



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Situation in Northern Kosovo

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 1, 2011

The United States is deeply concerned by the continued violence in northern Kosovo. On November 28, Serb extremists in Kosovo's Zubin Potok municipality attacked KFOR soldiers with Molotov cocktails, pipe bombs, and small arms as they carried out their mandate to remove illegal roadblocks that have restricted the freedom of movement throughout northern Kosovo.

We condemn this violence and extend our sympathy to the families of the KFOR soldiers and to the Kosovo Serbs who were hurt in the clashes. As of November 29, two German soldiers and two Austrian soldiers remain seriously injured.

Mr. Chairman, we reject any attempts to justify the violence as a response to what some have called the "unilateral" resumption of customs controls at Gates 1 and 31. Kosovo is a sovereign country, but even those participating States which have yet to recognize Kosovo's independence must acknowledge that Kosovo is a separate and single customs space under UNSCR 1244, recognized as such by the EU as well. The resumption of customs controls occurred in full coordination with the EULEX and KFOR missions in Kosovo, and the minimal presence of Kosovo customs officers at the gates is fully in accordance with international law.

We note with concern that Serbian parallel institutions in Kosovo have organized roadblocks in northern Kosovo and directed resistance efforts against EULEX and KFOR personnel. While the Government of Serbia may not have complete control over the actions of parallel officials, the parallel institutions are unquestionably endorsed and financially supported by Government of Serbia institutions. We welcome President Tadić's recent call on Northern Kosovo Serbs to remove these roadblocks and we urge the Government of Serbia to use its considerable leverage to help bring the unnecessary confrontations with international forces to an end.

The United States finds comments, such as those by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Ivica Dačić last week, regarding a "willingness to go to war" alarming and intolerable. Inflammatory rhetoric fuels the tensions in northern Kosovo and can lead to violence.

Mr. Chairman, we urge political leaders in Belgrade and northern Kosovo to reject violence and to facilitate the immediate removal of all barricades and the resumption of unconditional freedom of movement throughout Kosovo. As a security community, none of us should accept the events that occurred on November 28 and 29, or the other attacks hard-line Serbs have made against KFOR in the last weeks. We all have a responsibility to prevent a reoccurrence of violence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.