



United States Mission to the OSCE

Twelve years since the Full-scale Military Aggression Against Georgia by the Russian Federation

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 3, 2020

The United States strongly supports the joint statement by the *Group of Friends* of Georgia. In addition, I would like to say a few words in my national capacity, over and above being a member of the *Group of Friends*.

Twelve years have passed since Russia launched a military attack on Georgia to solidify its control over the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The anniversary of the August 2008 war is a somber reminder of the thousands who have suffered and continue to suffer in the wake of Russia's invasion.

Today, we remember residents forced out of their homes and forced to live as internally displaced persons. We remember innocent civilians who died because the *de facto* authorities closed the Administrative Boundary Lines (ABL) and denied them access to emergency medical care. We remember families torn apart and robbed of their livelihoods by "borderization" activities. As the whole world grapples with the effects of CoViD-19, Georgia also must bear the loss of trade between communities cut off by arbitrary lines, further hampering economic recovery.

Russia-led security forces continue to encroach deeper into Georgia, trying to expand the occupied territories meter by meter, a matter that should certainly be a focus of concern of this Permanent Council. In the past year, we also witnessed a Russian-led attempt to control hundreds of meters of additional Georgian territory at Chorchana-Tsnelisi. Russian so-called "border" guards detain civilians and use violence along the ABL, including recently shooting a Georgian citizen.

Russia's obligation under the 2008 ceasefire agreement is clear: Russia must withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions. Russia also committed to allow unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. We also call again on Russia to reverse its recognition of the so-called independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It is essential for hundreds of thousands of refugees and internally displaced people to be able to voluntarily return to their homes safely and with dignity. The United States' commitment to our friends and partners in Georgia remains steadfast. We stand with the people of Georgia and join them in calling for these communities, divided by Russia's aggression, to be united once again.

Mr. Chair, Russia's occupation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is a regular topic of our Permanent Council discussions on security in the OSCE area. Instead of engaging in constructive dialogue, Russia continues to engage in disinformation here in Vienna and elsewhere. Russia continues to instigate and back actions that are to the detriment of security on the ground and endanger the livelihoods and lives of the local population. The United States urges all OSCE participating States to support reopening a cross-dimensional OSCE mission in Georgia – with a monitoring capacity that can observe the situation on both sides of the ABLs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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