



# GEORGIA

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STATEMENT BY  
H.E. MR. MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI  
PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA

THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 63<sup>RD</sup> SESSION  
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## REMARKS

### H.E. MR. MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI, PRESIDENT OF GEORGIA

63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly  
New York, 23 September 2008

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Mr. President,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,

- I thank you for the opportunity today to address this, the 63rd annual gathering of the General Assembly, at such a critical moment in the history of my own country and of the United Nations.
- Sometimes, the most extreme tests of this institution's towering ideals arise in small, even obscure places.
- I come to you as the representative of one of those places, the country of Georgia, a land of fewer than 5 million, that last month was invaded by our neighbor.
- Despite our small size, the legal, moral, political, and security implications raised by that invasion could not be larger in consequence.
- Indeed, those issues cut through to the heart of the UN's founding charter.
- The principles enshrined in that charter included the inviolability of sovereign borders; the sanctity of human rights; the supremacy of international law; and the global rejection of armed aggression.
- All of these principles were put to the test by the invasion, and now hang in the balance.
- The invasion violated Georgia's internationally recognized borders.
- The subsequent recognition of the so-called "independence" of our two regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia challenged our territorial integrity.
- The ethnic cleansing of hundreds of thousands of our people did violence to the very idea of human rights.
- This General Assembly, therefore, faces a General Challenge.

- We are called upon not just to respond to the particular question of one instance of armed aggression in a single place—but to define our attitude toward armed aggression in all places.
- We are called upon to answer this momentous question:
- Will this body stand up for its founding principles, or will it allow them to be crushed under the treads of invading tanks, under the boots of ethnic cleansers, under the immobilizing impact of cyber attacks, and under the pernicious tactics of violent separatism?
- What would it mean for every member of this Assembly to defend the underlying principles of the United Nations?
- First, we must each refuse to stand silent in the face of this armed aggression and assault on human rights.
- Second, we must stand united and immediately adopt a non-recognition policy towards Georgia's two breakaway provinces.
- Together, we have both a moral and a legal obligation to protect international law and world order.
- Third, we must ensure that all parties comply with the full terms of the existing ceasefire agreement.
- And fourth, we must resolve to create a meaningful UN conflict resolution process that will peacefully reunify Georgia.
- The bottom line is this: We must be ready to use the full power of international law and of our collective international institutions to uphold the historic balance of justice...
- ...And thus set in motion a series of actions to right these historic wrongs.
- While this crisis poses grave challenges for the entire international community, it creates specific obligations on my own country.
- I want to argue that the answer to this new assault on our shared values is not a closing-up—not a circling of the wagons—but rather a greater openness on many fronts.
- As a democracy, we have nothing to fear.
- As a democracy, we have an obligation to our own people and to the international community to be even more open and transparent.

- For me and my government, this commitment translates into a series of specific actions on both the international and domestic levels. Allow me to explain.
- First, I know that there are many people in the world who seek a clearer understanding of how this war started and who started it.
- Rather than recite our case, let me repeat a simple invitation that I first made on August 17, standing next to German Chancellor Angela Merkel.
- There should be an exhaustive, independent investigation of the origins and causes of this war.
- Investigators must have unimpeded access to all officials, documents, and intelligence.
- Georgia welcomes such an investigation. My government is ready to share every piece of evidence and provide access to every witness sought by investigators.
- We call on the other party to this conflict to fully cooperate and not obstruct this investigation.
- This is how democracies behave.
- The truth must come out not only to clarify how events unfolded last month, but to help us answer the fundamental questions that this invasion has raised.
- My government's second initiative of openness involves developments within our own borders.
- Whereas others waged this war with arms, we will wage it with values.
- Georgia was attacked because it is a successful democracy in our part of the world.
- Our response today is to make our democracy an even more robust.
- That is why I am announcing to you four categories of expanded democratic initiatives:
- First, we will strengthen the checks and balances of our democratic institutions, including granting greater independence to Parliament and to the judiciary.
- Second, we will provide additional resources and protections to foster greater political pluralism, including by increasing funding for opposition parties and ensuring they have greater access to the airwaves.
- Third, we will strengthen the rule of law by introducing enhanced due process, trials by jury, and lifetime judicial appointments.
- Fourth, we will expand and deepen protections of private property.
- And in everything we do, we will be transparent.

