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CARDIN SAYS OBAMA BOLDLY MOVING FORWARD TO RESTORE U.S. LEADERSHIP AND CREDIBILITY ABROAD

Baltimore, MD – U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), Chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission) and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, tonight addressed members of the Baltimore Foreign Relations Council about the foreign policy challenges facing the new Obama Administration.

“President Obama took office just three short months ago with our economy in shambles and America’s world image and influence severely damaged – due to abuses and excesses of the previous administration. Congress has been working to give the President the tools he needs to fix our economy and, I am especially proud, we are working with him to help restore faith in the United States as a friend, ally, and leader in the global community. I believe American leadership is still sorely needed and the U.S. Helsinki Commission is one of those key tools available to help this administration engage likeminded nations who have made a common commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

“Starting from his very first days in office, President Obama has taken bold action to demonstrate to the world that the United States will lead by example, particularly in the area of protecting and promoting human rights. In recent years, no other issue has generated as much criticism of the United States as the status and treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay. President Obama has begun the process of closing the American detention facility there and also has made it clear that no branch or service of the United States Government shall engage in any form of torture. Hope and optimism have brought forth a new era of action and responsibility.”

Senator Cardin used his address to the Baltimore Foreign Relations Council to recap his recent trip to Israel, the West Bank, Syria and Vienna, during which he met with key leaders of the Israeli and Palestinian Authority governments, as well as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

“The United States must take a leadership role in helping Israel’s new government negotiate agreements with its neighbors, including the Palestinians. Innocent lives are at risk on all sides of the border. The Obama administration also must simultaneously focus on a realistic agenda to combat terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the results of which will have repercussions worldwide.

“A critical test for the new Obama Administration also will be the development of an effective working relationship with Russia. In the Middle East, and around the globe, our two nations have many common interests and must work together to reach our common goals.

“America’s security and leadership also has been greatly undermined by our dangerous reliance on foreign oil. I’m hopeful that President Obama is moving aggressively to help the United States create a more efficient energy system and seek out and invest in next-generation, transformative technologies. We all face economic challenges, but the U.S. is committed to an international climate change policy that will be a driver of the economy, not a burden.”

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The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, is an independent agency of the Federal Government charged with monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords and advancing comprehensive security through promotion of human rights, democracy, and economic, environmental and military cooperation in 56 countries. The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. Senate, nine from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense, and Commerce.