

**Joint statement of the Group of Friends of Georgia
10 years since the Russian military invasion of Georgia**

August 7, 2018

This statement is made on behalf of Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, the United States of America.

We reaffirm our full support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

Ten years since the Russian military invasion of Georgia, we remain deeply concerned over the continued occupation of Georgian territories and underline the need for the peaceful resolution of the conflict, based on full respect for the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, and the fundamental norms and principles of international law.

We urge the Russian Federation to reverse its recognition of the so-called independence of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.

In the ten years since the August 2008 war, Georgia has made progress in strengthening democracy and good governance, as well as in the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration and economic development. It is disappointing that these benefits cannot be enjoyed by the residents of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions. We believe a peaceful resolution of the Russia-Georgia conflict would have a transformative effect not only on Georgia but on the region as a whole.

We support the Geneva International Discussions (GID) as an important format to address the security, human rights, and humanitarian challenges stemming from the unresolved conflict.

Ten years after the establishment of the GID, we regret the lack of progress on the core issues of the discussions, including the non-use of force, establishing international security arrangements in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions aimed at providing security and stability on the ground, and ensuring the safe and dignified return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) and refugees.

We call upon the Russian Federation to fully implement the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement, *inter alia* to withdraw its forces from the occupied territories of Georgia.

We support the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) in Gali and Ergneti and encourage the participants to find proper solutions for the safety and humanitarian needs of the conflict-affected population.

We condemn the conclusion of the so-called integration and alliance treaties by the Russian Federation with Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, which constitutes a clear violation of the principles of international law by the Russian Federation and directly contradicts OSCE commitments.

We express our deep concern over the increase of Russian military exercises and its further military build-up in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.

We condemn the gross violations of rights related to freedom of movement and residence and to property, as well as the restriction of education in one's native language. We underline that the so-called borderization through placement of artificial obstacles and fortifying the occupation line with barbed and razor wire fences, as well as closures of so-called crossing points, further aggravates the humanitarian situation on the ground.

We condemn the killing of Georgian IDPs Archil Tatunashvili, Giga Otkhozoria, and Davit Basharuli, and urge the Russian Federation, as the state exercising effective control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to remove any obstacles to bringing the perpetrators to justice. In this context, we support preventive steps by Georgia aimed at eradication of the sense of impunity and aggravation of human rights in Georgia's occupied regions, and we note the adoption of the Decree of the Government of Georgia on approval of the Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili list based on the relevant Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia.

We remain deeply concerned over the ethnic discrimination in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and the mass destruction of houses of Georgian IDPs, illustrations of Russia's purposeful policy aimed at completely erasing the traces of ethnic Georgian population and cultural heritage in the occupied regions.

We support the voluntary return of IDPs and refugees to the places of their origin in safety and dignity.

We call upon the Russian Federation to enable access by international human rights monitoring mechanisms to the occupied territories of Georgia.

We commend the efficient work and contribution of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to prevent the escalation of tensions on the ground and call upon the Russian Federation to

allow the EUMM to fully implement its mandate and enable the mission's access to Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.

We welcome Georgia's compliance with the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement and its unilateral commitment not to use force, and call on the Russian Federation to reciprocate, to affirm and implement a commitment not to use force against Georgia.

We support the new peace initiative of the Government of Georgia, 'A Step to a Better Future', aimed at improving the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and fostering people-to-people contact and confidence building between divided communities to the benefit of all people.

We encourage the OSCE's engagement in the process of finding a peaceful resolution to the Russia-Georgia conflict and support the implementation of confidence-building measures with an aim to rebuild trust and improve the living conditions of the conflict-affected communities.

We regret the closure of the OSCE mission to Georgia in 2009.

We encourage the OSCE participating States to agree on the opening of the OSCE cross-dimensional mission in Georgia for the benefit of the conflict-affected population, including a monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the occupation line. The mission will considerably strengthen the OSCE's engagement in the GID and IPRMs, as well as in implementation of confidence-building measures.

The friends will continue to raise awareness of the conflict and the need for its peaceful resolution.