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**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1279th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

3 September 2020

On the 12th anniversary of the events in the Trans-Caucasus

Mr. Chairperson,

Russia remembers the tragic events that took place 12 years ago. In the night of 7 to 8 August 2008, the regime headed by Mikheil Saakashvili launched the so-called “operation to restore constitutional order in the territory of South Ossetia”. The start was announced on Georgian television by General Kurashvili. Completely surrounding Tskhinval, Georgian Grad multiple rocket launchers subjected the sleeping city to a barrage of shelling. The methodical and indiscriminate massive artillery bombardment of Tskhinval continued until the morning of 8 August. Ground forces of the Georgian army and special forces of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs entered the capital of South Ossetia with the support of tanks and armoured vehicles. The base of Russian peacekeepers from the Joint Peacekeeping Forces was stormed.

According to various estimates, around 160 civilians were killed in South Ossetia as a result of the criminal decision by the authorities in Tbilisi. Ten Russian peacekeepers were killed and around 40 wounded. Most of the residential buildings in the capital of the Republic and in several nearby villages were completely or partially destroyed. The OSCE office in Tskhinval was also shelled and the city’s vital infrastructure and industrial facilities suffered serious damage.

Georgia’s actions were a gross violation of international agreements on the peaceful settlement of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict. At the time, South Ossetia was an internationally recognized party to the conflict.

The aggression by the Georgian regime against South Ossetia was completely unprovoked. This was confirmed in the report by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, established under the auspices of the European Union and headed by the respected Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini. To quote from the document: “The shelling of Tskhinvali by the Georgian armed forces during the night of 7 to 8 August 2008 marked the beginning of the large-scale armed conflict ... [...] There is the question of whether the use of force by Georgia in South Ossetia ... was justifiable under international law. It was not.” Appended to the report were copies of Mr. Saakashvili’s criminal orders to launch a military operation in South Ossetia.

It is well known that it was the Tbilisi regime's attack on peaceful Tskhinval and the direct threat to the lives of Russian citizens in South Ossetia that led to the retaliatory Russian operation to enforce peace. The decision was lawful as the exercise of the right to self-defence, enshrined in particular in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, following Georgia's large-scale attack on the peacekeeping units of the armed forces of the Russian Federation deployed in South Ossetia under the 1992 Sochi agreement between Russia and Georgia. The United Nations Security Council was informed by Russia of the exercise of its right to self-defence.

The Russian military operation had one aim: to stop the aggression by Georgia and to prevent the possibility of renewed attacks. On conclusion of the military operation, units of the Russian armed forces were withdrawn from the territory of Georgia in October 2008 in accordance with the principles of the settlement worked out jointly by the then President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev and the then President of France Nicolas Sarkozy on 12 August 2008 and the Agreement on Implementing Measures of 8 September 2008. This was confirmed by the OSCE, notably in a statement by the Finnish OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Alexander Stubb, on 9 October 2008. A reference to it is also contained in the Conclusions of the Council of the European Union of 16 October 2008.

The attack on South Ossetia and the preparation for a similar action against Abkhazia left them no choice but to ensure their security and right to exist through self-determination as independent States. On 26 August 2008, Russia recognized the independence of the two Trans-Caucasian republics. We were guided by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the 1975 CSCE Helsinki Final Act and other fundamental international documents. For 12 years now, Russia has been systematically building equal inter-State relations with the sovereign Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

It is important to understand that as a result of Georgia's attack on Tskhinval, the long-standing negotiation mechanisms for settling the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts ceased to exist. Their place was taken by the new international format on the South Caucasus launched in accordance with the settlement principles agreed upon by Presidents Medvedev and Sarkozy, namely the Geneva International Discussions on Security and Stability in the South Caucasus. They are attended by mutual agreement and on equal terms by representatives of Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia, along with the European Union, the OSCE, the United Nations, Russia and the United States of America as parties that were previously involved directly in the settlement and are interested in stability and security in the South Caucasus. By agreement of the participants, the three aforementioned international organizations act together as Co-Chairs.

The importance of the Geneva International Discussions is clear. It is the only international forum guaranteeing direct dialogue between Georgia and Abkhazia and Georgia and South Ossetia. The very existence of the platform has made it possible for the last 12 years to continue the peaceful negotiation process without any violent confrontation, while maintaining relative stability on the borders of the three States.

Russia's efforts over the years have been aimed at restoring dialogue and a fully-fledged negotiation process between Georgia on the one hand, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the other, including the signing of an agreement between them on the non-use of force.

In our view, the sustained normalization of Russian-Georgian relations is no less important for ensuring full stability and security in the South Caucasus. We believe that the rapid resolution of existing

differences and the restoration and full development of bilateral relations are in the long-term interests of our countries and peoples.

Thank you for your attention.