



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Situation in Georgia

As delivered by Chargé d' Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
October 16, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We would like to thank the French delegation for bringing to our attention the conclusions from the GAERC meeting. We would also like to note the withdrawal of Russian troops from the areas adjacent to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in keeping with Part One of the September 8th agreement between Presidents Sarkozy and Medvedev and to make very clear that we believe that this is a good step.

However, in listening to the statement by the previous speaker, he claimed that, by taking this step, Russia had completely complied with its obligations. That is not a view that we can share. We regret that Russia has not fully complied with the August 12th Ceasefire Agreement, specifically Point Five, which states in unambiguous terms that "Russian forces must withdraw to their positions prior to the outbreak of hostilities." The September 8th agreement between Presidents Sarkozy and Medvedev reaffirmed the commitment of the parties to implement in full all the provisions of the August 12th agreement.

Our international monitors have indicated also that Russian forces remaining in Perevi are outside both the zone of conflict and the administrative boundary of South Ossetia. In addition, after signing the September 8th agreement, Russian forces entered the ethnic Georgian village of Akhagori, an area that was never part of the zone of conflict, and which Russian forces did not occupy prior to August 6th. We therefore believe that Russian Forces should be withdrawn from areas outside the zone of conflict, including from the Akhagori Valley.

We, too, were troubled by the procedural mishaps which took place in Geneva at the conference yesterday. In particular it is regrettable that the de-facto authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not display the sort of constructiveness that the other parties to the discussions indicated and chose instead to walk out of the informational session after demanding as a precondition for further participation that they be granted the same status as country delegations.

It is clear to us that progress will depend upon whether the Abkhaz and South Ossetian de-facto authorities are ready to drop their precondition of resolving their political status before beginning settlement talks. We are however encouraged with the major actors to the discussions including South Ossetians and the Abkhaz and the Georgians and the Russians, my own delegation, the EU, the OSCE and the UN. All agreed to try to resume the talks on November 18th after consultations with the parties. And we hope that these talks can be put in fact back on track because there is a need for practical steps on the ground.

We hope that in resuming these talks in a month after consultations with the parties, that they will be approached with a constructive mindset, solutions can be found to the pressing issues of unfettered access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia for international monitors and human rights groups, the establishment of an incident response mechanism to deal with violence and launching a process for the return of internally displaced persons once security is restored to the zones of conflict.

In addition we would like to say that we are quite disturbed by the reports of human rights violations and allegations of ethnic cleansing in South Ossetia. Russia's failure to ensure that human rights and personal security are protected in areas it controls underscores the crucial need for international monitors from the EU and the OSCE to have full and unimpeded access to South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

I would underscore again that the Ceasefire Agreement is equally binding on all parties and must be monitored on both sides of the administrative boundaries between Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the one side and the rest of Georgia on the other.

Finally, with regard to meeting international obligations, we would only point out that in our view Russia's invasion of Georgia and its recognition of Abkhazian and South Ossetian independence contradicts longstanding support of the international community, including of this organization, for Georgia's territorial integrity and violates key principles of the Helsinki Final Act, and risks destabilizing the broader region.

Thank you.