

OSCE to Send Scaled-Back Mission to Kyrgyzstan

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ASTANA, Kazakhstan — Europe's main rights watchdog will send a scaled-down police mission to Kyrgyzstan early next year after postponing its deployment because of security threats in the volatile Central Asian state, an official said Monday.

Herbert Salber, director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Center, also said in an interview that Central Asian states should be able to fight the twin threats of Islamist militancy and ethnic violence without abandoning human rights.

The 56-member Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which holds its first summit since 1999 in the Kazakh capital Astana on Wednesday and Thursday, planned to send 30 or 31 unarmed police to Kyrgyzstan in early 2011, Salber said.

He said most of the policemen would be deployed in the south, where clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks killed more than 400 people in June. The OSCE had earlier planned to send a 52-member police mission this year.

Kyrgyzstan, an impoverished former Soviet republic that hosts both U.S. and Russian military air bases, is trying to build the first parliamentary democracy in a region otherwise governed by presidential strongmen.

Salber said the situation in the south remained tense after the June violence, and the deployment was delayed after rumors spread that the OSCE policemen could side with ethnic Uzbeks to promote a Kosovo-style secession.

"Such fears were certainly entirely unfounded," Salber said. But he added: "They constituted a real threat to the security of OSCE personnel. We were feeling this atmosphere of threat."

Salber said eight OSCE policemen were already in Kyrgyzstan and that the full team would be deployed by early 2011 with a "modified concept" of their mission. Their main tasks, he said, would be to help local police and to rebuild interethnic trust.

Security in Central Asia, a region rich in minerals wedged between Russia, China, Iran and Afghanistan, will be high on the agenda of the OSCE summit.

Salber said he believed that Central Asian governments would be able to tackle their problems.

"I hope that the chances to cope with this are very good," he said. "The decisive point here is to mobilize the political will that is needed to meet these threats, and also for working together with the international community."

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