- This morning, I was honored to learn that in Transparency International’s latest index, Georgia was one of a few countries that have risen significantly in the rankings over the past year.
- Despite all the turmoil my country has endured, this proves the resiliency and irreversibility of our democratic commitment.
- We will, in short, fight the specter of aggression and authoritarianism with the most potent weapons in our arsenal...
- ...Namely our commitment to ever-expanding freedoms within our own borders..
- This amounts to nothing less than a “Second Rose Revolution.”
- If our first revolution was about meeting a threat from within by reinventing a failed state riddled by corruption...
- ...Our second revolution must be even more focused, as now we face an even greater challenge, one that comes from the outside.
- The success of the first Rose Revolution helped save my country.
- The health of the international order could well depend on the outcome of the second Rose Revolution.
- Countless people throughout the world were deeply moved and profoundly troubled by the invasion of Georgia—which began, with tragic irony, on the eve of that great celebration of peace, the Olympic Games.
- On the most basic level, you responded with passionate humanity to the plight of ordinary Georgians under siege—
- ...To the sight of 80-year-old men and women driven from their village homes...
- ...To hundreds of thousands of innocent souls taking shelter from bombings...
- ...To a small country of less than five million being trampled by a neighbor 300 times its size.
- You responded immediately by sending generous aid, by coming to Georgia, and by showing your solidarity.
- Leaders from around the world, meanwhile, have been working tirelessly to negotiate and enforce a ceasefire.

- I am especially grateful to President Sarkozy of France for his dedication to ensuring that the ceasefire is fully implemented, in letter and in spirit.
- This means, as all parties have agreed, a full withdrawal of all military forces from my country, to the pre-conflict positions.
- Your actions proved that the most potent response to this brutal invasion is to rebuild Georgia's democracy and economy, making them even stronger than before.
- And I want to make a special commitment to all of you who—during these especially difficult economic times—are helping fund Georgia's reconstruction.
- We will spend your resources wisely, well, and with full transparency.
- The Georgia we rebuild will contribute to the prosperity and security of all our citizens, and to the entire international community...
- ...By providing stability in this part of the world, and serving as a model for democratic development.
- Reconstruction will also ensure that Europe continues to benefit from true energy security that comes from diversification.
- And everything that we do, will be done peacefully.
- But today, we must ask a series of questions, the answers to which have grave consequences.
- We have all wondered in recent weeks: Was this invasion an aberration—a misguided attempt to resort to the 19<sup>th</sup> century logic of brute force?
- Or is it a sign of an ominous new trend, one that could upend the international order, eroding state sovereignty and the power of our common and hard-fought principles?
- I believe that this question and others have not yet been answered.
- Other still need to be asked.
- Will we encourage violent and hateful separatism around the world, standing aside when state sovereignty is subverted?
- Or will we draw a clear line, and defend the principles that uphold the international order, and declare—enough!

- In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have better ways to protect the rights of ethnic minorities than with T-72 tanks and Su fighter jets.
- We have developed a body of legal and political examples to accommodate minority demands within the context of national sovereignty.
- After all, this is one of the great achievements of the United Nations and of the European Union.
- Its foundation is the belief that democracy and prosperity provide room for all.
- Are we ready to throw this all away?
- And what of the use of brute force? Will we look the other way or reward the dispatch of tens of thousands of troops across the internationally recognized borders of another country?
- Will we cover our eyes when ethnic cleansing occurs, as it has—over and over again for 16 years—in Abkhazia and South Ossetia?
- In a world that struggles to reign in traditional forms of state violence, will we sanction new ones?
- During the invasion of Georgia, we were witness to several terrifying new twists in waging war.
- We saw proxy forces and militias cynically unleashed to ethnically cleanse the population of my country, operating without any restraint and outside any order.
- We experienced the first, full-scale campaign of cyber-warfare—a campaign that aimed to cripple my country’s economy and our ability to communicate with the outside world.
- It is profoundly distressing to see the technology that has woven our world together and helped bridge cultures being used to divide ethnic groups and to tear our world apart.
- And today, when most of the world understands the existential threat posed by climate change and ecological destruction, we witnessed in Georgia a sickening campaign of “ecocide” as part of the invasion...
- ...When combat helicopters dropped fire bombs on old-growth forests in Borjomi—forests that formed our national center of tourism, recreation, culture, and water resources.
- I believe that together, it is our solemn responsibility to deliver answers to these questions.

- Let us resolve that we will carry to the world the right conclusions...
- The invasion of our country provided an impressive demonstration of the power of global public opinion that can only arise when societies are open and free.
- Ultimately, what stopped the tanks and troops from taking our capital was the international disapproval voiced by so many of you...
- ...By the free media, by courageous human rights groups, and by leading voices of the world's conscience, from Natan Sharansky to Vaclav Havel.
- Rhetoric, however, is no longer enough. Today we must act.
- If words were sufficient, then something might have come from the many calls to peace—and the countless warnings—I myself have issued from this podium over the years.
- No one has fought harder than my country and me to heal the ethnic rifts in Georgia and to bring about a peaceful resolution of the conflicts.
- No one has fought harder.
- And we will continue this fight—to peacefully reunify my country, to stitch back together its beautiful, multi-ethnic tapestry.
- Four years ago, I stood before you and implored the international community to help stop the mass and forced distribution of illegal foreign passports in the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
- We knew then that this subversive tactic—combined with the ethnic cleansing that had driven most Georgians from these territories—would one day be used as a pretext for invasion.
- And this is precisely what happened last month. It is also happening in other countries in our neighborhood.
- In 2006, I brought to your urgent attention the attempts being made to annex Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and I asked you then: “Would any members in this great hall tolerate such interference by another power on their own soil?”
- I warned of the risk that—and I quote—“The Pandora's box of violent separatism and conflict will be unleashed not only in the Caucasus, but across many parts of our globe.”
- Today, unfortunately, we stand at this very precipice—where the peace could yield to a pernicious new world order.



