



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister David Dondua

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Michele Siders
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 12, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And before beginning, on behalf of the United States, let me add my voice to yours in expressing condolences to those colleagues who have suffered tragic losses over the past several weeks.

Mr. Chair, the United States warmly welcomes First Deputy Foreign Minister David Dondua to the Permanent Council. Mr. Minister, your presence here today is a compelling reminder of the important principles that underpin our international order, among them state sovereignty, territorial integrity, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and respect for the non-intervention in internal affairs.

Thank you for also highlighting Georgia's package of proposals to improve the lives of people in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The United States welcomes these measures, which help address the needs of the most vulnerable populations on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Lines. They provide increased opportunities for trade, mobility, improved livelihoods, and access to education.

We also thank you for sharing your frank assessment of the situation on the ground and the challenges facing participants in the Geneva International Discussions. The United States remains strongly committed to this format. At the forty-third round on March 27 and 28, the United States condemned the tragic death of Georgian citizen Archil Tatumashvili following his arrest and detention in South Ossetia in February, and the unacceptable delay in the return of his remains. The United States delegation called for a full and transparent investigation. The United States cited the tragic death as the most recent example underscoring the immediate need for international mechanisms to improve security and stability on the ground.

Like Georgia, the United States hopes the Geneva International Discussions can produce tangible progress toward lasting peace and security, as well as improvements in the lives of the affected populations. The United States regrets that participants were again not able to discuss internally displaced persons because of Russia's walk-out from Working Group II.

The United States calls for greater access to the occupied territories for the diplomatic community and human rights organizations. The OSCE should also have access to these territories. An OSCE field presence in the country should facilitate this access. In this

manner, as well as through its independent institutions and structures, the OSCE could contribute to Georgia's peacebuilding efforts.

For almost 10 years, Russia has sought to create an alternate reality. While Georgia seeks opportunities for engagement with people living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia maintains relations with two fictitious countries as a ruse to control and occupy regions of a neighboring sovereign state. We will continue to use the Permanent Council and other fora to hold Russia accountable for its violation of international law, and to expose Russia's attempts to distort the truth and rewrite history. The United States urges Russia to withdraw its forces to pre-war positions per the 2008 ceasefire agreement and reverse its purported recognition of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent States.

The United States fully supports Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.