

STATEMENT BY NORWAY
POLITICAL DIRECTOR, MR. VEGARD ELLEFSEN
AT THE SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL
HELSINKI, 4-5 DECEMBER 2008

Mr. Chairman,

We would like to thank Foreign Minister Stubb for the excellent job he has done as Chairman-in-Office together with his highly able teams here in Helsinki and Vienna and for organizing this excellent meeting. During the Finnish chairmanship, the OSCE has been a very visible and effective player. During the dramatic developments in the Caucasus this autumn, the OSCE once again demonstrated its potential to play a vital and very operational role in international crisis management together with the Council of Europe under its Swedish chair and the French Presidency of the European Union. We are grateful for the tremendous efforts the Chairman-in-Office has made throughout the year.

What happened in Georgia in August was a setback for all who believe in dialogue and seeking peaceful solutions to disputes. The conflict has had serious repercussions for relations between several participating states.

The Geneva talks will hopefully lead to a peaceful solution that respects Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Until a final and peaceful solution is found, we call on all parties to comply fully with their obligations under the ceasefire agreement. A continued OSCE presence in Georgia with access throughout the country is more necessary than ever.

The war in Georgia clearly demonstrates the danger of leaving conflicts unresolved. We have to redouble our efforts in this regard. We need political will, we need leaders to guide their peoples, to muster support for the compromises needed. We have seen some positive signs lately. They must continue.

It rests upon all of us to help alleviate the human suffering caused by this war. No effort should be spared in bringing speedy and efficient relief to the many displaced people. This is given high priority by Norway. We therefore welcomed and supported the donor conference on Georgia co-hosted by the European Commission and the World Bank earlier this fall. We appeal to the

parties directly involved to cooperate closely with national and international relief organisations and to ensure access and acceptable working conditions for aid workers.

After events like these, it is important to take stock and to look ahead. And we have indeed recently seen an emerging discussion on the need for strengthened high-level dialogue on European security issues. Norway believes that there might be a need for discussing security issues. We should, however, make sure we do not define our security challenges too narrowly. We are faced with a broad range of challenges, from hostility between countries to tensions between groups of people, be it over ethnicity, religion, scarce resources or other causes. Some of these conflicts may be exacerbated by climate change or the global economic downturn, and may particularly affect vulnerable groups in our societies. It is therefore important to make sure that we are well prepared for the challenges ahead.

The conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria may currently be somewhat less acute than the situation in Georgia. We welcome signs of increased direct contact between the parties, such as the recent meeting between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and hope to see progress in relations between Chisinau and Tiraspol. Continued active engagement by the OSCE remains essential in seeking a peaceful resolution to these conflicts.

We have a set of principles that we have all agreed on and that must be adhered to. We have in place a robust framework for discussing and engaging on common security threats. And the OSCE is uniquely placed to do so, given its large number of participating states and broad security concept.

History has taught us that only a comprehensive approach can bring about real security, a lesson we must not forget. The OSCE is based on standards and values that we all share and need to safeguard. Democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, economic and social development and environmentally sound practices all form part of our common security concept. Here, the OSCE institutions, including ODIHR, the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Representative on the Freedom of the Media, are doing a tremendous job in providing assistance to participating states.

The field missions continue to be the OSCE's main assets. The importance of their work in supporting participating states is immense. This is true for all field missions, but we would particularly like to stress the need to continue our work in Kosovo. A robust local presence is needed in a situation that is not yet sufficiently clarified.

Looking at the security challenges within and adjacent to the OSCE region, Afghanistan stands out as a partner country where assistance is needed and where it would be in our own interest that the OSCE takes on a larger role. Norway is of the view that we should respond positively to the clear request for assistance from the Afghan authorities. The Kabul conference in November was a success. Time has come for the OSCE to assist in key areas, such as police reform, border security and election preparation and observation.

Mr Chairman,

Earlier this week 93 states, many of which are represented around this table, signed the Convention on cluster munitions in Oslo. The agreement prohibits a whole category of weapons, and the signatories to the Convention commit to encouraging additional states to follow suit. We can assure everybody that we would welcome more signatures on this Convention in the coming days and weeks.

Mr Chairman,

We have stated on numerous occasions that we place the highest value on the CFE Treaty regime with all its elements. We will continue to fulfil our own commitments under the treaty, and urge the Russian Federation to cooperate with us and other States Parties in finding a solution to the current stalemate.

Through good times and difficult times alike, we have managed to preserve the OSCE as an open channel of communication and dialogue. This shows the value of the organisation.

In closing, we would like to assure the Greek Foreign Minister, Ms Dora Bakoyannis, that she has Norway's full support as she now assumes the post of OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for 2009. We look forward to working with her and her team on preserving and developing the OSCE as a tool for dialogue and cooperation between participating states.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.