



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Statement on the Anniversary of the Georgia Conflict**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Hugh Neighbour  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
July 30, 2009

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

We listened carefully to today's statement by the distinguished Russian Ambassador which looked back over the events of last year. We believe, however, today should be an opportunity to look ahead. The United States believes this topic and these issues have an important bearing on our gathering efforts to take a fresh look at European security. The conclusion stressed by almost all OSCE foreign ministers at the informal ministerial at Corfu was quite clear: we need a strengthened international role on the ground in Georgia.

Last week we participated in a thought-provoking discussion in the Forum for Security Cooperation, also initiated by our Russian colleagues. In that discussion, we considered how OSCE tools and mechanisms could have been used more effectively to prevent and contain the August conflict.

In our view, August 2008 showed the need:

- to respect the principle of territorial integrity and internationally recognized borders.
- for countries to refrain from acting as "peacekeepers" in countries where they have previously been party to a conflict.
- for more transparency on movements of troops and equipment in crisis situations.
- for transparency, including military monitors and human rights/humanitarian observers.
- for humanitarian access.
- to fully implement ceasefire agreements.
- for a robust international monitoring presence in support of conflict resolution and confidence building.
- to deal with the question of a participating State establishing military bases on the internationally-recognized territory of another participating State without that state's consent.
- for better conflict prevention mechanisms and/or political will to avoid a repetition of this kind of conflict.

Madam Chairman, we believe both our Russian and Georgian partners would agree, at least in the abstract, with most if not all of these observations.

As for an OSCE role in avoiding future conflict, it remains unfortunate that the Russian Federation did not accept the Greek Chairmanship's status-neutral proposal for a continued OSCE presence in Georgia. Russia's rejection of the Chairmanship's artfully crafted compromise followed a similar move last year, when Russia blocked consensus on a constructive proposal by the Finnish Chairmanship, even though both proposals were supported by the overwhelming majority of participating States.

Ongoing incidents along the administrative boundary lines underscore the need for effective mechanisms to prevent these incidents from escalating. Uninhibited access for international monitors to the whole of Georgia, including its South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions, is critically important to prevent violence and promote respect for human rights.

We reaffirm our strong support for the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. We urge Russia to honor the commitments it made in the August 12 cease-fire agreement and the September 8 implementing measures.

We support the provisions of the 12 August and 8 September agreements, and remain deeply concerned by the fact that these provisions have not been fully implemented. Although Russia committed in those agreements to withdraw its troops to the positions held prior to the start of hostilities, it has instead built up its presence with additional troops and new facilities while taking on a new, broader set of involvements in those Georgian regions.

Madam Chairwoman, Russia is not relieved of its international commitments by unilaterally characterizing the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions as independent. We call on Russia to provide free and unhindered humanitarian access to these Georgian regions. We urge respect for the human rights of all individuals in the conflict areas, and call for the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.