

JAN-29-1999 01:32

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ზნაობიანებზელი პრეზიზ ორგანოზაციასთან

PERMANENT MISSION OF GEORGIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

ONE UNITED NATIONS PLAZA, 36 FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10017. TEL: (212) 759 19 49, FAX: (212) 759 18 32

SECURITY COUNCIL

STATEMENT OF H.E. MR. IRAKLI MENAGARISHVILI, MINISTER OF FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF GEORGIA

New York

28 January, 1999

Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President, it has not been too long since last July, when I had the opportunity to address the Security Council with regard to the situation in Georgia.

The current development of events compels me, to take the floor today, for the same purpose. But at the outset, let me reiterate our deep sympathy and gratitude to the United Nations, personally to the Secretary-General and to his Special Representative, as well as to the Friends of the Secretary-General and to each and every member of the Council whose continued support and peace efforts in Abkhazia, Georgia are truly invaluable.

Mr. President,

As I already mentioned, despite our joint efforts in reaching a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict, the peace process is more and more taking on the resemblance of the closed circuit, and the present situation offers anything but optimism.

Our concern and skepticism is based on the fruitless and protracted round of negotiations of the past six months. Here I wish to bring to your attention the emerging tradition in the course of these negotiations, which is designed to mislead the international community.

As a rule, such meetings tend to reach their peak right before the meetings of the Security Council or other important fora on Abkhazia, Georgia. At that point, with a surprising promptness, there pops up some absurd and unrealistic "initiative", the sole purpose of which is to create an illusion about the progress in the peace process.

But every such "initiative" falls into oblivion until the next important forum on Georgia convenes. All this has assumed the character of a worrisome tradition, which should be noted by the international community and dealt with in the appropriate manner.

The recent proposal of the leader of the separatists, Mr. Ardzinba, regarding the unilateral decision of the Abkhaz side to repatriate refugees and displaced persons, clearly belongs to the kind of "initiatives" I mentioned above. And this decision was announced after the Abkhaz side broke down the scheduled meeting between President Shevardnadze and Mr. Ardzinba, where the documents on the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons and on the maintenance of cease-fire and the economic rehabilitation of the region were supposed to have been signed.

This so called initiative was also doomed. On January 23, 1999, at a meeting of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia, and the group of Friends of the Secretary-General with Mr. Ardzinba, the document on the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons. I believe this fact is one more illustration of the obstructive policy of the Abkhaz side.

The starting of the Geneva process was a true victory for all its participants and the parties to the conflict. My Government remains confident that the Geneva framework is the key mechanism of the peace process. But I have to repeat myself: due to the intransigence of the Abkhaz side, the Geneva meetings have not so far yielded tangible results.

The October 1998 Athens meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on confidence-building measures, was also a success, as long as it was the largest and most representative meeting since the end of the war. Therefore, we pay homage to the Governments of Greece, Turkey, Ukraine and others and express our appreciation for their readiness to support the follow-up dialogue of the parties.

Regrettably, the Athens meeting was no exception, given its outcome. The participants, including Friends of the Secretary-General, witnessed how the

96

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Abkhaz side reduced the documents of the meeting to the level of vague *rekonpozitsion*
declaration of intentions.

the systematic and outright obstruction of the peace process by the Abkhaz side raises a question: how long shall the Georgian side, the refugees, and the international community wait for the "kindness" of the Abkhaz side to start the constructive dialogue? Or can we remain content with the status-quo in the region, maintained at the expense of fruitless negotiations?

Such a status-quo is just an illusion. The fact is that despite the pretended lull, the situation in the region is getting worse in all aspects. The political, social-economic and the criminal situation is catastrophic. Despite Georgia's efforts, the living conditions of the refugees and displaced persons is nothing but tragic.

All this definitely increases tension in the country and threatens peace and security of the whole Caucasus region.

Mr. President,

The continuation of the conflict in Abkhazia plays only into the interests of certain political forces and clearly constitutes the example of the clash of the values:

On the one hand, there is the ethnocratic regime the foundation of which is political ambitions and criminal interests. On the other hand, there is the country which has chosen the road of democratic development and aspires to create the acceptable model for the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups within one unified state. We tend to wonder as to how long can the international community tolerate the present state of events?

All this creates the impression that the international community is still inclined to classify existing conflicts as the "first rate" and as "less important" ones, where the former enjoy the maximum concentration of efforts, and the latter, due to the lack of attention, turn into the so called "frozen ones". Such "frozen conflicts" pose threat to the international community and deplete its human and material resources without mitigating the suffering of the affected people.

