



**REMARKS OF H.E MIKHEIL SAAKASHVILI,
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Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

It is always a great honor for me to address the annual general assembly of the United Nations.

Ladies and gentlemen, in uncertain times like ours, cooperation is more necessary than ever.

Unless we stand together and invent new approaches to the global challenges we are all facing, we will be torn apart by fear and self-destructive interests.

Gatherings like this one, therefore, are valuable only if they allow us to shape a common vision for concrete actions towards peace, development, solidarity, and justice.

This month, thanks to the coordinated efforts of the international community and the leadership of President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton, direct peace talks have resumed between Israelis and Palestinians.

They resumed precisely at a moment when many people had given up hope for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The road to peace, security, and justice is still a long one. The remaining obstacles are enormous. But the goal is so noble and necessary that no effort should be spared.

This is why today I would like to pay tribute to all those who are taking risks for peace.

Yes, risks. Because peace is never obvious, never easy.

That is certainly true in the Middle East, and it is true in my region as well.

One of our common goals, then, must be to enable those risk-takers who have the courage to defy conventional wisdom and forge new paths to peace.

Peace is not an easy way. But peace is the only way.

As the President of a young democracy that recently suffered from war and invasion and is still under partial occupation by a nuclear superpower—I can say this: peace is our most precious common goal and, at the same time, our only path towards the other goals we share.

To those here, and in my own country who see no way to reverse the armed occupation or reduce regional tensions, I say: peace is not only the goal, it is also the *means* to any goal.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, my region is at a crossroads.

For too long, it has suffered from division, injustice, conflict, colonization, and violence.

Today, however, change is possible. In fact, change is already taking place.

I came here to speak about this change and to promote a specific vision - a vision for a free, stable and united Caucasus.

From Pushkin, Lermontov or Tolstoy's times till now, the Caucasian mountains were a symbol of wilderness and paradoxes, a region where individuals and souls were fundamentally free, but where citizens were politically oppressed, where people and cultures were deeply tolerant, but where governments and authorities created artificial divisions, where shepherds would cross 5000 meters high mountains, but where rulers erected walls nobody could cross.

I came here today to tell you that these times are vanishing, that the dream of unity and peace is possible.

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When I addressed you two years ago — in the aftermath of a full-scale invasion and when Russian Foreign Minister was openly threatening Georgia of total annihilation — few people believed that our country would survive as an independent and democratic state.

Few people thought that our government would endure—that our economy would survive the war and the global crisis—that our reforms could continue with renewed vigor—or that we would make steady progress toward the European Union and Euro-Atlantic structures.

Well, I am proud to tell you, two years later, that we have succeeded against the odds.

Thanks to the commitment of the Georgian people and to the support of our friends and allies.

Today, Georgia is back.

Georgia is back, first, as a laboratory for political reform and social transformation.

More than ever, we are committed to the promise at the heart of the Rose Revolution—to turn a failed state into a modern European one.

Our local elections last May were proof of that transformation and a milestone for our democracy, the result of seven years of patient, constant, tireless reform.

This effort, of course, has to go on—and it *will* go on because a great deal remains to be done.

Our objective is clear: to create a more institutionalized system of liberal democratic governance.

Ladies and gentlemen, my term as president ends in 2013 and these changes will survive my presidency and the current government.

Because we are not only speaking about changes of leadership or reforms of institutions, we are speaking about something deeper and stronger—something that *The Economist* of London recently characterized as Georgia’s “mental revolution.”

The Georgian people have tasted freedom, the absence of corruption, the fruits of economic development, the emergence of a true meritocracy. They have changed their behavior, their vision of the world, their dreams even, and they will mightily resist any attempts to reverse these changes—no matter if those attempts come from inside or from abroad.

This is our great victory: we helped to create something that goes far beyond the leaders and parties that led the Rose Revolution. We helped to create a revolution of the heart and the mind.

Once one of the most corrupt countries of the post-Soviet world, Georgia has made greater gains in the fight against corruption, as measured by Transparency International, than any other country over the past five years.

Once a place where foreign investors were kidnapped by gangs and mafias, Georgia is now ranked by the World Bank as number 11 for the ease of doing business in the world — a ranking we hope to further improve this year.

These rankings make clear why Georgia’s only interest is a peaceful resolution of conflicts:

Georgia is winning the peace—Georgia is winning through peace.

