



# GEORGIA

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**STATEMENT  
BY H.E. MR. MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI  
PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA  
AT THE GENERAL DEBATE  
OF THE 62<sup>ND</sup> SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

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REMARKS  
**H.E. MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI, PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA**  
62<sup>nd</sup> Annual United Nations General Assembly  
26 September, 2007

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- I thank you for the opportunity today to address this, the 62nd annual gathering of the UN General Assembly.
- On behalf of the citizens of Georgia, I would like to congratulate the Secretary General on the exceptional progress he has made in his first nine months.
- His steadfast vision for peace in Darfur—his commitment to rallying the world to combat climate change—and his determination to eradicate global poverty—stand true to the founding principles of this institution.
- Let me also extend my congratulations to Mr. Srgjan Kerim on his assumption of the office of President of the General Assembly and express our appreciation to your predecessor, Sheika Haya Rashed Al Khalifa for her very effective leadership.
- Today, in this great hall, we have an opportunity to reaffirm one of the core principles of the United Nations.
- The right of every individual to pursue a life of liberty in dignity—by voicing our support for the hundreds of thousands of monks and ordinary citizens daring to seek freedom for the people of Burma.
- We must stand fast with them.
- It is my deepest hope that we will look back and remember this “Saffron Revolution” of the Burmese monks as another step in the inevitable march of liberty across the planet.
- An echo of the Rose and Orange Revolutions that freed the peoples of Georgia and Ukraine from hopelessness and stagnation just four short years ago.
- When we returned Georgia to its rightful path of peace, democracy and transparency, we did so in the knowledge that our country was not an island.
- We knew that, in order for our own freedoms to endure, we would have to help advance the peaceful aspirations of others around the world, as a responsible member of the international community of democratic nations.
- This is why Georgia has lent its sons and daughters to peace keeping efforts in Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan—and just this month we committed a new battalion to serve under French command in Kabul.

- This is why we have reached out to our neighbors in Europe, Central Asia and beyond to promote peace through cooperation, trade and deeper engagement.
- Together, we are working to help ensure new and diverse supplies of energy for European and global markets.
- We contribute to this integrated effort by building new roads, railways and pipelines that weave together the countries of our region, ensuring that people and goods flow across our borders in a manner that is safe, legal, predictable and fair.
- In short, our vision for the region is guided by the belief that mutual interdependence brings mutual benefit.
- I believe that the people of Georgia have served as a catalyst and a living example of how governing transparently, through democratic principles, breeds lasting stability and shared prosperity.
- This is not, of course, a new path for Georgia, but rather a return to our European home and our European vocation—which is so deeply enshrined in our national identity and history.
- And while our most challenging relationship today remains with our neighbors in the Russian Federation.
- Which continues to interfere in our domestic politics.
- My government is committed to addressing this subject through diplomatic means, in partnership with the international community.
- I can say this with confidence because Georgia is a nation that is rooted in justice, the rule of law, and democracy.
- And that this is an irreversible choice made by the people of my country.
- For evidence of this, you merely have to look at how Georgia has responded to the many provocations we have faced in the past year—which range from missile attacks to full-scale embargoes and even destructive pogroms.
- Rather than lash out angrily, we have redoubled our commitment to democratic development and comprehensive reform.
- The results of this determination are startling – for they prove just how much can be achieved when good governance opens the door to the development of human potential.

- Today Georgia's economy is growing at over 14%.
- Our GDP per capita has more than doubled in four years.
- Corruption is the lowest among transition economies around the world and one of the lowest in Europe, according to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
- And as of this morning, our country has taken its place alongside some of the most developed economies in the world like Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Hong Kong, after the World Bank and International Financial Corporation ranked Georgia as the 18th easiest place to do business because of institutionalized transparency and a lack of corruption.
- It is worth pausing a moment to reflect on this evolution, if one considers that just a few years ago we were ranked 137<sup>th</sup>.
- This is what can be achieved when institutions function, and rhetoric is replaced with results.
- Four years ago, I spoke at this assembly about Georgia being a test case for the modern challenges of democratic transition.
- Today it is clear that Georgia's transition has led to a transformation.
- I could recite to you a long list of other successes since the Rose Revolution—and, equally, I could elaborate the many profound challenges that remain.
- But let me focus on perhaps our most important duty – the imperative to create a better future for the next generation.
- I, and my government, will not rest until every school in Georgia is filled with empowered and confident students, who have the benefit of new books, a modern curriculum, full Internet access, and motivated teachers.
- Just four years ago our schools were barren and desperate—many lacked desks, windows, heat, and above all hope.
- Today, reforms in education are sewing the seeds of lasting prosperity, and our students are leading the way.
- This is the Georgia we promised.
- And this is the Georgia we have created.

