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MINORITY RIGHTS AND THE BALTIC STATES

ISSUE

The Baltic States face the challenge of re-establishing their national identities while respecting the rights of their large Russian-speaking minorities.

BACKGROUND

Russia has focused its complaints on the treatment of Russian minorities in Estonia and Latvia. The small minority in Lithuania is not an issue.

As a response to domestic nationalist pressure, President Yeltsin formally suspended Russian troop withdrawals from the Baltic States October 29, because of alleged human rights violations.

The Baltic States justify restricting citizenship to the Russian minorities on the basis that they are part of an illegal occupation. Despite government assurances, uncertainty over economic and social rights remain a preoccupation of the Russian minorities.

Estonia and Latvia have taken steps to address Russian concerns. Estonian President Merri plans to establish a human rights institute. Estonia requested an observer mission under the CSCE CDH mechanism which will complete its report shortly.

The UN mission invited by Latvia concluded there were no gross or systematic human rights violations, but suggested ways Latvia could improve relations between the Latvian and Russian communities.

By way of a statement from the Chair, the Third Committee of UNGA 47 has encouraged governments involved to intensify their efforts to ensure the rights of Russian minorities in Latvia and Estonia.

CANADIAN POSITION

The SSEA underlined the importance we attach to the protection of minorities and the respect for international human rights commitments in meetings with Russian FM Kozyrev, Estonian FM Velliste and Latvian FM Andrejevs, at the Stockholm CSCE Council meeting, December 14 - 15.

Canada has acted forcefully on the issue of Baltic troop withdrawals. Canada rejects linkage of Russian troop withdrawals to any other issue. However, we have encouraged the