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Canadian Delegation to the
Organization for Security & Cooperation
in Europe



Délégation du Canada auprès de
l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération
en Europe

**INTERVENTION BY THE DELEGATION OF CANADA
ON TENSIONS IN GEORGIA
35TH SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF
THE FORUM FOR SECURITY COOPERATION
AND THE PERMANENT COUNCIL
11 JUNE 2008**

Madame Chairperson,

Our delegation, in our 8 May 2008 intervention at the 712th Permanent Council Meeting, in our 30 April 2008 intervention at the 544th meeting of the Forum for Security Cooperation and in our 24 April 2008 intervention at the 710th Permanent Council Meeting, had repeatedly called for a full accounting of the incident in which a Georgian unmanned aerial drone vehicle (UAV) was shot down over Abkhazia, Georgia on 20 April 2008 . We therefore welcomed and took good note of the UNOMIG's report into this incident.

UNOMIG's conclusion that a Russian Federation Air Force fighter plane was responsible for the downing of the unarmed Georgian UAV has elicited our concern. The unsanctioned use of force by a party entrusted with peacekeeping responsibilities is not consistent with its obligations as a neutral party.

The UNOMIG report also states that from a strict peacekeeping perspective, enforcement action by third parties, in this case the Russian Federation, in the zone of conflict, is inconsistent with the Moscow Agreement. This action undercuts the ceasefire and separation of forces regime. Moreover, in peacekeeping operations – with very few exceptions authorized by international authorities – the deployment of peacekeeping forces should only be carried out with the consent of the host country, which in this case is Georgia.

The UNOMIG report also states that Georgian UAV flights are in contravention of the Moscow Agreement. Regardless, an unarmed UAV flight cannot justify the Russian Federation's choice to respond with force on 20 April 2008. Our delegation firmly believes the proper course of action would have been for the Russian Federation to launch a diplomatic protest, bring its concerns to the OSCE, to invoke Chapter 3 of the Vienna Document 1999 or to raise the issue at the UN Security Council. Any of these measures would have been an appropriate and measured non-violent response to the overflights by Georgian UAVs.

This incident and other recent actions by the Russian Federation, such as the deployment of additional Russian forces, including paratroopers, heavy artillery and railway construction troops, in the Abkhazia region of Georgia have escalated tensions in the region and made a difficult situation worse.

In line with its role as a neutral facilitator and peacekeeper, the Russian Federation should do its utmost to lower the tensions that currently exist in the region.

Canada also calls on all parties involved to display restraint in words and deeds and to engage in actions that further confidence building measures between all parties. In this regard, we welcome Georgia's announcement to suspend further UAV flights, and the peace initiative proposed by the President of Georgia. Canada strongly urges the Russian Federation to support talks between Georgia and Abkhazia.

Canada fully supports the United Nations' leading role in resolving the protracted conflict in Abkhazia, and we would like to stress the importance of full cooperation and responsible actions from all of the parties involved in the peace process.

Canada further supports the Finnish Chair's earlier conclusion that high-level political discussions are key to de-escalating tensions. In this context, Canada notes the recent dialogue between the Presidents of Russia and Georgia is a positive step.

We reiterate the necessity of peaceful and constructive negotiations leading to a resolution of this conflict in a manner that respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia.

Lastly, Canada appreciates that the Finnish Chairman in Office has offered his support for further discussions on this matter, and that the Finnish PC Chair and the Estonian FSC chair have been able to arrange for this discussion to take place today. We firmly believe that the OSCE, with its conflict prevention mandate, should pursue options to help decrease tensions in the region.