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Unofficial translation from Russian

**Statement by the Leaders of the Russian, South Ossetian and North Ossetian Parts of the Mixed Control Commission (MCC) for Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict Following Their Consultations in Moscow on February 20-21, 2006**

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The leaders of the Russian, South Ossetian and North Ossetian Parts of the Mixed Control Commission (MCC) for Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict are voicing regret over the fact that the session of the Commission scheduled in Moscow for February 20-21 could not be held because of the refusal of the Georgian side to take part in it. Hence a consultative meeting of the cochairmen of the MCC from Russia, South Ossetia and North Ossetia was held.

The participants in the consultations express deep concern at the sharp exacerbation of the situation around South Ossetia. In the cochairmen's opinion, it has been triggered, first and foremost, by the policy being pursued by the leadership of Georgia, directed at undermining the negotiation process on resolving the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.

A patently destructive move was the adoption of the well-known resolution by Georgia's parliament on February 15. It is not based on objective facts and fails to take into account the views of the MCC or data from the Unified Military Command (UMC) of the Peacekeeping Force. The Georgian parliamentarians did not get round to meeting either MCC members or UMC representatives. The cochairmen feel that implementing this resolution by Georgia's executive authority may have catastrophic consequences for the civilian population and will lead to extensive destabilization in the zone of conflict and in the Caucasian region.

In the same direction proceed the now-frequent provocations by the Georgian side against the Russian and Ossetian battalions of the Mixed Peacekeeping Force (MPKF) - attacks, the seizure and killings of peacekeepers, illegitimate demands for obtaining Georgian visas and others.

The Georgian battalion is actually withdrawn from the MPKF and from subordination to the UMC and directly fulfills orders from the Defense Ministry of Georgia. The timeframe for its rotation is being continuously violated, thus undermining the existing agreements on the peacekeeping force.

While the South Ossetian side demonstrates a striving to find compromise peaceful ways for

settling the conflict and has put forward concrete proposals for joint work on a common action program to settle the conflict, the Georgian side actually ignores the peace initiatives and is building up arms and stepping up bellicose rhetoric. It seems that Tbilisi is making a choice in favor of a force-based scenario. No unilateral initiatives can substitute for the proposed joint work.

In this context the cochairmen note with satisfaction the consent of the Georgian side to the proposal earlier put forward by the South Ossetian side for organizing a meeting of the interior ministers of the parties. Moreover, the cochairmen consider urgent as never before meetings between the heads of other security agencies of the parties and also of the representatives of parliaments and of public and religious organizations. These confidence-building measures could be a substantial factor of reducing tension and defusing the present explosive situation.

The cochairmen state that faced with the escalation of tension, the OSCE, a participant in the process of resolving the conflict, has taken a strange position. This, in particular, shows itself in the unprofessional and tendentious assessments of the situation contained in certain reports of the OSCE Mission in Georgia forwarded to Vienna, the hushing-up of the Georgian side's violations of the security regime and the failure by the Organization's representatives to attend the MCC session in Moscow on February 20-21, 2006. All this does not add to the authority of the OSCE, called upon to impartially facilitate resolving the conflict.

The leaders of the Russian, South Ossetian and North Ossetian Parts of the MCC address an appeal to the Georgian side to renounce the line on breaking the existing MCC format and scuttling MPKF as the guarantor of peace and stability in the zone of conflict and to refrain from transferring onto a practical plane the question of the termination of the peacekeepers' mission.

The cochairmen call for absolutely excluding a force-based option to solve the problem and starting at once the joint elaboration of a document on security guarantees and nonresumption of hostilities, the idea of which was suggested by the OSCE, and also of a joint action program to settle the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. It is borne in mind that the program will be submitted for approval by the top political leaders of the sides participating in the settlement of the conflict.

The participants in the meeting took note of the communication of the Russian cochairman of the MCC on the contacts held with the representatives of the United States and the OSCE with the aim of defusing the present tense situation.

February 21, 2006