

Concluding Statement on the Outcome of the Resumed Meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz Parties

1. The resumed meeting between the Georgian and Abkhaz parties was held in Geneva from 17 to 19 November 1997 under the auspices of the United Nations with the participation of representatives of the Russian Federation acting as facilitator, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the states belonging to the Group of Friends created by the Secretary-General in 1994 consisting of France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, acting as observers.

2. An exchange of views on the following points took place during the meeting:

- Review of the state of the negotiations on the main aspects of a comprehensive settlement of the conflict and identification of areas where concrete political progress could be made;
- Consideration of questions of the return of the refugees and displaced persons;
- Intensification of efforts in the economic, humanitarian and social areas;
- Elaboration of a programme of future activities and mechanisms for their implementation. Representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs also took part in discussing issues of interest to them.

3. At the first part of the meeting (23 – 25 July 1997), the question was raised of the status of the countries of the Friends of the Secretary-General on Georgia. After extensive consultations, a decision was taken that the status of this Group of Friends of the Secretary-General of the United Nations should be analogous to the status of the other groups of friends of the Secretary-General. They may participate in meetings and make statements and proposals on various aspects of the peace process, including a political settlement. They are not parties to the negotiations and shall not be invited to sign documents agreed upon during the negotiations by the parties.

4. The parties welcomed the proposals of the Secretary-General of the United Nations to strengthen the involvement of the United Nations in the peacemaking process aimed at achieving a comprehensive political settlement.

5. The parties welcome the positive outcome of the meeting between Mr. Shevardnadze and Mr. Ardzinba in Tbilisi on 14 and 15 August 1997, organized with the assistance of the Russian Federation as facilitator.

6. It was noted that as of now, despite strenuous efforts applied in order to intensify the peace process, sought for progress has not been made on the pivotal issues of the settlement.

7. The parties reaffirmed their commitment made in the Tbilisi statement of 14 August 1997 to the non-use of force or threat of the use of force against one another. Any contentious issue shall be settled by the parties through exclusively peaceful means.

8. The meeting took note of the contribution made by the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (“the CIS peacekeeping force”) in stabilizing the situation in the conflict zone and noted the significant strengthening of cooperation between UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force.

9. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia, representatives of the OSCE and States members of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General call on the parties and the Russian Federation to support the continuation of the peacekeeping operation of the CIS peacekeeping force in order to secure favourable and peaceful conditions for a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

10. The parties condemn acts of violence by armed groups and the placement of mines, which has resulted in a deterioration of safety conditions for the local population, returning refugees and displaced persons, UNOMIG personnel and CIS peacekeepers, and other international personnel working in Abkhazia.

11. The parties will take all necessary and effective measures to halt any activity by illegal armed formations, terrorist and subversive groups and individuals, including those penetrating Abkhaz territory from outside, which could destabilize the peace process and precipitate a resumption of hostilities.

12. The parties have agreed that progress towards strengthening trust, mutual understanding and cooperation between them could be achieved through direct bilateral contacts and other means. They believe that the speediest possible agreement on and signature of the relevant documents on a settlement of the conflict would be a real step towards bringing about a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict. In this respect, particular attention was given to the issue of the return of refugees and displaced persons to their place of permanent residence. At the same time, emphasis was placed on the need to resume the process of voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons and to create safe living conditions for them.

13. The parties agreed on the need to take measures to convene in the near future a joint/bilateral commission to resolve any practical issues that may arise.

14. The parties agreed to refrain from disseminating hostile propaganda about each other and to take measures to promote an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding. The parties have agreed to institute exchange visits by parliamentarians, academics, intellectuals, journalists and other representatives of society in order to help achieve this objective.

15. The programme of action and the mechanism for its implementation are as follows:

(a) the parties shall establish a Coordinating Council and, within its framework, working groups on the following areas:

- issues related to the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and security problems;
- refugees and internally displaced persons;
- economic and social problems;

(b) the Coordinating Council and the working groups will meet under the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations or by his authorized representatives, with the participation of representatives of the Russian Federation as facilitator, representatives of OSCE, and with the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General;

(c) separate groups of experts may be established to study specific aspects of issues relating to the comprehensive settlement of the conflict as and when such issues arise;

(d) the Coordinating Council shall be convened by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations during the first week of December 1997. The working groups shall start their work in December 1997. The working group on issues relating to the lasting non-resumption of hostilities and security problems will meet frequently, at least once a week.

16. Meetings of the sides will be held periodically to consider the progress of the negotiations on the main aspects of the comprehensive settlement of the conflict. These meetings will be chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. They will take place with the participation of the Russian Federation in its capacity as facilitator, with the OSCE, and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General under the conditions defined in paragraph 3 above.

Geneva, 17-19 November 1997.

(Signed) L. Bota