



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Press Statement

Sean McCormack, Spokesman

Washington, DC

April 23, 2008

Georgia - Shooting Down of Unarmed UAV

The United States is deeply concerned by the shooting down of an unarmed Georgian UAV, by a presumably Russian MiG-29, over the Abkhazia region of Georgia on April 20. Such incidents escalate tensions, contradict the spirit of the UN Friends process, and risk destabilizing the entire Caucasus. We urge all parties to engage in serious discussions aimed at reaching a lasting political solution, including by engaging on the recent peace proposals made by the Government of Georgia.

We reiterate our unwavering support for Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity and are concerned by the presence of a MiG-29 aircraft in Georgian airspace without Georgian authorization, and by the use of weapons from this aircraft in shooting down an unarmed Georgian UAV. We support UNOMIG initiatives to enhance military transparency in the region, as well as its investigation of the shooting down of the Georgian UAV.

We also reiterate our concern over recent actions by the Russian government to upgrade relations with the Abkhaz and South Ossetian authorities, which challenge Georgian sovereignty and call into question whether Russia can continue to function as a facilitator toward a solution in the region.

We agree with the stated goal of Russia and the other members of the Friends of the Secretary General of easing the isolation and poverty of the population in the separatist regions. This can only be achieved by working closely with the Government of Georgia, which has responsibility for the well-being of the people living on its territory. We call on Russia to work together with the Government of Georgia and to place renewed priority on the safe return of refugees and displaced persons to Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

2008/315

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 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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