



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on OSCE Monitors in Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 13, 2008

Mr. Chairman.

The United States notes the statement by the Russian Federation alleging that the OSCE monitors in Georgia have withheld information from participating States. We have no evidence of this and believe that such accusations are a distraction from our main tasks: addressing the security, humanitarian, and other problems arising from the Russo-Georgian conflict of last August.

That said, we don't know and may never know the exact sequence of events on August 7th. We are aware of the statements by former members of the OSCE team, speaking in a personal capacity. They are important, but not conclusive. Georgian leaders may have believed such Russian attacks were underway, and the evidence of South Ossetian shelling of Georgian villages inside South Ossetia needs to be considered. As is well-documented, months of Russian provocations laid the foundation for such Georgian calculations.

Still, as we have said from the first, Georgia should not have attacked Tskhinvali, but Russia's military response was a disproportionate use of force.

We think the unanswered questions only reinforce the need for international monitors to be given full access to the conflict areas to enable a fuller picture of the situation to emerge and to investigate alleged human rights abuses by all parties, something the United States has continuously urged.

We again call on Russia to implement fully the cease-fire agreements and to guarantee the safety and security of civilians in areas it controls, including allowing for the voluntary return of internally displaced persons.

Our efforts should now focus on consolidating the cease-fire, addressing alleged past abuses and the needs of individuals displaced by the conflict, helping Georgia rebuild, and working with all parties to move from confrontation to peace.

We are particularly concerned about the situation in Perevi, a village outside South Ossetia's administrative borders by all accounts, yet recently occupied by South Ossetian forces. This is another flash point.

Russia should work to resolve these problems and work to set up the Geneva process for productive work.

In sum, the United States stands ready to work with the EU and with Russia, as well as with Georgia, to help stabilize the situation following this conflict. We should focus on practical steps forward, not point scoring.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.