



Statement by the Honorable Alcee L. Hastings
Co-Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Hearing on “Advancing U.S. Interests in the OSCE Region”
October 28, 2009

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this hearing on the OSCE and its value in advancing our country’s interests in the countries that are part of the Helsinki Process. For the past dozen or so years I have devoted considerable time engaging with government officials, parliamentarians and representatives of civil society on issues of mutual concern. At times, these discussions have highlighted sharp differences in substance; in others considerable common ground. I welcome the administration’s commitment to engage in robust bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, including through organizations like the OSCE.

As President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I had the unique opportunity to travel extensively throughout the OSCE region, an area stretching from Adak, Alaska to Anadyr in Russia’s Far East. I have headed OSCE election observation missions to Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine, and participated in numerous others as an observer. Beyond the participating States, I have had extensive contact with the OSCE’s six Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation, including Israel. Finally, I have attended the major OSCE conferences on combating anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. In sum, I have been a practitioner in this process.

The Helsinki Process provides an action plan for peaceful democratic change based on commitments to which all 56 countries have agreed. The historic changes we witnessed twenty years ago were brought about by internal pressures from courageous human rights activists and external pressures from other participating States. Clearly, some leaders are resistant to that kind of change and are intent on maintaining the status quo. Inevitably, change will come.

Meanwhile, our responsibility is to prevent the erosion of core OSCE principles; to support the efforts of human rights defenders and others working to realize peaceful change; and to draw attention to violations when and where they occur. In this regard, I cannot exaggerate the importance of the U.S. leading by example.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.