



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Situation in Georgia

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
August 28, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you for scheduling this special session of the Permanent Council. We appreciate the ongoing efforts of the Chairman-in-Office to resolve this conflict. We also warmly welcome Georgian Foreign Minister Tkeshelashvili to this meeting.

Mr. Chairman, the United States strongly condemns Russia's unilateral decision to recognize as independent the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This decision not only violates fundamental OSCE principles, but is also inconsistent with numerous UN Security Council Resolutions that Russia has supported, which reaffirm Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. Additionally, Russia's action undercuts Point 6 of the ceasefire agreement signed by Russian President Medvedev and French President Sarkozy, calling for the opening of international discussions on the future of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

We call on Russia to fully comply with the commitments made in the ceasefire agreement and its clarifying documents. We urge Russian forces to withdraw to their lines of deployment on August 6; to dismantle all checkpoints outside South Ossetia; to end any restrictions on the free movement of people and goods, in particular near the port of Poti; and to ensure civilian and humanitarian access to the whole of Georgia, including South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

We insist that Russia not obstruct OSCE monitors' immediate and full access to the whole of Georgia, including South Ossetia, and that it guarantee the safety and security of OSCE personnel in South Ossetia. We hold Russia responsible for ensuring that South Ossetian militias do not commit human rights violations or provocations that could devolve into armed conflict.

In our view, Russia's decision to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia again raises serious questions about its intentions vis-a-vis Georgia and in the region. This action further damages Russia's standing in the world and poses serious consequences for its relations with the United States and other countries. G7 foreign ministers took the unprecedented step on August 27 of condemning the actions of a fellow G8 member, Russia, for recognizing the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The United States will continue to stand with the people of Georgia and their democratically elected government, to support its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.