



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 4, 2009

Madam Chairwoman.

We welcome Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin to today's meeting, and thank him for his overview of Russia's perspective and policy towards the South Caucasus.

Clearly, however, the United States and Russia have markedly different views on the situation in Georgia. The United States stands with most countries in condemning Russia's recognition of the "independence" of the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and strongly supports the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. We remain committed to long-term conflict resolution, and seek to establish peace throughout Georgia.

Accordingly, we strongly support the Geneva discussions, and hope the July 1 meeting will yield concrete results on outstanding security, humanitarian, and human rights issues. We urge all parties to quickly implement the incident prevention and response mechanisms agreed in February, and repeat our call for joint visits, together with international monitors, to the sites of incidents. We note that the South Ossetian mechanism held its second meeting on May 29, and hope all parties will build on the progress made there.

We also hope progress can be made on pressing humanitarian and human rights issues, particularly the urgent problem of achieving free and unhindered humanitarian access to the South Ossetian region. Russia committed to such access under the August 12 cease-fire agreement and again in UNSCR 1866. Additionally, we hope to see progress on ensuring the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of internally displaced persons, and to see improvements in the ability to address and prevent the human rights abuses that were so long documented by the joint reports by ODIHR and the OSCE's High Commissioner for National Minorities.

The United States considers a continued OSCE presence in Georgia critical to efforts to restore stability to the region, resolve humanitarian and human rights concerns, and promote the implementation of OSCE commitments. We continue to fully support the Greek Chairmanship's status-neutral proposal for an OSCE presence in Georgia, and note that it enjoys the support of the overwhelming majority of the OSCE participating States. We regret that Russia has made it impossible to achieve consensus on a mandate for a continued OSCE presence in Georgia.

Progress on these issues would help restore trust and confidence in the region, and demonstrate a good-faith effort to take tangible steps to advance our common European security goals. Unfortunately, many Russian actions in Georgia, such as its establishment of military bases in the breakaway regions, and its deployment of FSB border guards to the administrative boundary lines, have had the opposite effect. The same holds true for allowing Russian companies to explore for oil and gas in Georgian waters, and promoting illegitimate elections in the South Ossetian region.

We again call on Russia to honor the commitments it made in the August 12 cease-fire agreement and the September 8 implementing measures, particularly point five of the cease-fire agreement, which calls for Russia to withdraw its troops to positions held prior to the start of hostilities. We also strongly urge Russia to fulfill point three of the cease-fire agreement, which calls for providing free and unhindered humanitarian access to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia. We remind Russia that it has a responsibility to ensure respect for human rights is upheld and international humanitarian law is observed in those areas of Georgia that are under occupation.

We thank you for speaking to us today, Deputy Foreign Minister Karasin, and sincerely hope we will be able to make progress on a Europe that is more secure and at peace.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.