



## HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

# Testimony :: Hon. Sam Brownback

Chairman - Helsinki Commission

In recent weeks, increased attention has been paid to Kosovo, the status of which is probably the single greatest issue yet to be resolved in the Balkans. Leaving it unresolved, of course, leaves it as a source of instability in the region. Given vast differences of positions regarding what the final status might be, on the other hand, any effort to resolve the issue of Kosovo's status also poses certain risks. The result is the careful creation of a process by the international community to move forward to the opening of talks later this year, dependent on the outcome of a mid-year review of progress in implementing standards. This process was outlined to the Congress by Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns last week.

Today's hearing on the future of human rights in Kosovo has been scheduled in order to go beyond the broad outline for proceeding with status questions this year and to examine, instead, the specific impact this process may have on people living in the region. In particular, many of us believe that there cannot be forward movement or a viable end result regarding Kosovo if human rights do not play a central role in the process. Whatever status Kosovo achieves, the bottom line is that Kosovo is part of Europe, and all of Europe has committed to respect human rights and fundamental freedom, particularly in the context of the Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE documents.

All too often, unfortunately, human rights problems can get sidelined in international talks. Those responsible for violations are usually unwilling to change their ways, while the actual exercise of individual rights and freedoms is perceived to be the source of friction. The easiest course often appears to be one in which victims get ignored if not blamed.

In the case of Kosovo, the leading human rights issue relates to minority communities, including not only the Serb community but the Roma and others as well. Parts of these communities have struggled since 1999 to survive in isolated enclaves with little freedom of movement, while other parts remain displaced and unable to return safely let alone make a living. In parts of northern Kosovo around Mitrovica under Serb control, displaced Albanians also have been unable to return to their homes.

Fortunately, several of the 8 standards outlined by the United Nations seek to address the rights of members of minority communities in Kosovo. By viewing these standards as excuses to delay or condition a determination of status, however, many Kosovar leaders seem not to understand that respecting human rights is not an option but a requirement.

Our witnesses this today can hopefully shed some light on how to change the situation on the ground in Kosovo, and how human rights will or will not play a role in what has been dubbed “the year of decision” in Kosovo.

First, we have Soren Jessen-Petersen of Denmark, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and head of the UN Mission in Kosovo, usually known as UNMiK. This assignment, which he took last year, is part of a distinguished career that includes years working for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and with the Stability Pact on refugee, internally displaced and migration issues in the Balkans. Later this week, Mr. Jessen-Petersen plans to report to the Security Council in New York on the current situation in Kosovo.

Our second witness is Mr. Charles English, Director of the Office for South Central European Affairs at the U.S. Department of State. Mr. English also a distinguished career in the U.S. Foreign Service that includes assignments in south central Europe. We are grateful that Mr. English has offered to participate in the hearing today, especially in light of Under Secretary Burns’ presentation last week.