- It is also the Georgia we must defend.
- For our democratic project is not yet complete—far from it.
- Georgia today is not whole.
- The vast majority of residents from Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been unable to reap the benefits of the Rose Revolution that I have just shared with you.
- Tens of thousands of children in these regions are raised amidst the sounds of gunfire instead of fireworks.
- Their homes are not their own – and their dreams are distant and frightening.
- They are prisoners of the morally repugnant politics of ethnic cleansing, division, violence and indifference.
- And we will not rest until justice is restored.
- Today, I regret to say that signs of hope are few and far between.
- The story of Abkhazia—of up to 500,000 men, women, and children forced to flee in the 1990s —is of particular relevance.
- In the time since Russian peacekeepers were deployed there, more than 2,000 Georgians have perished and a climate of fear has persisted.
- It is worth pausing to remember that today Abkhazia is populated by less than 20% of its pre-war population.
- The brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing uprooted ethnic Georgians, Armenians, Estonians, Greeks, Jews, Russians and others who had lived peacefully in that land for centuries—creating a de-populated and criminalized wasteland.
- The United Nations has tried to bring peace to this region, but it has not succeeded in making Georgia whole again—despite its unwavering recognition of Georgian sovereignty.
- Every day that passes without a peaceful resolution to the conflict—every day in which the forcibly displaced are not allowed to return home—marks a slow erosion of the credibility of this house, of its ability to fulfill its mission.
- We cannot allow this to continue.

- Fourteen years have passed without a single in-depth analysis being conducted as to why peace has not triumphed – or why the legal framework and format have failed.
- For this reason, and in order to inject a new and positive dynamic into the process, I am calling on the UN today to launch a comprehensive review of all aspects of the Peace Process.
- The necessity of an in depth review of the peace process is self evident, and it must result in fundamental changes.
- Changes are necessary in the negotiation format, which is stalled and stagnant.
- This in turn must lead to real changes in on-the-ground operations.
- Years of biased and unbalanced actions by supposed peace keeping forces must be replaced with competent and neutral ones.
- This is the only path forward.
- Out of this process, we expect genuine and relevant changes in the legal framework.
- A meaningful and implementable plan for return of the displaced, guaranteeing their property rights.
- Effective economic rehabilitation.
- The establishment of lasting security.
- And the resumption of direct dialogue between Georgian and Abkhaz interlocutors without any preconditions.
- Because of a lack of political will, countless lives in Abkhazia, Georgia are being wasted. And inaction has its costs.
- One of the greatest voices for peace in the last century, Martin Luther King, captured the essence of the problem when he said and I quote:

**Man's inhumanity to man is not only perpetrated by the vitriolic actions of those who are bad. It is also perpetrated by the vitiating inaction of those who are good.**

- Let us fill this vacuum with new energy, new commitments and a new common resolve.
- I want to take this opportunity to elaborate on the foundations of our proposals for a lasting, and peaceful settlement.

- First, we offer the alternative of security and prosperity to those who have been poisoned by the separatist illusion.
- We offer and recognize the right to self-governance for all who live in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, within our sovereign territorial borders under international guarantees.
- We offer constitutional changes to enshrine the protection of minorities including language rights, the protection of culture, history, language and education.
- And we offer and welcome a robust role for the European Union.
- In short, we offer a level of autonomy grounded in the very same principles that have guided the rest of Europe in promoting peace and prosperity across its multi-ethnic tapestry.
- The continued ignorance of the ethnic cleansing that occurred in Abkhazia, Georgia is a stain on the moral copybook of the international community.
- These disputes are no longer about ethnic grievance: they are about the manipulation of greed by a tiny minority and their foreign backers at the expense of the local population and the displaced.
- The choice is between a Georgia that is willing to welcome them back with every constitutional recognition of their identity and their rights—or, a bleak future where they are the objects of propaganda, fear and poverty.
- I have faith that we will succeed.
- Their masters and foreign manipulators do not.
- Where does the international community stand?
- That, Mr. President, is the essence of the issue.
- But the violent hold of the armed separatists and their patrons is not unbreakable.
- In South Ossetia, the courage of common men and women—who have chosen dialogue over division, and reconciliation over recriminations—is making a difference.
- Unfortunately, those who do not share a vision of peace and reconciliation have chosen to up the ante in South Ossetia, fearful that people power, and the desire to live in freedom, may undermine their cynical plans.

