



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement in Response to the PC Decision on South Ossetia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Paul W. Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
August 6, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States thanks the Chair for its leadership in convening this meeting of the Permanent Council during the OSCE's August recess. Ethnic tensions do not take a recess, and it is important that we have assembled here today for a Decision on increasing the number of OSCE monitors in South Ossetia.

As Assistant Secretary of State Beth Jones noted in Tbilisi on July 30, the United States strongly supports the work of the OSCE Mission in Georgia in its efforts to resolve the South Ossetian conflict peacefully through a political agreement respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.

In Washington yesterday, Secretary Powell met with Georgian President Saakashvili and raised our concerns about the situation in South Ossetia. He urged all parties to resolve tensions in these regions in a peaceful manner that respects the territorial integrity of Georgia. We have urged all sides to avoid inflammatory statements and to continue dialogue with the Joint Control Commission framework. It is critical that officials in Tbilisi, Moscow and in the South Ossetian capital of Tshkinvali stay in close touch to avoid unintentional incidents.

We would like to take this opportunity to commend the Mission and its staff for their efforts to monitor the situation and to keep the participating States informed of the latest developments in South Ossetia. All of us count on OSCE observers to give us fast, accurate reporting so that we all know what is happening on the ground.

The Decision we have just taken to augment the Mission's cadre of observers by sending two additional observers to South Ossetia is a step in the right direction toward greater OSCE involvement. We believe it is also a step in the right direction toward greater stability and a more rapid resolution of the tensions in the region.

The United States remains convinced that the best possibility for a permanent resolution of the conflict in South Ossetia lies in active political engagement by all sides. Nevertheless, political negotiations can only be successful in a climate of military disengagement.

For this reason, we call upon all sides to implement without delay the decisions taken by the Joint Control Commission on July 14 and 15, particularly regarding the removal of unauthorized checkpoints and paramilitary formations. Moreover, we urge all sides to respect all existing agreements and to refrain from carrying out military activities in or near the Zone of Conflict.

It is extremely important that the parties implement and build upon the agreements already reached by the Joint Control Commission in order to demilitarize the region and to speed up the political settlement process.

A continuation of the tense and unstable environment in South Ossetia will undercut humanitarian efforts and complicate prospects for economic development that would benefit all sides to this conflict.

The United States stands willing to work with the Government of Georgia and other interested participating states to reinvigorate the political process in South Ossetia. In particular, we would encourage active and immediate discussions among all interested parties, and with the OSCE, on basic principles to be met on the road to a political settlement. We welcome the Chair's suggestion to host a meeting among interested parties and hope that today's decision will be only the first of many cooperative milestones leading to concrete progress on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.