



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Current Status in Georgia

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As has been noted consistently in the past several weeks, including in the interventions by the United States and European Union on July 13th, and the recent statement by the European Union on July 20th, the situation in Georgia's South Ossetia region continues to cause us serious concern. The United States calls on all parties again to work with each other and with the international community to find a peaceful resolution of the dispute that strengthens Georgia's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and leads to economic development and peace for all the citizens of Georgia.

We are concerned over events that took place on July 15th in which Georgian Military Police stopped for a second time Russian JCC Co-Chair Ambassador Popov and Commander of Russian Peacekeeping Forces General Yevnevich on their way to Tbilisi. This unwarranted detention of diplomatic envoys resulted in the cancellation of the July 17th JCC meeting. The United States regrets the cancellation of that meeting and is hopeful that a rescheduled JCC will, in the near future, resume progress on law enforcement cooperation, elaboration of a joint work plan for a settlement of the conflict, and other important issues.

We regret that the South Ossetian leadership has so far failed to respond to the list of demilitarization steps shared with them by a group of interested OSCE member states, including France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. We strongly urge the South Ossetian side to implement these demilitarization measures so as to reduce tensions on the ground. One would hope there would be no violations to report on.

The United States calls again on the Russian Federation to reopen the Verkhniy Lars border crossing between Russia and Georgia. The closure remains unacceptable, as it prevents Georgia from monitoring securely its international border with Russia. All traffic is being diverted to the Roki Tunnel, which Georgia cannot control, and this puts both Georgia and Armenia in a difficult situation.

The current closure of Verkhniy Lars and the resulting flow of unmonitored traffic through the Roki Tunnel reinforce the United States' belief that there is an urgent need for joint and international monitoring of the Roki Tunnel. In addition, we renew our call on the OSCE to support the recommendation of the OSCE Mission in Georgia to establish a permanent checkpoint at Didi Gupta. Another helpful step would be the expansion of the zone of activity of the OSCE monitors to include all of Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia and an increase in the numbers of monitors. As a neutral party, OSCE monitors can help reduce tensions on all sides by reporting on violations throughout South Ossetia and verifying developments on the ground.

Mr. Chairman, as you know the United States has distributed a Food For Thought paper that contains some ideas on ways to promote security and peace in South Ossetia, which we hope will prompt discussion among the participating States. We believe these proposals could build on the progress made by the Joint Control Commission and the Brussels Donors' Conference and could do much to improve security and cooperation in the region and promote a resolution of the conflict.

Finally, the United States also notes the Government of Georgia's report of a police action on July 25-26 in the Kodori Valley in Georgia's Abkhazia region. The Government reports the operation is aimed at eliminating a rebellious militia engaged in criminal activity that is destabilizing the region. The United States is concerned by the lawlessness in the Kodori Valley. We believe it is in the interest of all parties to work cooperatively to reduce these destabilizing forces. We also believe that this operation underscores the need to look seriously at creation of an international police force to help combat criminality and establish the rule of law in Georgia's Abkhazia region.

The United States calls on all parties to maintain intensive contacts and refrain from any actions that could spark conflict, including incendiary statements regarding the possibility of broader military action. We note that the Government of Georgia denies that its law enforcement action constitutes any violation of the 1994 cease-fire. The United States looks forward to further information from the Government of Georgia and UNOMIG and calls on all parties to abide by the relevant agreements. We expect Georgian forces to withdraw from the Kodori Valley after the conclusion of this police action. The United States looks forward to working with the Russian Federation, as well as the other members of the Friends of the Secretary General of the United Nations (namely, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom) to encourage Abkhaz authorities to continue to demonstrate restraint, while pressing Georgia to resolve this situation in full accordance with international agreements.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.