

Q5 Legal / Reference 3-4:

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Statement by President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev

August 26, 2008

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My dear fellow countrymen, citizens of Russia!

You are no doubt well aware of the tragedy of South Ossetia. The night-time execution-style bombardment of Tskhinval by the Georgian troops resulted in the deaths of hundreds of our civilians. Among the dead were the Russian peacekeepers, who gave their lives in fulfilling their duty to protect women, children and the elderly.

The Georgian leadership, in violation of the UN Charter and their obligations under international agreements and contrary to the voice of reason, unleashed an armed conflict victimizing innocent civilians. The same fate lay in store for Abkhazia. Obviously, they in Tbilisi hoped for a blitz-krieg that would have confronted the world community with an accomplished fact. The most inhuman way was chosen to achieve the objective – annexing South Ossetia through the annihilation of a whole people.

That was not the first attempt to do this. In 1991, President Gamsahourdia of Georgia, having proclaimed the motto "Georgia for Georgians" – just think about it! – ordered attacks on the cities of Sukhum and Tskhinval. The result then was thousands of killed people, dozens of thousands of refugees and devastated villages. And it was Russia who at that time put an end to the eradication of the Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples. Our country came forward as a mediator and peacekeeper insisting on a political settlement. In doing so we were invariably guided by the recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity.

The Georgian leadership chose another way. Disrupting the negotiating process, ignoring the agreements achieved, committing political and military provocations, attacking the peacekeepers – all these actions grossly violated the regime established in conflict zones with the support of the United Nations and OSCE.

Russia continually displayed calm and patience. We repeatedly called for returning to the negotiating table and did not deviate from this position of ours even after the unilateral proclamation of Kosovo's independence. However our persistent proposals to the Georgian side to conclude agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the non-use of force remained unanswered. Regrettably, they were ignored also by NATO and even at the United Nations.

It stands quite clear now: a peaceful resolution of the conflict was not part of Tbilisi's plan. The Georgian leadership was methodically preparing for war, while the political and material support provided by their foreign guardians only served to reinforce the perception of their own impunity.

Tbilisi made its choice during the night of August 8, 2008. Saakashvili opted for genocide to accomplish his political objectives. By doing so he himself dashed all the hopes for the peaceful coexistence of Ossetians, Abkhazians and Georgians in a single state. The peoples of South Ossetia and Abkhazia have several times spoken out at referendums in favor of independence for their republics. It is our understanding that after what has happened in Tskhinval and what has been planned for Abkhazia they have the right to decide their destiny by themselves.

The Presidents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, based on the results of the referendums conducted and on the decisions taken by the Parliaments of the two republics, appealed to Russia to recognize the state sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Federation Council and the State Duma voted in support of those appeals.

A decision needs to be taken based on the situation on the ground. Considering the freely expressed will of the Ossetian and Abkhaz peoples and being guided by the provisions of the UN Charter, the 1970 Declaration on the Principles of International Law Governing Friendly Relations Between States, the CSCE Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and other fundamental international instruments, I signed Decrees on the recognition by the Russian Federation of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence.

Russia calls on other states to follow its example. This is not an easy choice to make, but it represents the only possibility to save human lives.