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Opening Remarks by Chairman-in-Office Alexander Stubb

Opening Session of the 16th OSCE Ministerial Council

4 December 2008, Helsinki

Madam President,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It has been a memorable year for me.

About a year ago, I knew the OSCE better from history books than from the work it was doing. I can tell you that the Chairmanship has changed all that.

When taking over the duties of the Chairman-in-Office I set out to prove that the OSCE can bring concrete results and make a difference. At least from my perspective it has succeeded in doing so.

The past months have left a lasting impression on me. I have been inspired by the determination of the peoples of the OSCE area to improve their livelihoods and strive for democratic reforms. At the same time, I never want to see again what I witnessed in Georgia in August: casualties of war, wanton destruction and people fleeing from their homes.

I also have strong memories of the co-operation we have enjoyed, and the support the colleagues around this table have extended to me. During difficult times, I have been able to count on you. I would like to thank you for this.

It has been a hardworking year for the Chairmanship.

The Finnish Chairmanship has pursued with vigour the objectives we outlined last January, even as circumstances have forced us to deal with unexpected new challenges. I trust that in the next two days, we will be able to adopt important decisions on strengthening OSCE action to counter small arms problems and terrorism, fostering international co-operation on maritime issues, putting climate change and its security implications on the OSCE agenda, promoting OSCE action against trafficking of human beings and improving the situation of Roma and Sinti, to mention only a few.

From day one, the Finnish Chairmanship has emphasized the importance of re-energizing the settlement processes of our region's unresolved conflicts. The activity of my Special Envoy, Ambassador Heikki Talvitie, and the early visits by the Chairman-in-Office to all conflict

areas sought to re-inject momentum into stalled processes. I hope we will be able make headway on conflict settlement here in Helsinki.

The Finnish Chairmanship has worked hard to enhance OSCE action on election-related issues. The OSCE has observed 12 elections this year. This has included all major elections, with the exception of last March's Russian Presidential election. We have also pursued discussions on election-related issues with the assistance of my Special Envoy, Member of Parliament Kimmo Kiljunen and Ambassador Tom Grönberg.¹ The co-operation between the ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly has improved, and has worked well in most cases throughout the year.

It has been a successful year for the Organization.

I firmly believe that the OSCE brand has been strengthened this year. The Organization has been able to deliver on the three central tenets that I have described as the OSCE mission statement:

- On **crisis management and conflict resolution**, the OSCE acted swiftly during the crisis in Georgia. It contributed to the ceasefire agreement and international monitoring efforts. This solidified the OSCE's reputation as a real first responder and effective crisis management organization.
- On **democratic consolidation**, we have received encouraging signals from many quarters of increasing interest in OSCE action to support electoral reforms and the development of democratic institutions.
- On **strengthening co-operative security**, the OSCE has been a venue for real political dialogue. Participating States have brought to table issues they considered most salient to their security. We have had frank exchanges of views on controversial issues, including the independence of Kosovo, missile defence and the crisis in Georgia.

At the beginning of the year, we were confronted by uncertainty regarding the continuation of the OSCE's largest field mission, in Kosovo. We have succeeded in putting aside our differences and enabling the OSCE mission to continue its important work for the benefit of all individuals and communities in Kosovo.

We have also been able to deepen co-operation between the OSCE and other international organizations. The Geneva Discussions, based on the OSCE-initiated platform of OSCE-EU-UN co-operation is a unique effort. The report on the human rights situation in the war-affected regions prepared by the ODIHR with the input of the High Commissioner on National Minorities complements the work of the Council of Europe.² These initiatives have demonstrated that the OSCE can take a lead and contribute effectively in international co-operation.

At the same time, we have taken important steps to strengthen the effectiveness of our Organization. While pushing for intensified OSCE action in the priority areas, we have also kept our eye on continuity and long-term planning. The strengthened co-operation among five successive Chairmanships - the so-called "Quintet" - has been very useful in ensuring that

¹ The report has been distributed as MC.GAL/10/08, 26 November 2008.

² The report has been distributed as CIO.GAL/182/08, 1 December 2008. The letter by the HCNM has been distributed as CIO.GAL/181/08/Rev.1, 1 December.

OSCE activities are and will be carried out in a sustainable manner. We have continued to pursue the granting of an international legal personality to the Organization on the basis of the existing draft convention.³ We have been able to agree without any delays on the extension of the tenure of the Secretary General and on the nomination of a new Director of the ODIHR.

It has been a challenging year for the co-operative European Security.

The future of the CFE treaty remains uncertain. The decision by the Russian Federation to suspend the implementation of the treaty commitments challenges Europe's most fundamental regime of politico-military transparency and predictability. The Parties to the Treaty should take urgent action to safeguard this regime.

The armed conflict involving Georgian and Russian armed forces in August 2008 sent shock waves throughout the OSCE area. Early warning by the OSCE was not heeded as almost 20 years of stalled efforts to resolve the conflict boiled over into violence. The war, of course, could not offer a solution to the underlying conflicts in Georgia.

President Medvedev has proposed an overhaul of the Euro-Atlantic security structures. President Sarkozy has in turn suggested that further discussion could be carried out within the OSCE. It appears to me that also other participating States are willing to exchange views on security in Europe.

I expect that these issues will be addressed during this ministerial meeting. I am a great fan of frank discussion, and I hope that the working luncheon on the *The Future of the Security in Europe* would provide us plenty of food for thought.

Madam President, Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let's seize the opportunity to renew the spirit of Helsinki.

After many years, we now have a real opportunity to unite ourselves behind a strong ministerial declaration. Having a record number of ministers adopting a forward-looking declaration would put the OSCE back to business as a major European security organisation.

Let's just do it!

³ The report of the working group has been distributed as CIO.GAL/173/08, 19 November 2008.