

19 May 2006

ENGLISH only



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Situation in Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 18, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Events in Georgia merit our attention today as we prepare for a very important donors meeting in Brussels next month that could mark a fresh start for the people of South Ossetia, Georgia, Russia, and the region as a whole. On the one hand, the May 12th meeting of the Joint Control Commission made progress in some important areas. On the other hand, there were two very troubling incidents on the ground involving serious and dangerous interference with the work of the OSCE's Military Monitoring Officers.

The United States condemns strongly these two incidents in South Ossetia on May 10th and on May 14th, in which camouflaged men, in the second case armed with assault rifles, violated the freedom of movement of the OSCE's Military Monitoring Officers. In the May 10th incident, the camouflaged men ultimately identified themselves as members of the South Ossetian de facto Ministry of Internal Affairs. In the May 14th incident, the camouflaged men refused to identify themselves. In the May 10th incident, the camouflaged men forced the monitors to break communications with their Field Office and confiscated property belonging to them.

Particularly disturbing is the report of the OSCE that, during the May 10th incident, an officer of the North Ossetian battalion of the Joint Peacekeeping Force appeared to threaten the OSCE officers should they continue to patrol that area without a JPKF escort.

These OSCE Military Monitoring Officers were attempting to carry out their mandated duties in the zone of conflict. Either incident could have descended into violence, but for the calm and professional behavior of the OSCE officers.

The United States reminds the South Ossetian and North Ossetian sides of the OSCE's absolute right to unhindered access to the whole of the zone of conflict. This is guaranteed by the South Ossetian side in the Memorandum of Understanding between the OSCE and the South Ossetian authorities. The United States notes with appreciation the citation in the OSCE's May 10th spot report that the Senior Military Observer from the Russian Federation facilitated resolution of the May 10th incident.

On a more positive note, the United States welcomes the results from the JCC meeting on May 12th in Tskhinvali. Agreement was reached on setting up a committee to merge the two peace proposals for South Ossetia. In addition, the JCC agreed on a list of projects that will be the subject of the donors' conference, to take place in Brussels on June 14th.

The United States continues to encourage the sides to focus on positive developments such as these. Such outcomes can lead to peace and prosperity for the people of South Ossetia, Georgia, and the region as a whole.

Thank you.