Our northern neighbor expected us to change our path when it imposed on us a full embargo in 2006, invaded us in 2008, ethnically cleansed Georgian regions and illegally occupied 20% of our territory, an occupation that continues to this day.

All these actions had one objective: to destroy the Georgian laboratory of political, economic, and social reform—to prevent the region from changing.

We answered these relentless attacks by reinvigorating our reforms, opening our economy even more, and accelerating our social transformation.

This is our policy and no provocation will ever make us change it.

Thanks to this commitment to reform, Georgia is now a responsible international player.

I am proud that my nation is fighting international terrorism in Afghanistan. I would like to pay tribute here to our nearly 1,000 soldiers who are risking their lives every day to help the Afghan people secure a stable, terror-free future.

I want to pay a special tribute today to company commander, First Lieutenant Mukhran Shukvani. Earlier this month, Mukhran was killed in the cause of peace, while serving alongside NATO forces in the dangerous Helmand province of Afghanistan.

We are fighting other common scourges, too, focusing especially on the terrible danger of nuclear trafficking. Many times over the past seven years, we have intercepted criminals who had in their possession the essential ingredients for nuclear devices. Every step of the way, we have cooperated with our allies in the international community to ensure that Georgia is doing everything possible to confront this global danger.

Here I must pause to bring your attention to a grave problem that results from the partial occupation of my country—a problem everybody should worry about, even those who overlook international law, forget 500 000 IDPS and refugees, dismiss repeated assaults on basic human rights, civil liberties, and the environment.

I am speaking of the lawlessness bred by the Russian occupation. Our two occupied regions exist in a black hole of governance. Today, in these lands, criminals act with impunity. The most elemental human rights are abused. Drugs and weapons are smuggled. People are trafficked. And potential weapons of mass destruction are moved in and out of these territories, posing a threat to us all.

Three days ago, we met in this very place to discuss the Millennium Development Goals and our progress in meeting them over the past decade. I won't tire you with a recitation of our efforts to achieve the MDGs—the strides we have made in halving our poverty rate, reforming our educational system and improving health care.

But I will tell you that these successes remain bittersweet for me because they cannot be savored by all the people of Georgia.

Not by those who live in fear for their basic rights in the occupied territories, nor fully by these 500 000 IDPs and refugees who were expelled from their homes.

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Ladies and gentlemen, for the last two years, the Russian Federation has been violating the ceasefire agreement brokered on 12 August 2008, by my good friend French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who was acting at the time on behalf of the European Union.

The Russian army has not withdrawn as required by the ceasefire. European Union monitors cannot enter Russian-occupied areas, where a constant military buildup is taking place. Hundreds of thousands of IDPs, victims of the ethnic cleansing campaign led by the Russian forces, are still prevented from returning to their homes.

How did Georgia respond to these violations of international law and human rights?

We answered with patience and calm.

We implemented—fully—the ceasefire agreement and went beyond our obligations, without ever using as a pretext Russia’s refusal to comply.

Last month, the head of the European Union Monitoring Mission, Ambassador Haber, publicly praised Georgian policy as “constructive unilateralism.”

What does “constructive unilateralism” mean?

It refers for instance to our calm when FSB supported militias killed our policemen at the occupation line or to our willingness to free criminals working for the occupation regime when the other side was kidnapping teenagers who wanted only to visit their empty house.

“Constructive unilateralism” means that we behave in a civilized and patient way, even when our enemy uses barbaric methods or implements an impulsive and irrational policy.

It means that – even if peace requires both sides to come to the table of negotiations – you can pave the way to peace on your own.

This “constructive unilateralism” is based on the idea that peace is in the supreme interest of Georgia, that peace is the only path to the de-occupation of our country.

It forms the substance of the strategy on occupied territories that my government has put in motion to engage the populations held hostage by the Russian occupiers, on the other side of the New Iron Curtain that illegally divides our country.

Walls like the one dividing Georgia will not be brought down by bombs, but by the commitment of citizens to build a free, united country—and by the commitment of the world community to enforce international law and the principles of the UN Charter.

This commitment is expressed in the refusal of nearly the entire world to legitimize the Russian occupation by recognizing the so-called independence of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, a de facto annexation of Georgian territories by the Russian Federation.

It is noticeable that, despite enormous pressure and multiple threats from Moscow, not a single former soviet republic has recognized this dismemberment of Georgia.

