



# **GEORGIA**

**STATEMENT**

**BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY MR. MIKHEIL SAKASHVILI**

**PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA**

**AT THE 61<sup>ST</sup> SESSION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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## REMARKS

**H.E. MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI, PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA**

**61<sup>st</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly**

**22 September 2006**

Dear Madame President, Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

- Let me begin by thanking this institution – and all who ascribe to its values and mission, for providing me – and the citizens of my nation –with the opportunity to address you today.
- We are gathered here at a time when the challenges and opportunities for the institution of the United Nations have rarely been greater.
- And at this gathering, we must ask ourselves where the hopes for peace and prosperity would be, if the United Nations system were not such an active presence around the globe.
- My country salutes on-going efforts to make the United Nations even more effective, and we welcome the candidacy of a Secretary General whose competence and unique perspective on gender equality issues will help advance that goal.
- Georgia is grateful for the contributions of the United Nations – for the commitment to build peace in our region, and the efforts to create new opportunities for those most in need.
- And I look forward to a continuation and deepening of this productive cooperation.
- In a few weeks time, we will be celebrating the third anniversary of the peaceful, democratic revolution that brought a new era of change and progress to Georgia.
- Ours was a revolution that gave power to its citizens.
- And it did so by re-building the fundamental social contract upon which any democracy must rest – a contract founded on respect for the principles of transparency, accountability and responsibility.
- Today, citizens of Georgia's democracy enjoy the fruits of fundamental human security, liberty and opportunity.
- And we have changed the lives of our people.
- We have done so by confronting and eliminating corruption, by fighting crime aggressively, by investing heavily in education and health care, and by establishing new rules of the game - in a society where little of both existed in the past.
- And the results of our efforts have not gone unnoticed.
- In the last two months alone, the World Bank and the EBRD – to name a few international institutions, have confirmed just how much Georgia has changed.

- Today, we are recognized as the number one reformer in the world, as one of the least corrupt States in Europe, and as an outstanding place to do business.
- It is fair to say that our reforms, conducted in a part of the world where few thought they were possible, have in fact performed.
- In two weeks time, we will take another step, further solidifying the institutional framework upon which our democracy rests when we conduct local elections.
- We are making this important investment in our democracy because we believe in the necessity of empowering our people with the tools and responsibility to shape their own future.
- I look forward to a healthy competition, to transparent elections, and a more vibrant democratic system.
- That, in our view, is the way in which we provide our State with the capacity to protect the vulnerable – and our citizens the means to build a better life.
- However, like any nation undergoing great change, we still have challenges ahead.
- Judicial reform continues. Local self-government capacity building remains an on-going goal, and employment must be a rightful expectation of every citizen.
- Our national aspirations, however, are not parochial. We see Georgia as an active and responsible member of the international community.
- To protect our achievements and consolidate gains for the next generation, we understand that full engagement means facing and addressing today's common threats and challenges.
- And this we are doing actively, alongside our friends, partners and allies in places like Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo where our troops help support international efforts to defeat terrorism and build lasting peace and democracy.
- Because of this commitment we will continue to actively pursue our membership in NATO and welcome the most recent step forward, when just yesterday Georgia was invited to join Intensified Dialogue.
- We do this because we believe democracies are stronger when they are united, and that lasting security is best achieved through alliances of common values.
- Georgia is a European nation and this is not a recent revelation. We would in fact deny our history if we felt – or acted - otherwise.
- In the next days, my government will be signing an Action Plan as part of the EU's European Neighborhood Policy.
- Here we will take another step, strengthening the bonds that unite the family of European democracies.
- It is the goal of my government that we become a model European neighbor.

- And we have learned from the past European experience that the proper and peaceful conduct of neighborly relations is the foundation of long term peace and prosperity.
- What Europe has achieved in the last fifty years, we seek to achieve in our neighborhood in a much shorter time.
- This is our collective challenge – and common goal.

