



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Russian Actions in Georgia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Kyle Scott
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 7, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Last week without the benefit of much warning, I declared the April 30 agreement allowing the stationing of Russian border guards along the administrative boundaries of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to be “wholly unwelcome”. Today, with the benefit of guidance from my capital, I can I reiterate the United States’ serious concern. This action, together with media reports of Russia’s apparent decision to deploy thousands of additional troops to these territories, contravenes Russia’s commitments under the August 12 cease-fire agreement, undermines the principles of the Charter for European Security, and violates Georgia’s territorial integrity.

At last week’s Permanent Council meeting, Ambassador Azimov described these border arrangements as “one further step in strengthening security in the Trans-Caucasus region.” We believe the de facto establishment by Russia of “borders” marks instead an unwelcome step in the opposite direction and sets back efforts to broker a lasting peace.

We again call on Russia to honor the commitments made under the August 12 and September 8 agreements. We urge Russia to withdraw its troops to the numbers and positions held prior to the start of the conflict to allow unfettered humanitarian access to the separatist regions and to allow human rights and multilateral organizations to investigate allegations of ethnic cleansing and other abuses.

We also urge Russia to ensure human rights are protected and international humanitarian law is observed in those areas of Georgia controlled by Russian military forces. Continuing detentions and kidnappings, attacks on private property, police killings, and other incidents of violence suggest that Russia is not protecting civilians or maintaining order and underscore again the importance of securing access for international monitors to the South Ossetian and Abkhaz regions of Georgia.

The United States believes that international monitoring and the effective operation of the incident prevention and response mechanisms agreed in Geneva can play a critical role in reducing tensions in the region. We regret to hear to news that you offered today that one of those meetings has in fact been postponed. We strongly urge all parties to meet regularly with international monitors to address security incidents and prevent them from escalating into wider conflicts. We also urge all parties to allow for joint visits, together with international monitors, to the sites of incidents.

Like other delegations, we believe that a robust OSCE presence can help restore stability in Georgia. The Chairmanship has worked tirelessly and with great creativity to configure an OSCE presence acceptable to all delegations. The Chairmanship's draft decision artfully avoids the primary divisive issue and focuses instead on practical arrangements to allow the OSCE to continue to support the Geneva process agreed by all parties and to facilitate conflict resolution efforts. The United States believes firmly in the vital importance of a unified OSCE monitoring operation that can freely operate across the South Ossetian administrative boundary line. We urge all delegations to work with the Chairmanship in a spirit of good faith and genuine compromise to reach swift agreement on the basis of this proposal, and to refrain from introducing contentious issues.

Madame Chairwoman, if we cannot resolve persistent and outstanding conflicts in the OSCE region, we will find it difficult to build a Europe that is more secure and at peace. Progress on the conflicts in Georgia would help build confidence and facilitate any discussions of European security.

The United States remains committed to finding a peaceful resolution to the conflicts in Georgia, and will continue to support Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.