Chairperson,

We associate ourselves with the words of welcome addressed to the Head of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Mr. Werner Almhofer. We have listened carefully to his report on the internal situation in the territory and the activities there of the Organization's field presence.

We welcome the shift of focus in the presence's work in 2010, as mentioned in today's report by the mission head, to the problems of establishing stability and security in the territory and resolving the issues involved in ensuring the rights of the non-Albanian national communities, preserving the Serbian cultural and religious heritage and establishing a process for the sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons to the places where they used to live. These are the key tasks set out in United Nations Security Council resolution 1244, which remains fully in force and continues to be the only legitimate basis, binding on all parties, for a Kosovo settlement. It is our hope that real benefit will soon be felt from the steps being taken and the declared intentions. We believe there is a need here to act in conjunction with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. We also support the decision on the establishment in 2010 of return and reintegration focal points in all the Mission's regional centres and trust that a plan of action regulating their work will be drawn up soon.

The situation in the territory as regards the fundamental area of inter-ethnic relations is unfortunately unchanged. There has been virtually zero progress in overcoming the deep-seated conflicts between the Serb and Albanian communities. The security situation remains unstable, as was confirmed by the dramatic events that occurred in northern Mitrovica in early July. This has led to an extremely unsatisfactory state of affairs with respect to the return of refugees.

One of the glaring examples of the inability of the territory's Provisional Institutions of Self-Government to resolve its key problems is the situation of the Serbs in the village of Zac, where there have been three major incidents in the last two weeks alone. Shots being

fired at Serbian refugees and the destruction of their homes are still fresh in the memory. The Kosovo police essentially does nothing, letting the persons suspected of attacking these villagers go unpunished. And this is despite the heightened attention and the countless visits to Zac by the local authorities and international officials.

The situation regarding the preservation of Serbian Orthodox and cultural heritage remains worrying, especially now following the Kosovo Force's decision to scale back its presence near four Serbian holy sites. More than 100 monasteries and churches have been destroyed and desecrated since 1999, including monuments from the Middle Ages under the protection of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Fresh actions of this kind are no rare occurrence, and efforts to restore the churches run into problems owing to a lack of funding. We trust that the OSCE will play a more active role in resolving these problems. We might recall, for our part, that the Government of the Russian Federation has decided to make a specific voluntary contribution to UNESCO in 2010–2011 amounting to two million United States dollars for financing restoration work.

It is important that the OSCE Mission has begun to respond more convincingly to manifestations of inter-ethnic intolerance and provocations on the part of Kosovo Albanian extremists aimed at destabilizing the situation in the territory and forcing the Serbian population out of Kosovo. It is worth highlighting a number of analytical reports prepared by the presence, primarily on the situation regarding the investigation of war crimes. We urge that this practice be continued and that attention be paid to the situation as regards the return of refugees.

We take the position that in carrying out its work in Kosovo the Mission will be guided by the principles of impartiality and transparency, focusing mainly on the implementation of specific programmes to assist the national communities and not merely monitoring the internal situation. We believe it would be a mistake to ignore under the pretext of status neutrality the irresponsible actions of the Kosovo "authorities" contravening provisions of Security Council resolution 1244, something that could further destabilize the already precarious situation in the territory.

Mr. Chairperson,

As you know, on 22 July the International Court of Justice delivered an advisory opinion, in response to a request by the United Nations General Assembly, on the conformity with international law of the "Declaration of Independence" adopted by the Assembly of Kosovo on 17 February 2008. In this connection, we should like to point out once again that the decision did not approve the territory's breakaway from Serbia – the Court assessed only the Declaration itself, stating specifically that it had not examined in a broader context the question of the right of the Serbian territory of Kosovo to secession. The Court said nothing in its conclusions about the legal consequences of the Declaration's adoption; thus, the advisory opinion of the Court in The Hague cannot serve as justification for Kosovo's "statehood", and the question of the international status of the territory remains open.

In this connection, we should like to stress that the OSCE Mission's mandate has not changed. The presence should continue its work performing the tasks outlined in its mandate. We do not support the idea of a further reduction in its budget or staff.

On 9 September, the United Nations General Assembly intends to consider a draft resolution on Kosovo. We are in favour of a continuation of negotiations by the parties to reach a final settlement on the territory's status. We firmly believe that Kosovo's future must be resolved through dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina. The experience of history shows that lasting peace can never be achieved by force. It is essential to understand that unilateral actions place a time bomb under the process of a Kosovo settlement and sooner or later may result in a new round of destabilization in the region. We trust that our partners will ultimately recognize this and draw the relevant conclusions.

Thank you for your attention.