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**STATEMENT BY MR. ANDREY KELIN,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 971st MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

14 November 2013

**In response to the report by the Co-Chairmen of the
Geneva International Discussions**

Mr. Chairperson,

We join in welcoming the Co-Chairmen of the Geneva International Discussions on stability and security in the Trans-Caucasus from the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union: Ambassadors Antti Turunen, Andrii Deshchytsia and Philippe Lefort. The utility of this international format is indisputable. Over the past five years, the Geneva International Discussions have become a useful forum for direct dialogue on issues of ensuring security in the region. Representatives of Abkhazia, Georgia, South Ossetia, Russia, the United States of America, as well as the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union, participate in these efforts on an equal basis. This makes it possible to lift concerns and exchange views on the situation in the Trans-Caucasus.

The issue of ensuring stability and security in the Trans-Caucasus remains, as ever, crucial to the Geneva talks. The Russian Federation has consistently worked on the premise that fully ensuring such security in the region is only possible through the concluding of legally binding bilateral agreements on the non-use of force between Georgia, on one side, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia also maintain such a position.

We take note of the efforts of the Co-Chairmen to draft a joint declaration of all of the participants in the Geneva International Discussions on the non-use of force. Such a declaration would represent an important intermediate step towards the conclusion of full agreements. It would formalize the positive dynamic provided by the unilateral statements made by the leaders of the three republics, Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia, on refraining from the use of force.

During the most recent round of Geneva International Discussions on 5 and 6 November 2013, which took place in a generally constructive spirit, regrettably, the Georgian delegation turned out to be unprepared to substantively examine just such a draft joint declaration that had been revised by the Co-Chairmen. Once again, there were attempts to raise the issue of certain unilateral commitments by Russia regarding the non-use of force

against Georgia. I am forced to reiterate: such notions are nonsensical. We were not the ones who started the conflict in August 2008.

We hope that by the next meeting in Geneva in December, the Co-Chairmen will have been able to prepare a draft joint declaration that is acceptable to all parties.

We are, on the whole, satisfied with levels of stability at the borders between Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Georgia, which were also confirmed during the last round in the security working group. This year, serious incidents at the borders of the three republics were avoided, including with the use of weapons. Nobody was harmed. Admittedly, there is a need to build capacity in the fight against crime in border regions. In the Gali region of Abkhazia alone, there were 17 recorded cases of kidnapping for ransom this year.

A reduction in tensions near the border has also been confirmed by the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia. It is clear that efforts to install border defences have contributed to this improvement. Local residents who previously only had a vague understanding of their location now know precisely where the dividing line between the territories lies. The number of violations has almost halved. In this context, we take note of the readiness once again expressed by South Ossetia to start joint delimitation and demarcation efforts with Georgia at Georgia's convenience. In the absence of legal guarantees of the non-use of force, the installation of defences on the border with Georgia following a decision by the leadership of the republic is vitally important to ensure the security of their peoples and States. I am convinced that South Ossetia and Abkhazia will be ready to enter into constructive discussions of delimitation issues with their Georgian counterparts, whether at the Geneva International Discussions or through the incident prevention mechanisms spoken of by the distinguished representative of the European Union.

Incidentally, the installation of border defences has in no way limited the freedom of movement of the general public, no matter what some may have tried to assert. In the first ten months of this year, more than 139,000 border crossings were recorded at the Georgian-South Ossetian border, with almost 30,000 cars crossing the border. The documents presented by delegates of Abkhazia and South Ossetia at the last meeting in Geneva provide convincing confirmation that residents of the Leninogorsk region of South Ossetia and of the Gali region of Abkhazia, including pupils attending schools in Georgia, have no problems crossing the border. In the border regions, farmers are able to go about their business unhindered. Provision is made for visits to cemeteries and other religious sites.

We share the view of the participants in the Geneva International Discussions regarding the importance of the efforts of the Joint Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) for the maintenance of stability in the region. We welcome their reaffirmed intention to continue participation in IPRM efforts on a regular basis. We expect that the work of the IPRM will continue to focus on the issues of incident prevention, suspicious activities, assisting in the search for the disappeared, and finding common solutions to problems affecting the local population along the borders. We trust that the work of the Gali IPRM will soon resume.

We support the endeavours of the working group on humanitarian issues. During the last round, the discussion in this group turned out to be less than simple. The introduction of yet another Georgian resolution on refugees at the United Nations General Assembly led to a categorical refusal by the Abkhazians and South Ossetians to return to this topic in Geneva.

There was no progress on the issues of socio-economic development or the preservation of cultural values. At the same time, we note the constructive discussions regarding joint efforts to establish the fates of the disappeared.

We think that it is to the credit of the Co-Chairmen that, during the most recent round of talks, the participants reached an understanding about ways to improve the effectiveness of the Geneva International Discussions, including in terms of organization and working practices. However, the Russian delegation would like to call on the Co-Chairmen to ensure that their public declarations are balanced. The Co-Chairmen must, by definition, demonstrate impartiality in their approaches to the topic under discussion.

Regarding calls from the distinguished permanent representatives of the European Union and the United States of America to implement the “ceasefire agreement”, I should like to clarify that no “ceasefire agreement” was enacted or signed after the failed Georgian aggression of August 2008. This would not, indeed, have been possible, because from the moment he gave the order to attack peacekeepers and civilians in Tskhinval, Mr. Saakashvili, became a person we could not do business with. All that exists is the Six-Point Peace Plan of Presidents Medvedev and Sarkozy of 12 August 2008 and the implementation measures for that plan of 8 September 2008. One of the principles stipulated that “The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation must withdraw to the line where they were stationed prior to the beginning of hostilities.” We fully complied with this provision on the night of 10 October 2008.

In conclusion, I should like to thank the distinguished Co-Chairmen from the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union for their efforts and express the hope that the Geneva International Discussions will continue to play an active, constructive role in bolstering security, stability and confidence in the Trans-Caucasus. The Russian Federation maintains its support for this unique format for direct dialogue and co-operation to find a settlement to the situation regarding Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia, which is useful to everyone.

Thank you for your attention.