



United States Mission to the OSCE

In Reply to Prime Minister Noghaideli

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Prime Minister,

Thank you for returning to the Permanent Council and for being so clear and forthcoming with regard to the current situation in your country. One year ago you briefed the Permanent Council on Georgia's peace plan for resolution of the conflict in its South Ossetia region. The OSCE Ministerial embraced your plan as a basis for settlement with three phases: demilitarization, confidence building and economic rehabilitation, and political settlement. One year later, we welcome your report that Georgia continues to implement the plan. The United States encourages the Government of Georgia to do all it can to move further in its unilateral demilitarization and confidence building measures. These set the example for the de-facto South Ossetian leadership, which unfortunately still lingers by the side of that road to peace.

The United States reiterates its strong support for Georgia's territorial integrity and for a resolution to the conflicts in Georgia's South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions within Georgia's internationally recognized borders. We reject the notion that the unique history and circumstances that have led to the process unfolding in Kosovo are somehow a precedent or template for equally distinct unresolved conflicts in these regions or others. We similarly reject as wholly unacceptable any and all provocations or use or threats of military force in trying to address the separatist conflicts.

The United States is encouraged by the first meeting of the Steering Committee for the Economic Development Plan for South Ossetia, held on October 6. However, we were disappointed by the failure to achieve progress at the JCC meeting in Vladikavkaz on October 12th and 13th, a meeting that required special arrangements between Georgia and the Russian Federation to overcome the latter's travel ban. We urge all parties to the conflict to engage constructively.

The United States repeats its call for confidence building measures, such as exploring the viability of a special economic zone, increasing the number of monitors in the OSCE's Georgia mission and expanding their mandate to include all of South Ossetia, establishing a permanent JPKF-OSCE checkpoint at Didi Gupta, and combined Georgia-Russia-OSCE monitoring of the Roki Tunnel.

We note President Saakashvili's September 22nd speech to the UN General Assembly, in which he suggested that the structure for negotiating and peacekeeping need to be changed to be effective. This lack of confidence by one side in the existing mechanisms, resulting from the lack of progress they have achieved, needs to be addressed in consultation with international partners.

Mr. Prime Minister, the United States remains an enthusiastic and simultaneously realistic supporter of Georgia's democratic development and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. Georgia's progress on reforms is improving the lives of its citizens in many sectors. More needs to be done. But we note that the economy is growing rapidly. The World Bank has recognized Georgia as the most transparent of transitional democracies. The recent October 5th municipal elections demonstrated the Georgian Government's respect for fundamental freedoms and advances in decentralization and elections that meet OSCE standards—even as the OSCE identified continuing weaknesses that need to be addressed. We welcome Georgia's cooperation with the ODIHR observer mission to further improve its electoral process.

The United States looks for more effective and far-reaching judicial reform and improvements to the criminal justice system, based on respect for an independent judiciary and human rights. For example, we urge Georgia to pass legislation banning *ex parte* communication and to do more to hold its law enforcement officials accountable for excessive use of force and torture. We commend the Minister of Justice for his ministry's plans to improve conditions in pre-trial detention facilities and prisons.

We stress that Georgia's positive efforts in the separatist conflicts and ongoing reforms must be accompanied by harmonious relations with its neighbors. The most recent tensions between the Russian Federation and Georgia have shown very clearly that improving relations must be a top priority for both those nations. We reiterate our call on the Governments of the Russian Federation and Georgia to take constructive steps to reduce tensions.

The United States joins the European Union in expressing our concern about the recent measures adopted by the Russian Federation against Georgia and their economic, political, and humanitarian consequences. We urge the Government of the Russian Federation not to pursue actions targeting Georgia or Georgians, which are continuing to escalate tensions. We are troubled by the ongoing deportations of many Georgians from the Russian Federation. The United States adds to the call to attention by the Prime Minister to the tragic death of the Georgian man, reportedly from an asthma attack, who was awaiting deportation from Russia on October 17th. We urge the Russian Government to provide for the humane treatment and safety of Georgians in Russia, in accordance with the Russian Federation's OSCE commitments, and to abide by its bilateral agreements with Georgia.

The United States gives its full and sincere support to the statement by the Prime Minister that the Georgian government and the Georgian people have no intention to use force to start violence, to conduct provocations, or to do anything that would cause harm to their citizens in order to solve the conflicts. We stand by that strongly.

Mr. Prime Minister, we applaud the Georgian Government's continuing commitment to ongoing reforms and peaceful resolution to the conflicts. The United States remains ready to work with all the parties in ways that will promote regional peace and cooperative development. Thank you for being here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.