

**CANADIAN INTERVENTION TO THE 2008 OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION
IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
Warsaw, 29 September-10 October 2008-09-26**

**Working Session 5: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination I:
Address by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities**

Mr. Chairperson,

Canada has maintained nothing but the utmost respect for the Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and its esteemed occupants, such as Minister of State Van de Stoel, Ambassador Ekeus, and the present High Commissioner, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek.

Sixteen years ago, participating States formulated an OSCE institution that would promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, promote strong inter-community relations and, most importantly, would serve to identify and seek early resolution of ethnic or minority-related tensions that might endanger peace, stability or friendly relations between participating States.

To this end, the HCNM was empowered by all OSCE participating States to conduct on-site missions, to engage in preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention and mediation, and to perform these duties independently of the parties concerned. In addition, the HCNM reports and recommendations have proved to be an invaluable tool and source of advice.

Over the years, the work of the HCNM has been simply outstanding. This institution has played a critical role in preventing crises, both throughout and following hostilities.

Mr. Chairperson, we are very troubled with the recent news that the HCNM was denied access to the South Ossetian region of Georgia. There is no ambiguity with regards to the justification of HCNM work and presence in this region, particularly in light of the current tensions. We are, however, even more troubled by the knowledge that some participating OSCE States have criticized the HCNM for making public the fact that he was prevented access on his visit to the region to access the situation on the ground.

While discretion and quiet-diplomacy is a trademark of HCNM responsibilities, we fully support the HCNM to publicly raise any situation or event that might be construed as impeding his ability to perform his duties in an efficient and independent manner.

Furthermore, within the HCNM mandate to protect the rights of minorities, it is incumbent upon the HCNM to voice concern over any situation that is of concern and suggest how it should be redressed.

Indeed, such actions do not constitute a breach of neutrality or objectivity, and do not break with the HCNM tradition of quiet-diplomacy and discretion while serving on missions.

Canada would like to reiterate its full confidence and support for the Office of the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.