- One year ago, I came to this hall with even more distressing news, of an illegal new military base being built in South Ossetia by those who hoped that arms and violence could triumph over the will of the people.
- I noted that this dangerous escalation was taking place under the very noses of international monitors whose job it was to demilitarize the territory.
- And I asked that these reckless acts be countered.
- Our warnings continued in the months and weeks before the invasion.
- We told anyone who would listen of the campaign that had been unleashed to slander Georgia and my government while blocking any meaningful negotiations with the separatists.
- This was part of a calculated effort to weaken international support for Georgia and lay the groundwork for invasion.
- We gave the international community details of a sharp military buildup by the purported peacekeepers that began this spring in both conflict zones, leading to armed attacks this summer by separatist militias.
- Just before the land invasion began in the early hours of Aug. 7—after days of heavy shelling that killed civilians and Georgian peacekeepers—we urgently sought to refute claims that 2,100 South Ossetian civilians had been killed by Georgians.
- This was the excuse used by the invader for what it called a “humanitarian intervention”—a profound perversion of the responsibility to protect.
- This lie, subsequently debunked by Human Rights Watch (which estimates 44 dead) and others, was an attempt to conceal the true motives for the invasion.
- Over the years, I also have spoken many times to you of the plans Georgia has developed, together with the international community, to peacefully reunify my country.
- I talked of the urgent need to replace and transform the failed frameworks of negotiation and peacekeeping in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- I have held out—repeatedly and with genuine intent—my hand to our neighbor.
- And just a few days before the invasion of Georgia, we continued to work furiously for peace.

- The United Nations Secretary General had sent his special representative to Georgia to determine how to fix the broken process of conflict resolution, and we cooperated closely with him.
- The German government had proposed peace talks for mid-August—talks my Government eagerly supported.
- The Finnish chair of the OSCE proposed talks in Helsinki as well, in late July, to which we subscribed.
- Unfortunately, the counterparties to the conflict turned their backs, repeatedly. They had other plans in mind.
- Finally, on the eve of the invasion, my special envoy traveled in desperation, twice, to South Ossetia to plead for peace. His counterpart failed to come to the meetings. He cited a flat tire as the reason.
- Within 24 hours, thousands of very full tires were rolling over the border of my country:
- So words alone are not nearly enough.
- Nor can words accurately convey the horrors of war.
- It is difficult, if not impossible, ever to say that anything good could come of war.
- The value of human life is incalculable, and we in Georgia grieve not only for our own lost sons and daughters, but also for our fallen neighbors.
- Yet, the international community has emerged from the invasion of my country with something truly valuable—**clarity**.
- We understand what has happened. We no longer can deny the motivations and intentions of those actors who instigated this war.
- With clarity comes responsibility.
- We no longer have reason for inaction.
- So now each of us has a responsibility to act.
- Despite the destruction created by the invasion - hundreds dead; nearly 200,000 displaced, according to the United Nations; our economy disabled - my government is putting our convictions into practice.

- I promise to you that my government will implement, with all due speed, the new democratic initiatives that constitute the second Rose Revolution.
- I promise to you that Georgia will soon be stronger and more democratic than ever before, and thus be in a better position to contribute to our collective security and prosperity.
- But, for this to have any meaning, we must together defend the principles on which this institution is built.
- We need actions, not words. Allow me to once again repeat the four commitments that I believe we must make.
- First, we must each refuse to stand silent in the face of this armed aggression, occupation, ethnic cleansing and assault on a UN member state.
- Second, we must stand united in rejecting the forced and illegal recognition of Georgia's two separatist provinces.
- Third, we must ensure that all parties comply fully with the existing ceasefire agreement.
- And fourth, we must resolve to create a meaningful conflict resolution process that will peacefully reunify Georgia.
- If we can accomplish these goals, then this institution will emerge from this crisis stronger than it was before.
- If however, we fail to rise to the challenge, I fear that the violence and tactics that subverted state sovereignty in Georgia will spread to other parts of the world.
- It is our collective responsibility to respond with conviction and resolve.
- Georgia has made its choice and our democracy will emerge stronger as a result.
- Together, we will find ways, as we have through the millennia, to ensure peaceful coexistence between all members of our multi-ethnic society, be they Georgians, Abkhaz, Ossetians or any other citizens of my ancient country.

**THANK YOU**