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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Events in Abkhazia, Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 8, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States remains deeply concerned about provocative actions the Russian Government has taken, which have increased tensions with Georgia over its separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These steps have significantly and unnecessarily heightened tensions in the region and run counter to Russia's status as a "facilitator" of the UN Friends process on Abkhazia, Georgia.

We have expressed our concerns both in the Permanent Council and in the Forum for Security Cooperation several times in the past days. American diplomats have engaged on these matters not only in Vienna but also in the capitals of OSCE participating States. At this tense time, we reiterate our call on Russia to affirm its commitment to Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within Georgia's internationally recognized borders, to reverse its unilateral measures in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and to cease further provocations. We urge the Georgian Government to continue to avoid any military measures and to pursue a political settlement to its separatist conflicts. We call upon all parties in the region to engage seriously on the peace proposals presented by the Georgian Government.

Mr. Chairman,

In the United States, serious concern about these issues is not confined to diplomats, military experts, and the leadership of the Administration. These concerns have far greater breadth and depth. Under our system of separation of powers, the United States Congress is completely independent, and both houses of our legislative branch have separately addressed developments between Georgia and Russia.

On May 7th, the House of Representatives passed a Sense of the House Resolution on the issue. The resolution condemned recent decisions by the Government of the Russian Federation to establish official ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia and encouraged the Russian Federation to work with the Government of Georgia, the peoples of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the international community to find a peaceful solution to the

conflicts. It urged all parties to the conflicts to eschew rhetoric and actions that escalate tensions and undermine efforts to negotiate a peaceful settlement.

In the Senate of the United States, the bipartisan leadership of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senators Lugar of Indiana and Biden of Delaware, along with Senator Martinez of Florida, have introduced a similar resolution that is expected to be approved as well. Senators Lugar and Biden also recently spoke firmly on this issue in a recent opinion piece published in the Washington Times newspaper.

Mr. Chairman,

These same concerns are reflected in editorial pages of independent media throughout the United States and around the globe. These editorial opinions are coming from influential newspapers in America's population centers on the East Coast and West Coast including the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Washington Times, and the Los Angeles Times.

In situations like the one that we face in the relationship between Georgia and Russia, it is important to avoid miscalculations and misunderstandings. Candor and straight talk are essential. This imposes on my delegation an obligation to ensure that there are no misunderstandings about the depth and breadth of U.S. concern about developments in Georgia and U.S. determination to help find a peaceful resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.