It shows—to the great surprise and fury of those who describe the fall of the Soviet Empire as the worst catastrophe of the 20th century—that the old times are definitely over.

It shows that the change I evoked earlier already has taken root.

It shows that the former captive nations of the Soviet times became strong independent states that can determine their own policies.

It is noticeable—and it is noticed in Moscow.

Ladies and gentlemen, I solemnly call today on those three, isolated UN member states that recognized Russia's de facto annexation of our territories and legitimized the Russian led ethnic cleansing campaigns to reverse their decision.

It is never too late to overturn a bad policy. The dismemberment of Georgia has failed categorically – and even the Russian Federation will one day need to reverse its disastrous policy.

Imagine how uncomfortable these three isolated leaders from faraway countries will be when Moscow itself chooses to comply with international law and withdraw its troops?

Because, ladies and gentlemen, that day will come.

Those who claimed a military victory in 2008 now face a diplomatic and political defeat. And, in Moscow, the occupation and annexation will soon be debated. They are in fact already debated in the corridors of the Kremlin.

Because this situation is not sustainable, even for the Russian leadership.

We have now, in our country, Russian soldiers deserting their units and fleeing to the Georgian side through the Wall erected by their superiors.

Just like Soviet soldiers did in Berlin during the Cold War.

In which sense is History moving? Certainly not in the sense of those who can deploy thousands of tanks but who cannot even take care of their soldiers or prevent them from fleeing.

Ladies and gentlemen, those who refuse to modernize their society and to open their political system might have an interest in war or instability.

But in Georgia, we know and we have *always* known that peace is our interest—the very precondition of our survival and our success.

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Ladies and gentlemen, I have three calls to make today:

My first call is addressed to my fellow citizens of Abkhaz and Ossetian origins who live behind the New Iron Curtain that divides our common nation. I want to tell them once again: we will protect your rights, your culture, your history—we will work *with* you, we will work *for* you.

You are part of a common history, a common culture, and a common future. Your differences enrich our proud national tapestry.

Rather than succumb to annexation by the Russian Empire, we invite you to build together with us a multicultural and multiethnic society that would be a regional model for tolerance and respect.

I dream about the day when an Abkhaz or Ossetian citizen of Georgia – as it happened several times in our common history - will become President of a reunited, democratic and European Georgia.

And this dream will become possible in a reunited and free Georgia, a Georgia that would build positive relations and even intense cooperation with the Russian Federation. A Russian Federation acting as a rational international player and not as a revisionist power. A Russian Federation that will have chosen cooperation instead of occupation, union of markets rather than embargoes, tolerance instead of crackdowns.

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My second call is, therefore, to the Russian leadership: you face a choice. Either you take a major part in this ongoing transformation of our common region, accepting other countries as partners and not vassals.

Or this transformation will happen without you.

We all want—I personally want—Russia as a partner and not as an enemy.

That is why the Georgian government supports the reset policy of the United States and the European Union's engagement with Russia.

Nobody has a greater stake than us in seeing Russia turn into a country that truly operates within the concert of nations, respects international law, and—this is often connected—upholds basic human rights.

I want to tell the Russian people that they will always be welcome in Georgia, as tourists, as students, as businessmen, as journalists or simply as friends. Not as occupation forces.

And I want to tell the Russian leaders that they should care more about their citizens and less about our diplomatic orientation, more about developing the Northern Caucasus – a region that is exploding as I speak – than about undermining our development.

They are welcome to come too if they want, in order to understand how a post-soviet society can turn into a European one.

I invite them to come, with notebooks rather than with missiles, with ipads rather than kalashnikov's.

I was pleased to notice that some of our reforms inspired a few recent presidential speeches in Moscow.

Instead of fighting each other, we should excel together in modernizing our common region.

And instead of secretly copying or envying our reforms, they should cooperate with us in order to build a stable and free area.

Because, by looking over the best pupil's shoulder, one might not get the full picture of what modernization means.

And allow me to say that the complete picture is rather simple: you cannot achieve lasting stability and prosperity without respecting some basic principles.

Modernization without freedom is not sustainable and you cannot hope to diversify and develop your economy when you send your most successful businessmen to the Gulag, like Mikheil Khodorkovski.

Computers are not enough if you do not have free minds to use them.

So let us free our minds from our common soviet past in order to build a common future.

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My third call goes to all of you, to the international community: help us to secure peace, in Georgia, but also in our broader region.

