

ENGLISH only



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on EU Observers to Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 18, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes the September 15th European Union decision to send an independent civilian observer mission to Georgia. We commend EU Member States' strong commitment to deploying at least 200 observers by October 1st.

We believe these observers, together with the OSCE military monitoring officers, will constitute the international mechanism of the six-point Ceasefire Agreement.

The United States notes Russia's recent withdrawal of forces from five observation posts along the Poti-Senaki line, but we remain concerned by Georgian Government reports that an estimated 1,200 Russian soldiers remain at 19 checkpoints outside both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We and our European partners will watch carefully to see if these soldiers are withdrawn within 10 days of the deployment of international mechanisms - including the EU observers - in accordance with the September 8th agreement between French President Sarkozy and Russian President Medvedev.

Mr. Chairman, the United States once more calls on Russia to implement in their entirety the commitments made in the Ceasefire Agreement and reflected in its clarifying documents. We remind Russia of its obligation to withdraw its forces to their pre-conflict positions, as required in the six-point Ceasefire Agreement.

In light of continuing reports of the destruction of ethnic Georgian villages in areas controlled by Russian forces and the forced displacement of ethnic Georgians, we also remind Russia that its forces are responsible for taking steps to maintain order in the areas of Georgia they occupy and should not block the return and safe livelihood of local residents.

Mr. Chairman, we demand that Russia allow the free flow of humanitarian assistance to all areas of Georgia as stipulated in point three of the six-point Ceasefire Agreement. We remind Russia that turning back shipments of humanitarian assistance and assessment teams trying to reach villages in South Ossetia contravenes the agreement and also raises questions about Russia upholding its obligations under international law.

Finally, we urge Russia to facilitate access to South Ossetia for the eight MMOs on the ground prior to the start of hostilities, in accordance with the September 8th agreement between Presidents Sarkozy and Medvedev.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the United States reiterates its commitment to the people of Georgia and their democratically elected government. We will continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.