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LETTER DATED 28 AUGUST 2008 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION TO THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE TRANSMITTING THE TEXTS OF THE STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE STATEMENT BY THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION DATED 26 AUGUST 2008 ON RECOGNITION OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

I have the honour to transmit to you the texts of the statement by Dmitry Medvedev, President of the Russian Federation, and the statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, dated 26 August 2008, on recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (attached in Russian and in English).

I would be grateful if you could issue and circulate this letter with the attached statements as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament.

(Signed): Valery LOSHCHININ
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of the
Russian Federation to the
Conference on Disarmament

**STATEMENT BY DMITRY MEDVEDEV, PRESIDENT OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
26 August 2008**

Fellow citizens of Russia!

You are no doubt aware of the tragedy of South Ossetia. The night shelling of Tskhinval by Georgian troops resulted in the deaths of hundreds of our civilians. Among the dead were Russian peacekeepers, who gave their lives fulfilling their duty to protect women, children and the elderly.

The Georgian leadership, in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and their obligations under international agreements, and contrary to the voice of reason, unleashed an armed conflict in which innocent civilians were the victims. The same fate lay in store for Abkhazia. Tbilisi was apparently counting on a blitzkrieg that would have faced the international community with a fait accompli. The most inhuman means of achieving its objective was chosen - annexing South Ossetia at the price of annihilating a whole people.

This was not the first attempt. In 1991, President Gamsakhurdia of Georgia, having proclaimed the slogan "Georgia for Georgians" - just think about these words - ordered attacks on the cities of Sukhum and Tskhinval. Thousands killed, tens of thousands of refugees, whole villages devastated - that was the result. And it was Russia that put a stop to the extermination of the Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples. Our country came forward as a mediator and peacekeeper, seeking a political settlement. In doing so our approach was always based on recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity.

The Georgian leadership chose another way. Disrupting the negotiating process, ignoring the agreements reached, committing political and military provocations, attacking peacekeepers - all in blatant violation of the regime governing conflict zones, established with the support of the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Russia has shown restraint and patience. We have repeatedly called for a resumption of negotiations, and did not deviate from this position even after the unilateral proclamation of Kosovo's independence. However, our persistent proposals to the Georgian side to conclude agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the non-use of force remained unanswered. Regrettably, they were also ignored by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and even in the United Nations.

It is clear now that a peaceful resolution of the conflict was not part of Tbilisi's plan. The Georgian leadership was methodically preparing for war, while the political and material support provided by their foreign patrons only served to strengthen their sense of impunity.

Tbilisi made its choice on the night of 8 August 2008. Saakashvili opted for genocide to accomplish his political objectives. In doing so he himself dashed all hopes for peaceful coexistence of Ossetians, Abkhaz and Georgians in a single State. The peoples of South Ossetia and Abkhazia have repeatedly expressed their desire for independence for their republics in referendums. It is our understanding that after what has happened in Tskhinval and what has been planned for Abkhazia, they have the right to choose their own destiny.

The Presidents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, based on the results of the referendums held and on the decisions taken by the Parliaments of the two republics, asked Russia to recognize the State sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Federation Council and the State Duma voted in support of those appeals.

A decision needs to be taken in view of the situation that has arisen. Considering the freely expressed will of the Ossetian and Abkhaz peoples, and guided by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Final Act) of 1975 and other fundamental international instruments, I signed Decrees on the recognition by the Russian Federation of the independence of South Ossetia and of Abkhazia.

Russia calls on other States to follow its example. This is not an easy choice, but it is the only chance to save human lives.

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

Russia has recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, mindful of its responsibility for ensuring the survival of their fraternal peoples in the face of the aggressive, chauvinistic policy pursued by Tbilisi.

That policy is based on the slogan “Georgia for Georgians”, proclaimed in 1989 by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, who attempted to put it into practice in 1992 by abolishing the autonomies in Georgian territory and ordering Georgian troops to seize Sukhum and Tskhinval in order to enforce its unlawful action by force. It was already at that time that genocide was committed in South Ossetia. Ossetians were subjected to slaughter and mass expulsion.

Thanks to the selfless acts of the peoples who rose up against the aggressor and the efforts undertaken by Russia, it was possible to stop the bloodshed, negotiate a ceasefire and establish mechanisms to maintain peace and to address all aspects of a settlement.

Peacekeeping forces were established in South Ossetia in 1992 and in Abkhazia in 1994, and structures were put in place to facilitate confidence building, with Russian mediation, and to address issues relating to social and economic rehabilitation and political status. Those steps were supported by the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which joined in the work of the mechanisms in place and sent observers to the conflict zones.

Despite certain difficulties, the peacekeeping and negotiating mechanisms did work, helping to bridge positions and achieve concrete agreements.