- As I speak before you today, elements from Russia are actively – and illegally - building a new military base in South Ossetia, in the small town of Java, hoping that arms and violence will triumph over the will of the people.
- And this dangerous escalation is taking place under the very noses of international monitors whose job it is to demilitarize the territory.
- I have brought a conclusive body of evidence with me today, to show our friends in the international community the truth that others conceal.
- I bring this disturbing fact to your attention because reckless acts like this must be highlighted and countered.
- Our collective job today is not to ask how this can be possible.
- Rather, it is to act with determination, and unity.
- For too many years, the only voices emerging from this region have been those promoting separatism, radicalism and hate.
- Sooner rather than later, the march of liberty will prevail.
- In the past year, the residents of South Ossetia have started down a different path.
- They are seeking to participate in Georgia's economic growth, to benefit from our new hospitals, our revived schools—and to share in and contribute to our democracy.
- And it is the ordinary residents of South Ossetia, engaged in extraordinary acts of heroism, who are making the difference.
- It is the children who took their summer holidays on Georgia's seacoast, only to return home and be barred from their schools, who will tear down the barriers of hate.
- It is the residents rebuilding their towns in the face of gunfire and threats, who will repair the broken bridges.
- And it is the courage of local leaders, such as Dmitry Sanakoev—a former separatist leader of South Ossetia who once bore arms against Georgia—who will lead the way.
- He was chosen by the people of South Ossetia in democratic elections to represent them. And his vision will be embraced.
- I believe we should respect the courageous expression of those Ossetians who have decided to take this path within Georgia.



- The only obstacle to the integration of South Ossetia is a separatist regime that has oppressed its own inhabitants, using the tactics of fear, and intimidation.
- It is an unfortunate reflection on the international system that this simple fact cannot be openly acknowledged by the international organizations whose duty it is to legitimize what is right and condemn what is wrong.
- Now is the time to seize this historic opportunity.
- In closing, I would like to share with you the insights of a woman whose name is on our minds and in our hearts today—Aung San Suu Kyi.
- Her courage, her resolve, her reflections on peace and democracy, cannot be imprisoned—they travel across every border and barrier to inspire us all.
- Her words are of profound relevance to the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. I believe they also must be a beacon for all of us in this room.
- I quote:

**Even under the most crushing state machinery, courage rises up again and again, for fear is not the natural state of civilized man ...**

**It is man's vision of a world fit for rational, civilized humanity which leads him to dare and suffer to build societies free from want and fear.**

- These words poignantly reflect what is taking place today in the streets of Burma.
- And in our own corner of the world, for the past four years, the people of Georgia have invested their own sweat and treasure to build such a society—one free from want and fear...
- We now must ensure that Georgia whole and free includes all the people of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
- I believe I have been clear in stating Georgia's intentions.
- And equally clear as to where we are unshakeable in our principles – principles, I stress, that are shared by all nations that seek legality and stability in the international system.
- We have much work to do, and little time to waste.
- We are committed to a peaceful and honest path. Unfortunately, our interlocutors do not seem to be.

- This morning, a senior Russian official made an unconstructive, unsubstantiated, and wholly untrue accusation that Georgian forces killed two innocent people in Upper Abkhazia.
- What the senior Russian official failed to say however, is that one of the people was a lieutenant colonel of the Russian military, and that he was killed during a law-enforcement operation against armed separatist insurgents.
- One has to wonder—what was a vice colonel of the Russian military doing on in the Georgian forests, organizing and leading a group of armed insurgents on a mission of terror?
- Whatever the explanation, we regret any loss of life.
- Indeed, we will do everything possible to avoid violence and further hostility and confrontation.
- This reckless and dangerous pattern of behavior must not continue.
- In conclusion, Mr. President,
- I want to express the gratitude of Georgia for the efforts of the United Nations and its staff.
- I trust that I have demonstrated that we have the opportunity and, in Georgia, the desire to resolve our common challenges so that the international community can commit its resources to resolving the great challenges of our age.
- Let us not lose any more time.

I thank you.