



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on May 29 Shooting Incident in South Ossetia

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
June 2, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States is deeply concerned over a renewal of deadly violence in the Georgian territory of South Ossetia, where at least five individuals were shot to death on May 29th.

We understand from the OSCE Mission to Georgia that the Georgian and South Ossetian sides intend to jointly investigate the incident. We feel that this would be an important confidence-building measure for both parties; the United States urges them to follow through on that intention.

The incident demonstrates that the situation in South Ossetia continues to be very volatile. A major factor contributing to this instability is the failure of the sides to demilitarize the zone of conflict as they agreed to do. Only if both sides uphold that commitment – the commitment to draw down their military personnel and equipment - can even some measure of stability be reestablished in the zone.

This incident further points to the need to augment the number of OSCE Mission military observers for the zone of conflict. We strongly urge the South Ossetian authorities to reconsider their position that only five monitors may be based in Tskhinvali.

This is not a sufficient number to cover the zone of conflict or to provide any meaningful level of confidence for either side or for the local, unarmed populace, who are so often the innocent victims of violent incidents in South Ossetia.

We again urge the sides to intensify their efforts to find a solution to the conflict that has for so long divided the country. We reiterate that any solution must be reached peacefully through dialogue, and must respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and guarantee the human and civil rights of all its citizens.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.