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United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on the Situation in Georgia

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 3, 2009

Madam Chairwoman,

Today, a year after the August 2008 war, the situation in Georgia remains a matter of grave concern. A little over a year ago, Russia invaded a sovereign state, in clear violation of the principles and commitments of the Helsinki Final Act, and unilaterally declared the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to be independent states. Russia has stationed thousands of Russian forces in both regions and posted hundreds of Russian border guards along the administrative boundary lines. Now, Russia intends to deepen military and economic ties still further, according to plans announced by Russian Prime Minister Putin on his August 12 visit to the Abkhazia region.

These acts are matters of great concern, as is the plight of civilians in the region. Human rights abuses in the separatist regions are serious and ongoing. We regularly hear reports of abductions, detentions, robberies, and home demolitions, often directed against persons of Georgian ethnicity, and we frequently receive reports of explosions and gunfire along the administrative boundary lines. Civilians' freedom of movement is restricted, and men and women encounter difficulties when going about their daily lives. We strongly urge all parties to respect the human rights of all individuals in the conflict areas, and to work to create conditions for the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

We once again call on Russia to meet its commitments under the August 12 and September 8 agreements. Russia committed not only to withdraw its troops to positions held prior to the start of hostilities, but also to provide free and unhindered humanitarian access to the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia. Russia's characterization of these regions as independent does not relieve it of these high-level commitments.

International support for efforts to restore security and stability in Georgia is critical. The OSCE, the UN, and the EU have coordinated the Geneva discussions on Georgia and facilitated meetings of the joint incident prevention and response mechanisms agreed in February. Recent meetings have allowed for useful discussions of security incidents and improved communication across the administrative boundary lines. We hope participants will continue to meet regularly, and will make full use of hotlines and other means of preventing conflict.

We once again commend the EU for playing a particularly valuable role in Georgia. Although denied access to the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions, the EU Monitoring Mission has done an admirable job objectively monitoring implementation of the August 12 and September 8 agreements, and providing accurate reports about developments on the ground. We fully support the mission, and continue to back its call for unrestricted access to the whole of Georgia, including its South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions. It is only with this

access that monitors can accurately assess reports of violence and prevent them from escalating.

As we work toward a long-term, peaceful resolution of the conflict, continued OSCE engagement in Georgia is essential, particularly as Georgia continues its efforts to strengthen its democracy. We urge Georgia to pursue vigorously political and economic reforms, continue to engage the opposition in constructive dialogue, and investigate reports of mistreatment of opposition members.

We deeply regret, as we've stated before, that the Russian Federation refused to accept the Greek Chairmanship's proposal for a continued OSCE presence in Georgia earlier this summer. We continue to hope Russia will reconsider its stance in the name of objective monitoring and humanitarian access.

In closing, let me reiterate my government's support for Georgia's sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.