



United States Mission to the OSCE

United States Intervention to the 2008 OSCE Ministerial Council

As delivered by Under Secretary of State for
Political Affairs William J. Burns
to the Ministerial Council, Helsinki
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Thank you very much Mr. Chairman, distinguished colleagues. I am pleased to join you today to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the OSCE. I would like to thank our Finnish hosts for their extraordinary hospitality and for Foreign Minister Stubb's exceptional work as OSCE chair. It is a fortunate coincidence that Finland's chairmanship brings us together in Helsinki. Thirty-three years ago in this city, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe committed to strengthen international peace and security and to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The original Helsinki conference's founding principles remain as valid today as they were thirty-three years ago. The United States continues to support those common commitments and to value the OSCE as a critical link that binds us to Europe and Eurasia. U.S. participation in the OSCE complements and reinforces our bilateral relationships with European and Eurasian states, our membership in NATO and our strong ties to the EU.

No nation acting alone can overcome the problems in today's interconnected world from terrorist acts to the financial crisis. The OSCE's "added value" lies in its proven ability to advance our common agenda, from resolving conflicts to helping nations promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law. No country, including my own, is perfect and we can all benefit from each other's experience. That is why the United States again this year invited an OSCE team to observe our elections.

I would like to take this opportunity to look ahead and to highlight areas where I think we should focus our collective efforts through the OSCE to strengthen international security and peace.

The first is the situation in Georgia. The Finnish Chair's efforts to promote dialogue before during and after hostilities deserve our praise. The OSCE's readiness, along with the EU, to deploy observers was an important signal of our collective commitment to peaceful conflict resolution. What is needed now is full access for military monitors throughout the internationally recognized territory of Georgia and agreement to extend the mandate of the OSCE Mission there. We also should support a continuation of the Geneva discussions co-chaired by the OSCE, the UN and the EU, which hopefully will make progress at the next round later this month.

Second, we need to redouble efforts to resolve the frozen conflicts which, nearly 20 years after the end of the Cold War, still remain frozen. We have an opportunity to make headway toward resolution of the situation in Nagorno-Karabakh. Presidents Aliyev and Sargsian have made commendable efforts to build trust and narrow differences over the past few months. We hope the Minsk Group meeting today will help build momentum toward agreement on basic principles for a peaceful settlement. Serious engagement is equally necessary to make progress on the conflicts in Moldova and Georgia.

Third, we need to work together to preserve the benefits of the CFE Treaty, which transformed European security and contributed to the dramatic decline of conventional forces in Europe. Today that treaty is at risk. Russia's suspension of its implementation and its military presence in Moldova and Georgia are major concerns. Host country consent to the stationing of forces is a core principle of the CFE Treaty. The United States and NATO Allies have advanced proposals to resolve the impasse over ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty and fulfillment of the Istanbul commitments. Our goal remains to create the conditions that will allow for ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty by all 30 CFE states.

Fourth, OSCE institutions and field missions deserve our continued support for their efforts to help participating states and their citizens fully implement human rights and fundamental freedoms. I would single out for special mention the work of ODIHR, the world's premier election monitoring organization and a key source of expertise on protecting human rights.

Finally, let me reiterate that the United States welcomes suggestions to strengthen our collective security. We support ideas for expanding the OSCE's role in Afghanistan, and we are ready to discuss ways to bolster European security. Consideration of new ideas should not detract from our shared commitments to fully implement the OSCE's founding principles and our efforts to promote cooperative security and arms control. Simply put, we should build on the European security architecture that we have, and ensure that comprehensive security includes human and economic as well as political and military elements.

We look forward to the incoming OSCE chair, Greece, continuing the ambitious work of Foreign Minister Stubb and his team. As the international community faces unprecedented challenges, I am confident the OSCE will continue to serve as a force for human dignity, good governance and collective security.

Thank you very much.