

Joint statement of the Group of Friends of Georgia

This statement is delivered on behalf of Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

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

Thirteen years since the Russian military invasion of Georgia, we remain deeply concerned over the continued occupation of parts of the territory of Georgia and underline the need for the peaceful resolution of the conflict based on full respect for the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and international law.

We welcome Georgia's compliance with the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement. We call upon the Russian Federation to fulfill immediately its clear obligation under the ceasefire agreement to withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions, as well as its commitments to allow unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and not to impede creation of international security arrangements on the ground. We call upon Russia to reverse its recognition of the so-called independence of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.

We reiterate our deep concern over Russia's military exercises and ongoing military presence in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.

We condemn Russia's steps to unilaterally establish the Georgia-Russia state border on segments of the occupied territories and incorporate a part of Aibgha village of Georgia into Krasnodar Krai. We urge Russia to reverse this process. We are also concerned with ongoing work in implementation of the "programme" on creation of a common socio-economic space between the Russian Federation and the Abkhazia region of Georgia as another step toward de facto annexation.

We note the January 2021 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case concerning the armed conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation in August 2008 and its consequences. This includes the Court's findings that Russia has exercised effective control over the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement, including through its military presence. The Court also ruled that Russia, in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, tortured Georgian Prisoners of War; arbitrarily detained and killed Georgian civilians, and was responsible for their inhuman and degrading treatment; prevented the return of ethnic Georgians to their homes; and failed to conduct investigations into human rights violations. We call on Russia to fully comply with the European Court of Human Rights' judgment, including by

allowing internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to their homes in safety and dignity.

We are concerned over the ethnic discrimination against Georgians residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, and over human rights abuses, including severe violations of rights related to freedom of movement, residence and property, and destruction of the houses of internally displaced persons (IDPs). We call on those in effective control to enable full and unhindered access by international human rights organisations to the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We are concerned by the intensified provocations by the Russian Federation and the regimes in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali, which continued unabated amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. We are particularly concerned over the ongoing installation of barbed wire fences and other artificial barriers along the administrative boundary lines (ABLs) of Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, and by the lengthy closure of so-called ABL crossing points. These actions have destabilized the situation on the ground and severely impacted the security, safety, well-being, and humanitarian conditions of civilians in conflict-affected areas, particularly in Akahalgori and Gali districts. The tragic deaths of civilians due to the closures of the so-called crossing points is an illustration of the grave consequences of the continuing restrictions on the freedom of movement for the local population.

We remain deeply concerned by ongoing arbitrary detentions around the ABLs. We note the recent release of Zaza Gakheladze as a positive development and call for the immediate and unconditional release of those remaining under arbitrary detention.

We condemn the killing of Georgian citizens Archil Tatunashvili, Giga Otkhozoria, and Davit Basharuli, and urge the Russian Federation to remove any obstacles to bringing the perpetrators to justice. In this context, we reiterate our support for Georgia's preventive steps aimed at eradicating impunity and note the Otkhozoria-Tatunashvili List adopted by the government of Georgia.

We take positive note of the establishment of a humanitarian corridor across the ABL in Abkhazia region, which has saved lives during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also take positive note of the recent reopening of the so-called "crossing point" at the Enguri bridge. We urge full resumption of all ABL crossings in both the Abkhazia and the South Ossetia regions, and hope this step will help ease the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19.

We support the Geneva International Discussions (GID) as an important format to address the security, human rights, and humanitarian challenges stemming from the unresolved Russia-Georgia conflict. We underline the necessity of progress on the core issues of the discussions, including on the non-use of force, establishing international security arrangements in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and ensuring the safe, dignified, and voluntary return of IDPs and refugees in accordance with international law.

We express our support for the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms

(IPRMs) in Ergneti and Gali and emphasize the important role they can have in preventing the escalation of the conflict and in helping protect the safety and security of people on the ground. We express our great concern over the lengthy suspension of the Gali IPRM and urge its resumption without further delay or pre-conditions, in line with the ground rules.

We reaffirm our unwavering support for the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and call upon the Russian Federation to allow the EUMM to implement its mandate in full, including by enabling the EUMM's access on both sides of the ABLs.

We welcome the decision of the government of Georgia to launch a multi-stakeholder process of developing a comprehensive "State Strategy for de-occupation and peaceful conflict resolution", as well as the launch of the strategic review of the reconciliation and engagement policy. We support the Georgian government's "A Step to a Better Future" peace initiative, aimed at improving the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of people residing in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and at fostering confidence building among divided communities.

We encourage the OSCE's engagement in the process of finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Georgia. We regret the closure of the OSCE mission to Georgia in 2009 and encourage the OSCE participating States to decide on the reopening of the OSCE cross-dimensional mission in Georgia, including a monitoring capacity able to operate unhindered across the ABLs. The re-opening of the mission would strengthen considerably the OSCE's engagement in the GID and IPRMs, and in implementation of confidence-building measures. The Group of Friends of Georgia will continue to raise awareness of the conflict and of developments on the ground, hold Russia accountable for its obligations and commitments, and advocate for the conflict's peaceful resolution.