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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ANVAR AZIMOV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

19 May 2011

Regarding the detention of Georgian citizens in South Ossetia

Mr. Chairperson,

In connection with the statement delivered here by the delegation of Georgia on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of that country regarding the detention on the morning of 18 May 2011 of five Georgian citizens in the vicinity of the village of Lapani in the western part of the Republic of South Ossetia, we should like to make the following comments.

Different sources are citing quite conflicting accounts as regards that incident. Each of the parties is putting forward its own version of the events of yesterday morning. For our part, we are prepared to share with you the information we have on what happened.

As we learned, a group of young Georgian citizens who had illegally crossed the border to gather coriander were detained by a South Ossetian border patrol at 8 a.m. on 18 May in the vicinity of the Cholto valley on the territory of South Ossetia. Following the detention of this group, the South Ossetian border guards, South Ossetian I stress and not Russian, continued their patrol and encountered another similar group that had illegally crossed the border. While attempting to detain that group, the South Ossetian border guards came under fire from a nearby forest. The South Ossetian patrol was forced to open fire in response, resulting in two persons sustaining minor injuries. The South Ossetian border guards offered them medical assistance, which they declined.

We should also like to point out that the claims made by the European Union (EU) mission that the Russian border guards did not keep in contact with the EU monitors are incorrect. At 12 noon on 18 May, the Russian patrol that had visited the scene of the incident telephoned the mission and warned them that the connection in the Cholto valley was not working.

In the end, the detainees, including the 17-year-old young man who had not received any gunshot wounds and was in perfect health, were taken to Tskhinval and then released.

We should like to call the Permanent Council's attention to the fact that the problem of the delimitation of the border in the vicinity of the Cholto valley has been raised repeatedly by the South Ossetian side during the Geneva discussions and at meetings within the framework of the incident prevention and response mechanisms. There has, however, been no response from the Georgian side.

We believe that until we have all the facts and details connected with this incident, it would be premature to draw any conclusions. There is no sense in trying to use this incident, in which people have been injured, to provoke unnecessary controversy and stir up confrontation in this room.

It is first and foremost the South Ossetian and Georgian parties who must deal with this incident. They have the necessary instruments to do so, namely meetings within the framework of the incident prevention and response mechanisms, in which representatives of the OSCE Chairmanship participate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.