



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the 10th Anniversary of the NATO Bombing in former Yugoslavia

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 26, 2009

Madam Chairwoman,

We listened with great interest to the statement by the Serbian Delegation marking the anniversary of NATO's campaign that brought an end to Serbian aggression in Kosovo.

In late 1998, the Yugoslav government, under former president Milosevic, unleashed a brutal military campaign inside Kosovo, which included widespread atrocities against civilians. In its recent ruling in the case of former Serbian President Milan Milutinovic and five other senior officials, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia detailed that this was part of a Yugoslav state policy to force hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians out of Kosovo, killing many in the process.

The international community at that time worked very hard to find a diplomatic solution to halt these events, resulting in the Rambouillet Accords, which called for Kosovo's autonomy and the intervention of NATO troops to preserve the peace. Unfortunately, Milosevic rejected peace and continued the ethnic cleansing campaign. As a result, the international community, in the face of rising international outrage over the atrocities occurring in Kosovo, responded with a NATO military operation to halt the violence in Kosovo and stop the humanitarian catastrophe.

As we look back on this period, it is incumbent upon governments and leaders to ensure that the true legacy of 1999 is understood. During this process, we should acknowledge that many suffered, ethnic Albanian and Serb alike. With a clear understanding of the facts, we are better able to move ahead and contribute to the stable, prosperous Euro-Atlantic future to which the people of the region aspire.

Last week here in the Permanent Council, the Ambassadors of Serbia and the Russian Federation made statements concerning the fifth anniversary of the worst inter-ethnic violence in Kosovo since the Kosovo war. We note that last week also marked the one-year anniversary of the attacks by ethnic Serb extremists on UN and NATO personnel protecting the UN courthouse in Mitrovica, Kosovo, which cost the life of a UN peacekeeper and injured many more UN police officers.

No violence is acceptable, be it Milosevic's brutal repression of Kosovar Albanians, the 2004 violence, or the Mitrovica courthouse attacks. The United States welcomes the acknowledgement of the Government of Kosovo that what happened in 2004 was unacceptable. On the March 17 anniversary of the violence, Kosovo's Prime Minister Thaci issued a public statement that the attacks on Serb churches and homes that took place in 2004 were deeply regrettable and must never be repeated. Indeed, some of the worst perpetrators of

the 2004 violence were arrested, prosecuted and jailed. On the same day, Prime Minister Thaci also repeated his Government's pledge for reconciliation and cooperation for a brighter future for all of Kosovo's citizens and for the region. On March 23, Kosovo Foreign Minister Hyseni underscored this message before the UN Security Council. The Government of Kosovo is doing more than just issuing statements. It is building a positive future in accordance with its progressive constitution that guarantees far-reaching protections for its ethnic minority communities.

As Foreign Minister Hyseni outlined to the Security Council, the Government of Kosovo, with assistance from the U.S. and other concerned parties, has been actively engaged in efforts to preserve and reconstruct many of the Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries targeted in the 2004 attacks, as well as other important cultural sites in Kosovo. The Reconstruction Implementation Committee (RIC), of which the United States has been a strong supporter, has partially or fully reconstructed 34 sites, and is scheduled to finish major reconstruction by the end of 2009. The government of Kosovo is the largest funder of the RIC. My government has donated one million dollars for restoration and preservation of several cultural heritage sites in Kosovo, including four Serbian Orthodox sites: the Church of the Presentation of the Virgin in Lipljan, the St. Sava Church in Mitrovica, the Church of St. Archangel Michael in Stimlje, and the Budisavci Monastery in Klina.

The future of Kosovo lies in a multi-ethnic, tolerant society that works for the benefit of all of its people. We will continue to work with Kosovo, Serbia and the other countries of the region to promote lasting peace and prosperity in the Balkans.

We encourage the government of Serbia to work constructively with an independent Kosovo and the many willing international partners engaged in the region to find pragmatic solutions to the challenges that face them and to look towards their European and Euro-Atlantic future as peaceful, stable neighbors.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.