

PRESS STATEMENT

Meeting of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General 12-13 February 2007, Geneva

From 12 to 13 February 2007, senior representatives of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General (Germany, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States) met in Geneva under the chairmanship of the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping.

Together with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the Friends discussed the United Nations-led Georgian-Abkhaz peace process and ways to promote the dialogue between the parties. Representatives of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides took part in the meeting and engaged in constructive exchanges with the Group of Friends, which significantly enriched its discussions.

The United Nations and the Group of Friends reaffirmed their support for a negotiated solution of the conflict in the framework of relevant resolutions of the Security Council, including Resolution 1716 (2006). They stressed that a comprehensive political solution could be achieved through dialogue and that the situation on the ground in the areas of security, IDP return and socioeconomic rehabilitation can and must be improved.

Encouraging the sides to resume dialogue, the Friends stressed the need for immediate engagement on security issues, both in the upper Kodori valley and the zone of conflict. They highlighted the need to refrain from any action that could impede progress or undermine confidence, and urged the sides to take into account one another's sensitivities and to cooperate to deescalate tensions.

The Friends reaffirmed the right to return of IDPs and refugees to Abkhazia, Georgia; and encouraged the sides to focus on practical steps to improve conditions for returns, in the first instance to Gali.

The Friends also stressed their willingness to support efforts at socioeconomic rehabilitation on both sides of the ceasefire line.

The Georgian and Abkhaz sides assured the Friends of their willingness to move forward on these issues.

The Friends expressed full support for the efforts of the Special Representative to these ends.

Geneva, 13 February 2007