We Georgians have learned tragically how a so-called frozen conflict can very quickly become a hot one.

If there is clear support from the international community, I am convinced that a lasting peace can be secured in the Caucasus.

I am convinced that if the world shows the same commitment to a peaceful resolution of conflicts in my region than in other parts of the world, we can accomplish wonders.

It is in everybody's interest to see this strategic region, this crossroads of civilizations, become more stable, prosperous, and open.

Ladies and gentlemen, History has taught us that wars can erupt quickly - but also that brave leaders can secure peace where and when nobody would ever believe that conflicts could be resolved.

History has taught us that regions that were torn apart by armed conflicts and contaminated by hate – starting with Europe – can achieve lasting peace through cooperation, interdependence and unity.

History has taught us that dreams are often more realistic than resignation.

I strongly believe that a common market, shared interests, and political and economic interdependence will one day give birth to a united Caucasus. That is what I am calling for today.

We share a similar history of oppression, but we have also in common a deep, essential and undefeated aspiration for freedom.

Let us capitalize on this aspiration. Our region will never be truly free if it is not united.

It will of course require a long and difficult series of efforts and gestures, from all of us, but the objective is worth every sacrifice.

As it happened a long time ago with the European Union - this amazing geopolitical revolution we aspire to join one day - the historical move towards Caucasian unity will start with concrete projects, in the energy sector, in the education and the cultural fields, in the civil society spheres.

We should begin with more people to people exchanges. It is time we get to know each other and forge links that will bring us together without changing existing borders.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished delegates, my birth town and our capital, Tbilisi, is inhabited by Caucasians from every religion and from every ethnicity. Altogether, these people form a living example of tolerance and cooperation.

We, leaders, have to learn from this cohabitation of peoples and translate it into geopolitics.

Our unity would not be directed against anyone and, once again, we will not aspire to change any borders.

We might belong to different States and live on different side of the mountains, but in terms of human and cultural space, there is no North and South Caucasus, there is one Caucasus, that belongs to Europe and will one day join the European family of free nations, following the Georgian path.

We, the Caucasians, driven by legitimate or imaginary threat of annihilation from other powers or from each other, hoped too often to be protected by neighboring empires.

This anxious search for foreign shelter has led us to subjugation, assimilation or annexation.

It has authorized foreign leaders to artificially emphasize and manipulate our divisions.

We - Caucasian people - we all made the same mistake through History.

It is time to change.

It is time to stick together, to help each other to survive and progress.

It is time to understand that our region has sufficient resources and potential for all of us.

It is time to rely on ourselves, on the human potential of our citizens, to develop our own education system and to organize our own development.

The Caucasus is one of the birthplaces of European civilization. It is time to show that the energy of our ancestors does not belong only to a remote past and that we have something to give to our children and to the world.

It is time to stop fighting and weakening each other and to realize that our strength consists in unity.

It is time, ladies and gentlemen, for unity and for peace.

It is time to stop being prisoners of the past and to move towards our common future.

In the past, Georgian citizens were perceiving our border with the Ottoman Empire as an absolute threat.

Today, we have passport free customs, joint airport and free trade with Turkey.

Tomorrow, the citizens of Armenia and Azerbaidjan will be able to cross our borders without passport.

Recently, a foreign diplomat told me that, after crossing our border with Russia, he encountered dozens of roadblocks where local militias and FSB agents kept blocking the passage from one valley to another, from one village to another, aggressively preventing individuals from circulating in their own country.

It is time to replace barbwires and roadblocks by open borders and passeport-free customs, to replace IDP camps by joint schools and universities, to replace kalashnikov by computers and missiles by books, radios or TVs.

Ladies and gentlemen, in 2008, thousands and thousands of tanks, armed vehicles, troops and militias crossed the Caucasian mountains, bringing destruction, death, hatred.

Now, it is time for ideas – these ideas of freedom and unity that we all cherish – to cross the same mountains, bringing hope, life and even love.

As I speak, thousands of tanks, armed vehicles and missile platforms are entrenched or moving all across the Caucasus.

If we remain on our own, isolated from each other, they will prevail.

But if everybody holds the hand of his neighbor, if tens of millions of unarmed people stand together, shoulder to shoulder, being the continuation of each other just like the Caucasian mountains, then no brutal force will ever break through this chain of awakened human spirits and this thirst for freedom.

Thank you.