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CARDIN PRAISES OBAMA FOR REITERATING THE NEED FOR BALANCE AND THE RULE OF LAW WHILE PROTECTING THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), Chairman of Judiciary Terrorism and Homeland Security Subcommittee and Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, released the following statement in response to President Obama’s remarks on national security delivered today at the National Archives:

“For four months now, President Obama has been cleaning up the messes left by the previous administration. For eight years, our system of justice and America’s leadership in the world were diminished by the actions of the very government responsible for protecting us from harm. I applaud President Obama for his continued efforts restore balance to our nation and our system of justice. I thank him for his commitment to provide greater transparency and oversight.

“Guantanamo Bay represents a failed system of justice that has detained hundreds of people over seven years and yielded only three convictions, while releasing over 500 individuals without any charges ever being brought. The courts have repeatedly called into question the current system of military commission trials, and have ordered some detainees to be released. I agree with President Obama that it is far past time to close Guantanamo Bay and I commend him for taking actions to do so. I welcome his invitation to work with Congress to create a system of fair and speedy trials to prosecute suspected terrorists and have their convictions upheld by the courts. As Chairman of the Judiciary Terrorism and Homeland Security Subcommittee, I look forward to working with the Obama Administration as they finalize a plan to implement a lawful and efficient system of trials using an appropriate combination of our civilian courts and military commissions for the five categories of detainees he outlined today.

“An important part of the President’s remarks today was his pledge to reverse the practice of overusing the “state secrets” privilege. This was too frequently and too heavily abused by the previous administration, which is why I am a co-sponsor with Judiciary Committee Chairman Leahy of S. 416, the State Secrets Protection Act. Complementary to the President’s remarks today, this bill would give independent federal judges a greater role in determining whether the “state secrets” privilege should be used by the government to dismiss a lawsuit, and requires regular reporting to Congress of the use of the privilege by the government. This bill will help reinstate some of the required checks and balances in our national and homeland security efforts. I look forward to marking up this important bill in our Committee after the Memorial Day recess.”

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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.