



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Testimony :: Hon. Louise McIntosh Slaughter

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Presiding Commissioner - Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

Mr. Minister, we deeply appreciate your appearing before the Commission today at an interesting time as you prepare to host the OSCE ministerial meeting next month in Madrid. Our Chairman, Congressman Hastings, expresses his regrets that unforeseen travel difficulties have prevented him from returning to Washington in time for this afternoon's hearing. As a longstanding member of this Commission, I am pleased to welcome you on behalf of my colleagues. Certainly we are unique in our focus on developments in the OSCE from a parliamentary perspective.

I appreciate your prepared remarks that recognize distinctive contributions of parliamentarians to the Helsinki Process. My personal involvement in that aspect of the OSCE dates back to 1993 when Finland hosted the Annual Session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Over the years, I have appreciated the opportunity to work closely with fellow parliamentarians from throughout the OSCE region.

From Vancouver to Vladivostok the OSCE has provided important leadership on issues from human trafficking and combating anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance to promoting projects aimed at protecting the environment and advancing security among the participating States, now numbering 56. Gender equality, as you point out must be a priority, an issue I have pressed in the context of the Parliamentary Assembly, along with Tone Tingsgård of Sweden, the Special Representative on Gender Issues. I also noted your reference to Afghanistan, the OSCE newest Partner for Cooperation. When I first flagged concerns regarding developments in Afghanistan, some people said, "that isn't our concern, it's outside the OSCE region." Well, one of the lessons of September 11th is that events in seemingly faraway lands do matter, for the people there and ultimately for our own security.

Mr. Minister, I know you have an ambitious agenda for the Madrid meeting and that the Russians and others may complicate your work given the OSCE rule requiring consensus. Thank you for being here to update us on these and other developments in the OSCE arena.