Madame Chairman,

- It will come as no surprise when we say that there are still grave obstacles to establishing lasting peace in my country.
- Reforms, especially when they are democratic, upset old interests and old habits.
- It is a simple statement of political fact that there are frequent attempts to undermine our reforms – our progress – and our democratic way of life.
- And we must all beware of those who believe a stable democracy can pose a threat to its neighbor.
- Georgia's democracy – like all democracies around the world – does not and cannot seek that end.
- The painful truth however, is that in Georgia today we have inherited the brutal legacy of unresolved territorial conflicts.
- And these conflicts undermine our stability and the stability of our region.
- In fact, this inherited legacy is directly responsible for the systematic abuse of the fundamental human rights of a large portion of our population.
- Just imagine for a moment, that the children who find themselves victims of these savage events, are denied the right to learn or speak their native language.
- That the elderly are not allowed access to adequate health care, that young people cannot receive a proper education – and that hundreds of thousands of people cannot return safely to their own homes – from where they were systematically ethnically cleansed – and which in many cases have been illegally sold or even destroyed.
- Further, the painful, but factual truth is that these regions are being annexed by our neighbor to the north – the Russian Federation – which has actively supported their incorporation through a concerted policy of mass distribution of Russian passports – in direct violation of international law, which is itself unprecedented.
- Few examples are more poignant – when one State seeks to annex another, when one State seeks to undermine another – on its internationally recognized sovereign territory.

- Today, I would like to ask all of you if any members in this great hall would welcome – or tolerate such interference by another power on their own soil. I doubt.
- Yet this is the situation we are facing today.
- And these are the actions that we must confront as we seek to consolidate and defend our democracy.
- Let us never forget that the victims of these conflicts are real people – and that the climate of fear that they live in is pervasive - and that their suffering must come to an end.
- Together with these conflicts, we have inherited frameworks for peace-keeping and formats for negotiation that no longer function.
- Simply put – they neither promote the peace – nor do they encourage genuine negotiation.
- If the purpose of our Revolution was to guarantee that all citizens of Georgia have the right to participate fully in the life and decisions of the State – then our Revolution remains unfinished.
- Today in Georgia’s conflict zones, we do not enjoy a status quo of stability and progress.
- That unfortunately is a popular fiction.
- Rather, we find ourselves facing a deteriorating situation, where the sponsors of crime and illegality are gaining the upper hand.
- Let us be clear: Georgia is a responsible democracy – and if we are to take that responsibility seriously - we must acknowledge that embracing change is the only path towards a lasting and just peace.
- The shortcomings of the current peacekeeper system are well documented.
- A few examples – taken directly from reports provided by the United Nations and the OSCE - demonstrate how Russian-dominated forces on the ground have served to perpetuate rather than resolve the conflicts – and how they have abused and made a farce of the time-honored principles of neutrality, impartiality, and trust.
- By choice, they themselves and not us have in effect, annulled their own status.
- Since the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia, Georgia, more than 2,000 Georgian citizens have lost their lives and more than 8,000 Georgian homes have been destroyed.

- For more than 12 years, Russian peacekeepers have been unable to facilitate the return of more than 250,000 internally displaced persons to their homes in Abkhazia – though this is an explicit part of their mandate.
- UNOMIG and the OSCE have cataloged numerous violations involving the transfer of heavy weaponry such as tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, mortar, anti-aircraft systems and cannons to the separatists – at the very time when we have acted to unilaterally de-militarize.
- The presence of Russian peacekeepers has proven unable and unwilling to take any meaningful steps to halt grave such violations.
- In South Ossetia, 18 illegal military exercises were catalogued with prohibited equipment in the last year alone – many with the direct participation of Russian “peacekeepers.”
- Unfortunately, the list goes on.
- On January 2nd, 2003 Russian peacekeepers shot and killed two civilians in Abkhazia and on September 3, 2006, a Georgian helicopter in Georgian airspace was shot at over the JPKF area of responsibility in South Ossetia.
- And at the village of Chubirkhinji, during talks sponsored by the United Nations, an eight year old Georgian boy looked out the window of his school in front of live television cameras and saw his Georgian flag and yelled, “Long Live Georgia”.
- Guess what happened? Every teacher in that school was rounded up and arrested by Abkhaz militias – one more humiliation and brazen act of human rights abuse conducted in front of the international community by the proxies of Russian peacekeepers.
- Let us be under no illusion.
- The residents of our disputed territories are under a form of gangster occupation which hopes the international community will lose interest and reward the results of ethnic cleansing.
- This cannot be allowed to happen.
- If we stand by, we will have accepted that indifference and illegality are the new rules of the international game.
- This leads me to the topic of Kosovo.
- As the international community seeks to find a just solution to this decade long issue – we must take stock of the extraordinarily counterproductive efforts pursued by the Russian Federation to abuse this unique situation for the pursuit of narrow special interests.

