

Crisis in Georgia discussed at OSCE PA Fall Meetings



A debate of the crisis in Georgia highlighted the Fall Meetings of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Toronto, Canada, from 18 to 20 September. A record number of parliamentarians, around 200 parliamentarians representing 49 OSCE countries, attended the conference, which was hosted by the Parliament of Canada.

OSCE PA President Emeritus and Special Envoy for Georgia, Goran Lennmarker, reported on his recent visit to the region. The debate on Georgia engaged a great number of parliamentarians following introductory remarks by the specially invited guests, Georgia's Foreign Minister, Eka Tkeshelashvili, and Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Vitaly Churkin.

Mr. Lennmarker said that refugees will define this conflict and suggested the creation of a "Catastrophe Commission" to try to reach the truth about what has happened during the hostilities, and particularly to answer the question whether or not ethnic cleansing has occurred. He said that the whole lesson of Europe is that there can be no ethnic cleansing, and we must see to it that there can be no ethnic cleansing in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

"What is true?" Mr. Lennmarker asked. "We need independent and objective observers, both in South Ossetia and Abkhazia,"

he continued. "The first victim in a war is usually the truth. It is important that we find the truth."

"Recent weeks have been a very difficult time for many people in the OSCE region," said OSCE PA President Joao Soares in his introductory remarks. "Most importantly, my sincere sympathy goes to those hurt and killed during the conflict in Georgia. I am pleased that we could bring representatives from Georgia, Russia and the OSCE together here in Toronto to discuss this issue. It is my hope that we will all gain a better understanding of recent events."

The Fall Meetings took place under the general theme of OSCE in an Open World: Trade, Security and Migration. They also included a meeting of the Assembly's Standing Committee and of its Mediterranean Forum.

Speakers at the conference also included Noel A. Kinsella, Speaker of the Senate of Canada; Senator Consiglio Di Nino, head of Canada's delegation to the OSCE PA; OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, and Ambassador Aleksii Harkonen, head of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force. Gareth Evans, President and Chief Executive of the International Crisis Group and former foreign minister of Australia, gave the keynote address at the opening session.

PA SG Oliver, ODIHR Director Lenarcic appear before US Helsinki Commission

On 17 September, Secretary General Spencer Oliver presented at a Hearing of the US Helsinki Commission. The hearing entitled "the role of OSCE Institutions in advancing human rights and democracy" was chaired by Chairman of the Commission, Former President of the OSCE PA Congressman Alcee L. Hastings and Senator Ben Cardin OSCEPA Vice President. Ambassador Janez Lenarcic also served as witness at the hearing. Both Oliver and Lenarcic stressed that the OSCE continues to play an important role in promoting security, democracy and human rights and that this is even more evident after the events in Georgia in August. Mr. Oliver emphasized the role of the parliamentary dimension in promoting dialogue and he expressed appreciation for the work done by the US Helsinki Commission within the OSCE.

