



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on International Humanitarian Law and Respect for Human Rights

As delivered by James H. Cox, Chief Arms Control Delegate
to the Forum for Security Cooperation
Vienna, 19 May 2004

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to take a few minutes to draw colleagues' attention to the statement made by the US delegation at the Permanent Council on 13 May. That intervention, the title of which is "[Statement on International Humanitarian Law and Respect for Human Rights](#)", was circulated under document number, PC.DEL/414/04.

Mr. Chairman, that statement not only confirms that the President and the Secretary of Defense have taken actions to ensure that those responsible for abuse of prisoners and detainees in Iraq are brought to justice, but, perhaps more importantly, it reaffirms that the US military is committed to respecting the international law of armed conflict. The great majority of US service members conduct themselves in strict accordance with this body of law, as they are trained to do, and they represent themselves and the United States honorably.

As our Chargé, Mr. Davidson repeated last Thursday, President Bush has said that one of the key differences between democracies and dictatorships is "that free countries confront such abuses openly and directly." The United States has confronted – and continues to confront - the abuses in full public view, as democracy demands.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to read to my colleagues, many of whom are currently serving – or have served - in the military forces of their nation, a few words drawn from a statement made by US Secretary of State Colin Powell last Sunday at the World Economic Forum in Jordan:

Begin extract of Secretary Powell's Text -

What I saw in those pictures, and what you saw in those pictures, shocked me, as it shocked you – it shocked all Americans. We were in a state of disbelief for days, as you were here, and around the world, as we saw what our young men and women had done. It was so inconsistent with the values that we uphold as a military, and the values that we uphold as a nation. It shocked us because we knew how it would affect the region. We knew the region would look at these photos, would look at what had happened, and say, "Is this the America that we believed in? Is this the America whose value system we have looked at and admired for so many years?"

We were deeply disturbed by what we had seen. It was so inconsistent with what I have seen during my years as a soldier. For 35 years I had seen young men, young soldiers, die in battle to protect our principles, who had always fought with honor and integrity. We hold ourselves, and we hold our men and women in uniform, to the highest standard.

The United States helped to rebuild Europe, and parts of Asia, after World War II, after the Korean War. We've always gone through "rough patches" in the aftermath of these struggles. We've made mistakes, but we always succeeded. We always kept on track. We succeeded because America has an enormous capacity to do good; an enormous capacity to learn from its mistakes, and to move on.

We ask at the same time that you not lose sight of the larger picture in Iraq. Today, thousands of American soldiers are building schoolhouses. They're shaking hands with young children. They're refurbishing hospitals. They're installing sanitation systems. Every day in Iraq, American soldiers, 18-, 19-, 20-year-old soldiers, perform thousands of acts of kindness and courage, just as they have done around the world in so many places, as they went to secure peace for others, to bring freedom for others.

Our heads bow, our hearts ache, over what a small number of them did at that prison. There's no excuse for that. But at the same time, take into account the magnificent work of so many of these youngsters, who have left their homes in America to serve in Iraq, to serve in other parts of the world where freedom has been at risk and is at risk, and their willingness to do this as members of a proud organization, the United States Armed Forces, and its representatives of a nation that does not seek dominion over anyone else. We seek sovereignty over no one else. The United States always comes to help, to lend a hand. To assist others on a path forward; to end poverty; to fight disease; to bring hope to any dark corner of the world. You will see our strength now. You will see how we respond to this challenge. You will see that the America that we asked you to believe in is still there. *(End extract of Secretary Powell's Text)*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.