



## HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

# Testimony :: Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin

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**Co-Chairman - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

I welcome this hearing, one year after ethnic violence devastated areas of southern Kyrgyzstan. Let me begin, however, by welcoming an old friend: Kimmo Kiljunen, whom many of us know from his work in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. I am pleased to see that Kimmo has continued doing important work in a non-legislative capacity.

In fact, I think he has done very important work in Kyrgyzstan by heading the international investigation into the tragic events of June 2010, which stunned the country and shocked the world. The ethnic violence took place against a backdrop of weak government institutions, endemic problems with the police and judiciary, and growing ethnic nationalism. It erupted in a climate of corruption, and in a place that the United Nations has identified as a leading drug trafficking center in Central Asia. In the local power vacuum left following the overthrow of former President Bakiev and his supporters, I understand that racketeering was thriving and had taken on an ethnic component, as many businessmen vulnerable to extortion were ethnic Uzbek. And while many successful businesses were owned by Uzbeks, they were underrepresented in political life.

So while the violence had an ethnic face, it also appears to have been fed by perceived economic disparities. I believe that economic development and fighting corruption must be a component of any reconstruction and reconciliation program. I am concerned that the process of compensating victims for property damage is too slow and bureaucratic. Bribes reportedly are needed to compete the complicated application process. As a result, many young people are leaving the region in search of work elsewhere, particularly in Russia. Few ethnic Uzbek businesses have reopened, or reportedly reopened under ethnic Kyrgyz ownership, leading to concerns about "raiding" or pressure on minority business owners to sell for a token price.

International assistance has in some cases become a source of ethnic tension as well. Even with good intentions, aid has not always reached those for whom it was intended. For example, a new high-rise apartment building funded by international aid money was intended to house victims of the violence. Yet, while more than three-fourths of the victims were ethnic-Uzbeks, I don't believe any ethnic-Uzbeks received apartments in the new building. Although I understand that this was partly because most preferred to remain in traditional single family houses, it is illustrative of how divisive even an aid program can be.

And property distribution likely will be another stress point. Riots over land disputes in 1990 during the breakup of the Soviet Union left over 300 people dead. A long-stalled land distribution project in Osh has been restarted, opening the door to fresh quarrels.

Obviously, this is a very complicated problem, with many angles and competing perspectives. Kimmo Kiljunen's report is exhaustive, comprehensive and fair. Given the passions that still surround the violence and the possibility of its recurrence, that is a major achievement. I very much look forward to hearing from him and our other witnesses about the results of the international investigation and the recommendations for addressing the current situation and promoting ethnic reconciliation.