- Here too we must be very frank: any attempt by Russian officials to create or imply that a 19<sup>th</sup> century-style solution involving deals and territorial swaps in exchange for agreement on Kosovo is not only old fashioned but deeply immoral.
- I want to remind all of you that my countries territories – just like yours – are not for sale or exchange.
- And any hint of a precedent for Abkhazia and South Ossetia is therefore both inappropriate and reckless.
- The foundation of modern peace and security in Europe is based directly upon the very principle of respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- Indeed it is the cornerstone of the contemporary international order.
- If the Russian Federation persists in attempting to make this dangerous linkage and undermine that fundamental order – its impact will be far reaching – and the Pandora's box of violent separatism and conflict will be unleashed not only in the Caucasus, but across many parts of our globe.
- Because we are a responsible democracy, I must assure you Madame Chairman, that Georgia will not allow this to occur.
- We will do so, however, in the spirit and with the values that govern all civilized democracies.
- And in this, I do not believe we are alone.
- It is our firm belief that as Europe looks to intensify its relationship with its neighbors to the East, there is a vital interest to avoid instability, and to reject the unraveling of sovereign statehood.
- It is with these goals – and threats - in mind that I share with you my thoughts on how together, we can reverse the aspirations of those who draw strength on the cynical politics of division and fear.
- Responsible nations have an obligation to act accordingly, and my government is firm in its belief that we need to replace and transform the current framework for negotiation and peace-keeping in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- It is therefore our solemn duty – and sovereign right - to replace ineffective mechanisms with ones that work – to substitute impartial forces with ones that are fair – and to replace fear with hope – and mutual suspicion with new-founded trust.
- Our efforts are guided by principles that are simple, predictable and clear.

- We will consult. We will cooperate.
- And we will commit ourselves to the avoidance of any policy that is destabilizing.
- Our goal is the pursuit of peace and a peaceful resolution.
- But let me again be very clear – if we fail to unite in support of new mechanisms to advance peace – we give a green light to those who seek otherwise – and we risk plunging the region into darkness and conflict, despite our best efforts to promote peace.
- That is why today, I am proposing a fresh roadmap to resolution, that has as its goal the peaceful reunification of my country in its internationally recognized borders.
- Where all the diverse ethnic group of Georgia can live in peace and Harmony as they have thousands of years – and enjoy the fruits of democracy in a society that both protects and celebrates their unique heritage.
- In a country that invests new schools, hospitals, roads and Georgia’s future.
- The essential elements of this package must include the demilitarization of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, backed by the active engagement of the United Nations, the OSCE, the EU and other international organizations.
- This must include direct dialogue between parties on the ground, and here I mean Georgians and Abkhazians – and Georgians and South Ossetians – so that together we can assume responsibility for re-building the peace.
- These efforts can and will succeed through the establishment of an international police presence in both regions, backed again with the robust inclusion of the international community.
- Once such a force is in place, we are ready to back its mandate by signing a comprehensive non-use of force pledge.
- More must also be done to restore trust and improve living standards - and in both regions we must rehabilitate the economies.
- Why should our citizens be reduced to such miserable economic conditions?
- We are ready to contribute significantly to restoring access to the opportunities that the rest of Georgia’s citizens now enjoy.
- Additional confidence building measures will be implemented.
- Today, the situation in Georgia is marked both by opportunity and danger.



- Every day there are provocations and every day criminal elements consolidate their hold with consequences that will have international implications.
- As we move forward to replace and transform these anachronistic mechanisms, we continue to stand ready to work with our neighbor in the Russian Federation because Russia must become part of the solution.
- Consultations have already begun and they will intensify in the weeks and months ahead to change these mechanisms.
- It is well settled and universally accepted international law that Georgia has the sovereign right to request the removal of foreign military forces that impede the peaceful resolution of conflict.
- We make no secret of our intentions to fulfill this right because it is based on the most obvious principles that govern a nation and the international community.
- And it is in the spirit of the UN Charter that we seek to bring the benefits of our democratic Revolution to all the citizens of Georgia.

Madame Chairman,

- It is with the deepest respect to this institution and this occasion that I have chosen to signal not only our desires – but also my very grave concerns.
- Let no-one ever say that Georgia was not clear as to how it sought to protect its democracy and its State.
- Let no-one ever say that we did not seek to do so by peaceful means alone.
- There is no other way for our country – and for the international community at-large.
- In choosing to join the standard bearers of civilized democracy, we will act accordingly.
- We presume that all nations who share these same values and are willing to sacrifice for them...
- ...So that collectively we can achieve peace in our region.
- Let us therefore embrace this historic opportunity and not delay.

**THANK YOU**