



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions on the Conflict in Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 14, 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The United States warmly welcomes the three Co-Chairs for the Geneva International Discussions on the Conflict in Georgia to the Permanent Council: Ambassador Michalka, Ambassador Sultanoğlu, and Ambassador Klaar. We appreciate your substantive, detailed, and candid reports. We take note of the language of your report, indicating that this is the most serious situation that we have seen in years. This report is intended to be to the Permanent Council an early warning. Your remarks warn us of a current crisis, and this should be a wake-up call to the participating States.

The United States reiterates our unwavering support for Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and rejects Russia's recognition of the occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states. That is rejected.

Important rules of international law and principles of the *Helsinki Final Act* – respect for sovereign equality, territorial integrity, and human rights – underpin our international order and govern the interaction between states. As we know, Russia's military invasion in 2008 of Georgian territory violated those principles. Russia – as a party to the conflict – must uphold its obligations under the 2008 ceasefire.

We call on OSCE participating States to demand accountability from Moscow. Should we conclude from Russia's actions it has no interest in stabilizing the situation on the ground in Georgia or in building trust? Russia's ethnic discrimination against Georgian citizens and ongoing installation of razor wire fences and other barriers along the administrative boundary lines (ABL) near Gugutiankari, and the closures of crossing points disrupt the lives of people living in conflict-affected areas. We call for the immediate reopening of crossing points on the ABLs. We were deeply dismayed by the death of Margo Martiashvili, who passed away because so-called *de facto* "authorities" refused to allow her to cross the line to obtain adequate medical treatment in Tbilisi. Georgia's program, *Step to a Better Future*, can improve the well-being of people on both sides of the ABL.

Because of its obdurate behavior, we must *again* call on Russia to respect the rule of law, to direct the *de facto* "authorities" to cooperate, and conduct full and transparent investigations into the deaths of multiple Georgian citizens, reportedly either at the hands

of Russian security forces or while in their custody after having been detained. The perpetrators must be brought to justice.

Mr. Chair, the United States believes the Geneva International Discussions play a unique and important role in enhancing security, stability, and respect for human rights throughout Georgia's territory, as well as in resolving the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. The GID Co-Chairs do not have an easy job attempting to move this conflict towards resolution. We encourage the participants to focus their efforts on implementing the ceasefire, improving the lives of people affected by the conflict, making progress on identifying and returning the remains of missing persons, and resolving the conflict itself. This includes establishing international security arrangements in the regions of Georgia under Russian occupation – Abkhazia and South Ossetia – and ensuring the voluntary, safe, and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

The quick and sustained engagement of the GID Co-Chairs this summer in response to threats from Russia and its proxies in South Ossetia over the establishment of a Georgian police outpost demonstrates the value of your work. It also proves the necessity of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) to defuse tensions on the ground. Which have been suspended, as you report, since June of 2018. We call for the resumption of regular meetings of both IPRMs as soon as possible. While technical and *ad hoc* meetings serve an important purpose, they are no substitute for this critical mechanism.

The OSCE, the EU, and the UN each play an invaluable role monitoring the security, human rights, and humanitarian situations in the conflict-affected regions. These organizations possess the expertise needed to tackle the challenges inherent in the Geneva process, and we welcome your fruitful cooperation with them. An OSCE field presence in Georgia capable of operating unhindered across the Administrative Boundary Lines would facilitate international access to the occupied territories and contribute to Georgia's peacebuilding efforts. We understand that the OSCE field presence was suspended in 2009. If Russia will give a signal of its willingness to have such an OSCE presence, perhaps we could initiate, once again, an effort to establish such an OSCE field presence.

In closing, we thank each of you and your teams for their tireless efforts to promote stability on the ground in Georgia, hold Russia accountable for its actions, and help create the conditions necessary to resolve this conflict permanently

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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