

**Statement of the Honorable Benjamin L. Cardin
Co-Chairman
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Hearing: “Challenges to Minority Communities in Kosovo”

June 3, 2008

The traditional emphasis of the Helsinki Commission has always been on promoting respect for human rights in Kosovo. This was the case during the dark days before 1999 when the forces of Slobodan Milosevic terrorized the Kosovar Albanian population. It has been the case since 1999, while Kosovo has been under UN administration.

We have always tried to focus on standards in Kosovo regardless of the status of Kosovo.

In the last year, from the unveiling of the Ahtisaari plan through Kosovo’s declaration of independence in February, we were compelled to focus on status. Like the international community, there are differing views here within the U.S. Congress.

It is my hope, however, that with this hearing we can return to our focus on standards, and specifically the rights and privileges for minority communities in Kosovo. Even for those of us who have supported the recognition of Kosovo’s independence, implementation of the Ahtisaari provisions regarding minorities was part of the package.

Given the dismal situation for minorities in Kosovo, especially from 1999 to 2004, there is reason to be concerned about the prospects for these communities in an independent Kosovo. The efforts of Kosovo leaders in more recent years to reach out to these communities, however, give hope that the prospects may improve. It is mostly a question of whether the status question, as it has played out internationally as well as within Serbia and within Kosovo, will undermine efforts to establish trust between the majority and the minorities in Kosovo.

As I am sure the High Commissioner knows too well, it is difficult to establish trust between communities that have significant differences and a history of hostility between them. There is probably no better person than the High Commissioner, however, to provide insights on how to overcome this difficulty, and I look forward to his remarks.