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United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Geneva International Discussions on the Conflict in Georgia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Harry Kamian
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 21, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At the 42nd round of the Geneva International Discussions (GID) on the conflict in Georgia, participants made progress toward agreement on a non-use of force statement. The United States welcomed the participants' commitment to returning to work on this important agenda item during the next Geneva round. The United States also welcomed the recent release of detainees as an important step that we hope will lead to further progress in resolving humanitarian cases.

At the discussions, the United States expressed concerns over increasing restrictions that are limiting access to the Georgian region of Abkhazia. The United States called for the reopening of two controlled crossing points along the Abkhaz Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) and the rescission of a policy restricting the rights of ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia. The United States also condemned the continued placement of physical barriers and demarcation signs along both ABLs. These actions restrict freedom of movement and jeopardize the health, safety, and welfare of local residents.

The United States also noted that the reported recent demolition of houses belonging to Georgian internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Eredvi village of South Ossetia is not consistent with international principles governing the treatment of internally displaced persons, and underscored our continued recognition of Georgian IDPs' rights to freedom of movement and to choose their place of residence, including the ability to return to their homes in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

In Working Group II, the United States affirmed its readiness to support cooperation among the sides to address environmental threats affecting livelihoods in the region, as well as to explore cooperation in disaster readiness and response, and to increase educational opportunities for residents of the conflict-affected areas.

The United States regrets that participants were not able to complete discussions across the full GID agenda, including a discussion of internally displaced persons, because of a walk-out in Working Group II. We urge participants to address disagreements diplomatically and to look for practical steps forward to resolve humanitarian issues. These include the core issues of IDPs, refugees, and returns during the upcoming rounds of negotiations.

The United States fully supports Georgia's territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty within its internationally-recognized borders.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.