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## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Response to Zurab Noghaideli, Prime Minister of Georgia**

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley  
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna  
March 27, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

On behalf of the United States, Mr. Prime Minister, it gives me considerable pleasure to welcome you back to the OSCE Permanent Council. There have been a number of important and positive developments since you addressed this Council last fall. We commend your hard work directed at building peace and democracy in Georgia. These efforts reflect Georgia's continuing achievements since the Rose Revolution. The United States looks forward to Georgia's continued efforts, in cooperation with the OSCE, to foster democratic reforms and a peaceful resolution of the conflicts. We welcome Georgia's constructive efforts to advance a peaceful settlement of the Abkhazia conflict, beginning with the description of your Government's action plan you shared with us last November.

With the long overdue meeting of the Joint Control Commission happening now in Vladikavkaz, as we speak, this week presents both challenges and opportunities in resolving the conflict in South Ossetia.

The United States reconfirms its unequivocal support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and for the peaceful resolution of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts, such that these regions are afforded autonomy within a unified Georgia. We condemn calls by the South Ossetian leader for unification with Russia in contravention of this principle.

We hope the JCC meeting now in Vladikavkaz will result in an agreement on elaborating -- without delay -- a consolidated Peace Plan for South Ossetia that reflects the views of both Tbilisi and Tskhinvali. Such action would pave the way for a peaceful negotiated resolution of South Ossetia's status within Georgia.

As part of this effort, the United States supports wholeheartedly the Needs Assessment Study and looks forward to the meeting of donors to be hosted by the Chairman-in-Office. The United States reaffirms its intention to support these projects.

We commend Georgia's unilateral confidence-building measures, including efforts to demilitarize the zone of conflict. Such steps are tangible proof of Georgia's commitment to peaceful resolution of the dispute.

The Government of Georgia has committed itself on many occasions to non-use of force, which the United States endorses strongly. We call on the South Ossetian side to reciprocate

with demilitarization and confidence-building measures of its own, based on those proposed to them March 17. The South Ossetians should also engage promptly with the Georgian side on the draft restitution law. We call on the Russian Federation to encourage the South Ossetians to take these steps now.

I will take this opportunity to complement all parties involved on their success in keeping the temperature somewhat in the moderate range, and not, so far, allowing matters to get beyond control.

The United States endorses Ambassador Reeve's proposal to establish a Joint Peacekeeping Force checkpoint and OSCE monitoring at the town of Gupta. We reiterate our support for law enforcement cooperation, including re-establishment of the Special Coordination Center and joint policing in the zone of conflict.

Mr. Prime Minister, when President Bush was in Tbilisi last May, he said that, in the global struggle for liberty, our duties begin at home. Georgia's challenge remains to strengthen democratic institutions. We applaud the difficult work Georgians have undertaken with dignity and determination, such as radically reforming the educational system, revamping the police force, significantly decreasing corruption, and boosting budget revenues to allow the government to fulfill its social welfare obligations to the Georgian people. We are pleased that serious judicial reforms are under way, and call on the Georgian Government to deepen and accelerate these efforts.

We recognize that, just two years and four months after the Rose Revolution, much remains to be done, but much has already been done. The United States is committed to helping where we can. The dedicated reformers throughout Georgia need to improve their coordination and sustain progress on democratic and judicial reform. The United States shares the concerns of the OSCE Mission regarding excessively long pretrial detention, the independence of the judiciary, the status of minority communities, and freedom of the media. We urge the Government of Georgia to address these issues.

Georgia is a nation of tremendous potential. Her friends and allies must work together to ensure the success of Georgia's historic reforms and transform a fragile peace into a lasting one. Her neighbors, especially the Government and People of the Russian Federation, have everything to gain from a prosperous, peaceful, and democratic Georgia.

We wish you, Mr. Prime Minister, every success.

I would like to add a comment with regard to the two journalists who have been detained in Belarus. While not being familiar at all with the details of the detention, I am fairly comfortable in saying that the United States would not be supportive of any action that denies access to such detainees to their consulate in Minsk.

Thank you.