



United States Mission to the OSCE

Extension on Illegal Detention of Zaza Gakheladze by the Russian Occupation Regime in the Tskhinvali Regions/South Ossetia, Georgia

As delivered by Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Elisabeth Rosenstock-Siller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 11, 2021

The United States condemns the sentencing of Georgian citizen Zaza Gakheladze to 12 years and six months in prison, after Russian-led security actors shot and detained him nearly seven months ago along the South Ossetia *Administrative Boundary Line*. We reiterate that the provocative Russian actions taken to wound and detain Mr. Gakheladze would not have occurred if Russia had fulfilled its obligation under the 2008 ceasefire agreement to withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions.

The February 5 sentencing is yet another example of Russia's attempts to control and exploit the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russian actions threaten the lives, human rights, culture, and personal freedoms of people living in and near these occupied Georgian territories and deny them the ability to exercise rights and access opportunities that should be available to all Georgian citizens.

This sentencing comes on the heels of the January 21 ruling of the *European Court for Human Rights* that found Russia responsible for human rights violations, including torture, arbitrary detention, and denying Georgian nationals the right to return to their homes. We demand that Russia cease its blatant violations of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Russia must comply with its obligation under the 2008 ceasefire agreement to withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions. We also call on Russia to reverse its recognition of the so-called independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and fulfill its commitment to provide unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

We express solidarity with Mr. Gakheladze and his family, and all families who have had to endure Russia's oppressive occupation.

The United States supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. We will continue to work with Georgia, the *Geneva International Discussions*, the *Group of Friends of Georgia* at the OSCE, and in other international fora, to hold Russia to account.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

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