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## United States Mission to the OSCE

# Statement on the Passing Away of the First High Commissioner on National Minorities, Max van der Stoel

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires a. i. Carol Fuller  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
May 5, 2011

The United States would like to express its deep condolences to the family, friends, and colleagues of Max van der Stoel, who passed away on April 23, 2011, in The Hague.

Max van der Stoel spent his life championing for the basic human rights of those who had been deprived of them. He set a high standard as the OSCE's first High Commissioner on National Minorities by effectively defending Roma, who he said faced discrimination across Europe; by mediating between combative Albanian and Macedonian communities; and by seeking to ease tensions in the Baltic countries — newly freed from the collapsed Soviet Union — with their ethnic Russian minorities.

But he was much more than our first HCNM. As just one example, as the Netherlands' foreign minister, he visited Prague in 1977, shortly after a band of "dissidents" had written and signed "Charter '77" which called for Czechoslovakia's implementation of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. He was struck by the courage of the dissidents. One day when he went back to his hotel, a member of Charter '77, Professor Jan Patočka, was waiting for him. Here was a foreign minister of a Western European democracy in effect recognizing an opposition movement to a Communist government. With the tape recorders rolling, he said a government was not allowed to interfere in the affairs of another state, but that the government of the Netherlands supported the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act in all respects and expected the government of Czechoslovakia to do the same. Patočka thanked him for this valuable moral support. After the short meeting, Professor Jan Patočka was arrested and rigorously interrogated. He died of a heart attack the next day. Even though the death of Jan Patočka stayed with van der Stoel, he was never deterred from the struggle for human freedom.

Max van der Stoel, lawyer, diplomat, politician, human rights defender, and father, we thank you for all you've done to assist those less fortunate. You will be missed, but your legacy will live on.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.