The worrisome examples of all this have clearly emerged during the last six months in Abkhazia, Georgia.

* Ongoing are the punitive operations by the so called Abkhaz militia against the peaceful civilians, carried out under the pretext to curb "terrorism". Moreover, the assaults from territory controlled by the separatist regime on the Georgian villages of the neighboring Zugdidi region, have become systematic.

* More importantly, during the past period of time, the Abkhaz side has employed all power in its hands to stall the process of the return of refugees and displaces persons to their homes and violated every Article of the May 1993 Protocol in this regard.

In his recent Address to the members of the Security Council (S/1999/71) President Shevardnadze put forward a number of proposals aimed at shaping the future actions of international community with regard to the resolution of the conflict.

Let me reiterate our firm belief that the family of nations should be more outspoken and demanding. It should strictly indicate that the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes is not a favor but their fundamental right under international law and that the responsibility for its violation should rest with the Abkhaz side.

We believe that the time has come that the Security Council seriously consider the question of ethnic cleansing, committed by the Abkhaz side against the Georgian population. The peace process has already reached the phase, when its further development would be impossible without unbiased approach and the appropriate evaluation of the activities of the separatist regime.

It is also necessary to recall the decision of the Budapest and Lisbon Summits of the OSCE, regarding the situation in Georgia, stressing the unacceptability of demographic changes by means of force.

the international community should also warn the Abkhaz side that the further attempts of to obstruct the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes, will be viewed as the continuation of the policy of ethnic cleansing and might as well prompt the Security Council to employ relevant articles of the Charter of the United Nations and to bring those responsible to justice.

Mr. President,

My Government is gravely concerned at the security conditions in the conflict zone.

Unfortunately, there is no doubt that the CIS peacekeeping operation under its current mandate, has already exhausted itself. Since the last May, the Georgian

side opposes to the extension of the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping forces, unless it reflects the realistic objectives provided in the decisions of the number of summits of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Due to the lack of proper security conditions, UNOMIG fails to fully discharge its functions. This factor seriously affects the UN activities in the conflict zone and threatens the situation in the region as a whole.

Georgia has always supported the deployment of a self-protection unit in the zone of conflict. the present realities indicate that UNOMIG can not function adequately without its introduction.

We should also stress the concerning fact that the question of the comprehensive demining measures in the region are still unresolved. It affects the activities of international personnel, and threatens the life of peaceful civilians.

I wish to underscore that the safeguards for peace and security are the part of the political process while dealing with armed conflicts, including one in Abkhazia, Georgia. Proceeding from this understanding, the time has come to strengthen the political component in the activities of UNOMIG.

Neither bilateral, nor trilateral negotiations have yielded results with regard to the definition of the political status of Abkhazia within Georgia. Under the circumstances the UN should not limit itself by just reaffirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. Together with Friends of the Secretary-General it should elaborate proposals for a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, and submit them to the parties for consideration.

We believe that the Security Council should once again reaffirm the right of all refugees and displaced persons to safely return to their homes without preconditions with adequate security safeguards. We also believe that its necessary that the United Nations together with OSCE and Friends of the Secretary-General work out the mechanism for the starting of this process.

During the initial phase of the settlement, it is necessary to consider the creation of a provisional administration under international control, with the widest participation of returnees in self governing and law enforcement bodies.

We support the idea of giving a special status to returnees, lest they should become hostage of political games and ambitions.

100

JAN-29-1999 01:36

RUSSIAN MISSION TO THE UN

1 212 517 7427 P.07/07

6

We believe that the Security Council should take note of the decisions adopted at the December, 1998 OSCE Ministerial meeting in Oslo, providing principal provisions with regard to the conflict settlement in Abkhazia, Georgia and practically calls for a strengthening of the cooperation between UN and OSCE.

One of the most important criterion of UNOMIG's activities should become its effective monitoring of the CIS peacekeeping operation, therefore, respective measures should be taken to that effect.

I think the Security Council should welcome the bilateral dialogue between the parties, as well as the creation and functioning of joint investigative groups, with a view to investigating the violations of reached agreements.

The Security Council should also express readiness to promote, in its capacity, the region's economic rehabilitation, in accordance with the reached progress in the peace process.

Mr. President,

The Government of Georgia expresses its full readiness to cooperate with the United Nations, and with international community as a whole, in order to achieve the peaceful solution to the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia.

This is the only acceptable way for all of us but we are confident that some decisive steps should be taken on the peaceful road too. This is the wish and expectation of the Georgian people and of international community. Therefore Mr. President, let me express hope that the council will give a serious consideration to our suggestions and will come to the relevant decision.

Thank you for listening.