



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Events in South-Ossetia

As delivered by Political Counselor Samuel C. Laeuchli
to the Special Permanent Council, Vienna
July 14, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

We welcome your willingness to schedule this special session of the Permanent Council on such short notice, and thank Ambassador Talvitie for his presence here today and for his report on his activities regarding the heightened tensions in South Ossetia.

The United States is deeply concerned about the security situation in Georgia.

The escalation of violence in the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is very troubling. We call on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint and reengage in negotiations for a peaceful resolution to the conflicts.

The admission by the Russian Federation that on July 8th four Russian fighter jets entered Georgian airspace over South Ossetia is of great concern. We recall that one month ago Russia argued that Georgia's reconnaissance flight over its own territory by an unarmed UAV was provocative; by Russia's own logic, this latest action must therefore be considered a far more serious provocation. We reiterate our support for Georgia's territorial integrity and call on Russia to respect this.

We welcome Georgia's willingness to once again refer this issue to the OSCE for consideration, acknowledging the importance of using mechanisms such as the OSCE to resolve outstanding differences through dialogue.

The OSCE needs to do everything it can to contribute to a reduction in the tensions in that region. We should send a clear message in favor of an immediate halt to the violence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which in recent days has resulted in injury and loss of life. We should urge an intensification of direct talks at the highest levels between Georgia and Russia, and offer the good offices of the Chairmanship in Office to facilitate these efforts. We should call for the resumption of a security dialogue among representatives of the central Georgian government, the Temporary Administrative Unit of South Ossetia, the OSCE, and other interested parties to de-escalate tensions.

We should also look at practical steps on the ground that can help ease tensions and rebuild confidence. Joint monitoring of the Roki Tunnel and the establishment of a checkpoint at the bridge at Didi Gupta would increase transparency and deter the illicit flow of weapons, ammunition, and armed personnel into the Tskhinvali region of Georgia, a process that has contributed to the recent episodes of violence.

Greater support from all sides for rapid implementation of the Economic Rehabilitation Program projects can help underscore the importance of working together. All assistance to South Ossetia should be channeled through the OSCE mechanism so that it builds ties between communities, rather than the current situation, in which some assistance is actually

helping to cement existing divisions. Immediate efforts to reopen the TransCaucasian Highway to civilian traffic would be an obvious confidence-building measure that would benefit all the people of South Ossetia.

The violation of Georgia's airspace and the violent incidents of recent days underscore the need to bolster the OSCE presence in the region, and we call for an immediate approval of an increase in the number of OSCE Mission Monitoring Officers in South Ossetia.

These are all practical steps to help ease the tensions. We urge the OSCE and our Chairman-in-Office to implement them immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.