However, real prospects for a settlement were dashed when, at the end of 2003, political power was seized by “revolution” in Georgia by Mikheil Saakashvili, who immediately started to threaten to use force to solve the problem of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

In May 2004, Georgia deployed special forces and Interior Ministry troops in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone, and in August that year Georgian troops shelled Tskhinval and tried to seize it. With active mediation on the part of Russia, the then Prime Minister of Georgia, Zurab Zhvania, and the leader of South Ossetia, Eduard Kokoity, signed a ceasefire protocol and, in November 2004, a document on ways to normalize relations in a phased process.

After the mysterious death of Zurab Zhvania, who was a sound politician, in February 2005, Mikheil Saakashvili categorically rejected all the agreements that had been reached.

That was also the case of the Abkhaz settlement based on the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces signed in Moscow on 14 May 1994. Under the Agreement, Collective Peacekeeping Forces were deployed in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone. In addition, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia and the Group of Friends of the United Nations Secretary-General for Georgia were established.

When Mikheil Saakashvili sent a Georgian military contingent into the upper Kodori valley in 2006, in violation of all the United Nations agreements and resolutions, he disrupted incipient progress in the settlement process under these mechanisms, including the implementation of the agreements reached between Vladimir Putin and Eduard Shevardnadze in March 2003 on joint efforts to bring back refugees and open the Sochi-Tbilisi railway line.

Still openly disregarding Georgia's commitments and agreements under the United Nations and OSCE framework, Mikheil Saakashvili established puppet administrations for Abkhazia and South Ossetia in order to drive the last nail into the coffin of the negotiating process.

The entire duration of Mikheil Saakashvili's administration has been marked by an absolute inability to reach agreement, continuous acts of provocation and staged incidents in the conflict zones, attacks on Russian peacekeepers and a disparaging attitude towards democratically elected leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Since the outbreak of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s as a result of Tbilisi's actions, Russia has been doing its utmost to contribute to a settlement based on recognition of the territorial integrity of Georgia. Russia has taken this position despite the fact that the right of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to self-determination was violated when Georgia proclaimed its independence. Under the Act of the USSR on the procedure for dealing with matters arising from the secession of a Union Republic from the USSR, autonomous entities that formed part of Union Republics had the right to decide for themselves whether to remain in the Union, as well as the question of their legal national status in the event of secession of that Republic from the USSR. Georgia prevented Abkhazia and South Ossetia from exercising that right.

Nevertheless, Russia consistently followed its policy, performed its peacekeeping and mediating functions in good faith, sought to contribute to attaining peace agreements and showed restraint and patience in the face of acts of provocation. We adhered to our position even after the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo.

By aggressively attacking South Ossetia on the night of 8 August 2008, which resulted in numerous casualties, including those among peacekeepers and other Russian citizens, and by preparing a similar action against Abkhazia, Mikheil Saakashvili has himself put paid to the territorial integrity of Georgia. By repeatedly using brutal military force against the peoples

whom, according to his own words, he wished to see within his State, Mikheil Saakashvili left them no option but to ensure their security and right to exist through self-determination as independent States.

Mikheil Saakashvili could hardly have failed to realize the consequences for Georgia of attempting to resolve the Abkhaz and South Ossetian problems by force. Already in February 2006, he said in an interview: "I will not give the order for a military operation. I do not want people to die, because blood in the Caucasus means blood not even for decades, but for centuries." So he knew what he was doing.

Mention should also be made of the role played by those who have been conniving all these years with the military regime of Mikheil Saakashvili, supplying him with offensive weapons in violation of OSCE and European Union rules, talking him out of undertaking not to use force, and fostering his sense of impunity, also with regard to his authoritarian actions to crush dissent in Georgia. We know that at some stage his foreign patrons tried to restrain him from reckless military adventures; however, he has clearly gone completely out of control. We are concerned about the fact that some have failed to draw objective conclusions from the aggression. Dawning hopes of implementing the joint initiative of the Presidents of Russia and France of 12 August 2008 soon vanished into thin air when Tbilisi effectively rejected the initiative and Saakashvili's patrons followed suit. What is more, the United States of America and some European States are promising him the protection of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and calling for rearming the Tbilisi regime; new weapons deliveries are already being prepared. This is a direct invitation to new reckless ventures.

Taking into account the appeals of South Ossetian and Abkhaz peoples, of the Parliaments and Presidents of both Republics, the opinion of the Russian people and both Chambers of the Federal Assembly, the President of the Russian Federation decided to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and to conclude treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with them.

In taking this decision, the Russian Federation was guided by the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act and other fundamental international instruments, including the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. It should be noted that under the Declaration, every State has the duty to refrain from any forcible action which deprives peoples of their right to self-determination and freedom and independence, to promote through their action the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to possess a government representing the whole people belonging to the territory. There is no doubt that Mikheil Saakashvili's regime is far from meeting those high standards set by the international community.

Russia has sincere positive and friendly feelings towards the Georgian people, and is confident that Georgia will eventually have worthy leaders who are able to show genuine concern for their country and develop mutually respectful, equal and good-neighbourly relations with all the peoples of the Caucasus. Russia will stand ready to contribute to this in every way.

26 August 2008
