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DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

Statement

in response to the address HE Volodymyr Kholosha, Ukrainian Deputy Minister for
Emergency Situations and the Protection of the Population from the Consequences of
the Chernobyl Catastrophe
delivered by Ambassador Jivan Tabibian
at the 607th meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council
4 May 2006

Thank you Mr.Chairman,

Our own welcome to Deputy Minister Kholosha whose work seems to be deeply involved in the questions of protecting the populations of the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. On this issue at the outset let me say that he tried to appeal to our hearts, may be even to our minds and it worked. We join all others who have deep compassion for the victims and recognition and admiration for the heroism and sacrifice of those who right after and later try to do their best to minimize the damage and the pain to the people most directly affected. Obviously that effort will continue and is continuing. All anybody can do is to ameliorate, to mitigate and to repair the damage; the impact seems to be rather ongoing, though it goes through different phases. When we stop mourning the immediate dead, we think about a long term survival and the viability of affected communities. All this is how it should be. We encourage those states who have the means to show their solidarity by whatever means they can, to help those most affected and to repair the total environment. This is a long term project. So much for all of us sharing feelings and commitments. On this issue, it is very easy to say something is the worst catastrophe. However the moment we say so it might immediately bring up the next question: are such catastrophes preventable? Is it possible to diminish their impact? Can we think about it? Everybody knows that in this issue Armenia is not an unconcerned country. We have and we had our own Nuclear Power Plant and no less due to the Chernobyl events and an earthquake in Armenia we ourselves shut down our own. But we restarted it. Here is where we need to talk about a few related matters.

All those who make decisions, whether we as individuals in our lives or countries and states, we are at all times in the business of “assessing risk”. There are no zero risk enterprises. There are no zero risk decisions. And when you come to the questions of energy it is a continuous assessment of risk and what is the consequence of each risk that is assumed. People assume risks because either their consequences are affordable or alternatives are unavailable. It might have been understandable if Armenia did not have energy needs to indeterminately shut down the power plant. But considering our energy dependence and our incapacity to find substitutes, we take calculated risks. Of course, the International Atomic Energy Agency and others make sure that those risks are somewhat reasonable ones; they can be reduced. There are safety and safeguard standards and with those one reduces the potential effects of those risks. These

thoughts bring out another subject. Somebody said that borders are rather curious notions when it comes to catastrophes like Chernobyl. It was a few months after Chernobyl I remember I was along the Adriatic coast of Italy in a little town south of Venice called Chioggia which ships by the way, the world's greatest quantity of its certain specialty product, the radicchio. It stopped shipping simply because the crop was infected by Chernobyl. And we talk about the Adriatic coast of Italy and the product that would have ended up in most fancy kitchens across Europe. So these winds, ill winds, contaminated winds do not follow borders. This poses a major international challenge. It is easy to talk about the international community and this and that, but let's look at the real challenge. The challenge is, if more than one country is affected than more than one country has an interest in preventing it. We get sometimes confused between notions of liability. Who is liable? Even if one knows after the fact who is liable, the consequences are so enormous that no capacity to compensate exists; one cannot get private insurance, because the scale of the loss is so out of proportion. Though we are collectively vulnerable, and in such disasters we are, collectively does not mean universally. Several countries, several regions, several areas: for a long period of time what can we do collectively to make sure that by our initial involvement such risk calculations do not go into sub-optimal decisions and marginal decisions. People who have been bypassed, will choose risky paths, risky technology, risky location, risky management, risky administration. Therefore our comment is to say that when it comes to these real risks, we are all our brothers' keepers. We must make sure that we find formulas where preventive cooperation tries to deal with the ambiguous questions of sovereignty; we must invite people in before the disaster and not simply after the disaster.

I know that in our case, in Armenia, this issue is rather critical. People ask us when are we going to get rid of the NPP? But please, tell us tell us the alternatives, help us build them and then we will get rid of the old. Yet it seems like it is our responsibility alone to get rid of it, though the exposure to risk does not stop on our borders. These are political problems, they are not just technical, human or humanistic issues. Therefore this is a very important subject. After twenty years we still have not solved the dynamics that lead to such situations. So one final word to say that in all such matters, transparency is usually a great help, and helps us get ahead of the game, rather than by the lack of transparency transform every thing into a question of national security.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman thank you and thanks to our guest.