

**Statement of the Honorable Eni F.H. Faleomavaega before the Helsinki Commission  
in support of Kazakhstan's bid to chair the OSCE in 2010**

**May 12, 2009**

Chairman Cardin, Chairman Hastings, Distinguished Members of the Helsinki Commission:

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you in support of the Republic of Kazakhstan to chair the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010. Kazakhstan continues to prove itself as a strong ally of the United States and has made great strides in the last 17 years toward transforming itself from communism to democracy.

I am here because I believe that as a nation we must support, encourage, and work with countries that are earnestly striving to implement the values that are embraced by this commission—particularly those from the former Soviet Union. They need our leadership and support as they labor toward establishing democracy. Among these nations, Kazakhstan rapidly has set an example for others to follow.

Kazakhstan became the first to declare its independence from the former Soviet Union and to form an alliance with the United States. Under President Nazarbayev's leadership, it voluntarily dismantled the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal and allowed the use of its airbases in the war against terror.

Since 9/11 and in regard to the U.S. coalition operations in Afghanistan, President Nazarbayev has allowed overflight and transshipment to assist our efforts. U.S.-Kazakh accords were signed in 2002 on the emergency use of Kazakhstan's Almaty airport and on other military-to-military relations. The Kazakh legislature also approved sending military engineers to Iraq in May 2003. These were welcome resources, but the alliance does not end there.

Kazakhstan support for the United States is also evident in its people. According to U.S. State Department polling data, more than 63 percent of the people of Kazakhstan have a favorable opinion of the United States. Certainly, this is reflective of President Nazarbayev's leadership. While Kazakhstan still has challenges ahead, it embraces democratic principles and continues on a firm path toward democracy.

Certainly we can understand how difficult that path can be. America itself is striving daily to become a nation that better embodies those democratic ideals that inspire us. We know that we can do better in the areas of human rights, tolerance, the administration of justice, and we have had more than two-hundred years to work on this. Kazakhstan has had seventeen. We were able to work through much of our transition without the 24/7 scrutiny of media. Kazakhstan has had no such opportunity.

As Chairman of the Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, which includes broad oversight for U.S. policy affecting Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, I believe Kazakhstan's efforts should be recognized and supported, as they were when the 56 member nations of the OSCE elected Kazakhstan as its chair.

Having worked with His Excellency Kanat Saudabayev, Kazakhstan's former Ambassador to the United States, now Secretary of State, for some seven years during his tenure in Washington, I spearheaded an initiative in September 2007 recommending Kazakhstan to Chair the OSCE in 2009. A number of my colleagues supported my initiative and joined me in sending a letter to Secretary Rice asking her to also support Kazakhstan's bid. I am pleased that those efforts led, in part, to the U.S. supporting Kazakhstan's acceptance for 2010.

On several occasions, I have personally met with President Nazarbayev, here and abroad, and I am fully aware of his efforts to strengthen and promote democracy. They are genuine and have been recognized throughout the world, even by Britain's former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. While President Nazarbayev has taken bold steps to bring Kazakhstan out from under the yoke of communism, he still faces many challenges and, although his record may not be perfect, as David Wilshire, Head of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, noted, "Building a democracy is a long and hard task."

Given the time it has taken America to elect its first African American President, I tend to agree with Mr. Wilshire's assessment. I also support President Obama's vision. In his inaugural address, President Obama emphasized that "America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity." I believe the 56 member nations of the OSCE share this sentiment. They, too, are ready to lead and welcome those who are on the path to democracy.

This is why I am hopeful that we will come together and support Kazakhstan's bid. Today, Kazakhstan is the most stable and prosperous nation in Central Asia—the first country in the Commonwealth of Independent States to be granted market economy status by the United States. More than 300 U.S. companies account for the largest share of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Kazakhstan. By 2015, Kazakhstan is expected to be one of the top ten oil producers and exporters in the world, with reserves comparable to Kuwait's. With more than 130 ethnic groups and 40 faiths living in peaceful coexistence, Kazakhstan is also a model for religious tolerance.

Considering that until 17 years ago Kazakhstan had known no democratic past, we cannot nor should we ignore the bold steps President Nazarbayev has taken to bring Kazakhstan out from under the yoke of communism. And, if advancing freedom and moving forward with democracy is our goal, Kazakhstan should be our choice to head the OSCE. Kazakhstan deserves our friendship, and I urge your support.

Thank you.