



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on South Ossetia, Georgia

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Paul Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 12, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States is deeply concerned by the rising tensions in the Georgian territory of South Ossetia.

OSCE Mission monitoring officers have reported that South Ossetian forces appear to be preparing for battle, reinforcing villages, digging trenches and positioning arms and munitions, including heavy artillery. The report indicates that the Russian peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia have not intervened, but have passively permitted these provocative actions.

OSCE Mission monitoring officers also reported seeing five Georgian helicopters on the ground within the zone of conflict.

In addition, there have been several spot reports by the OSCE Georgia Border Monitoring Operation about unidentified helicopters crossing the Georgia-Russia frontier at various points.

The United States is also deeply concerned over the brief detention and harassment of an OSCE Mission monitoring officer by armed South Ossetian individuals on July 10th, in contravention of the 1992 memorandum of understanding that provides for the free movement of OSCE Mission monitoring officers.

The United States urges all sides to work quickly for the immediate release of the remaining Georgian soldiers being held hostage in South Ossetia.

We also encourage the parties to resume their dialogue on South Ossetia's future within Georgia and avoid any further provocative actions. It is essential that the sides work closely to avoid any future violence and to ensure Georgia's territorial integrity.

We urge the Chairman-in-Office to stay actively engaged on this matter. We hope Ambassador Roy Reeve, the Head of the OSCE Mission to Georgia, will return to Georgia as soon as possible, and that all sides will permit him to carry out his conflict-prevention and conflict-resolution responsibilities.

We welcome the agreement to hold a high-level meeting in the Joint Control Commission format in Moscow within the next two days, and call upon all parties to remain engaged in the process. We also urge all sides to work to clarify the terms of the 1992 Memorandum of Understanding in the areas in which ambiguity is heightening tensions.