

Address by Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions on Georgia: UK response, November 2022

Thank you, Chair. On behalf of the United Kingdom, let me welcome the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions (GID) to the Permanent Council and thank you for your remarks.

Georgia has been under continuous hybrid attack from Russia since the 2008 war which saw 20% of Georgian territory effectively annexed. The UK remains deeply concerned over the continued illegal Russian presence in Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions and fully supports Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

This year, the multitude of hybrid tactics against Georgia have included the August announcement of the so-called transfer of the Bichvinta estate in Abkhazia to the Federal Protective Service of the Russian Federation on a 49-year lease. This is yet another flagrant breach of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The UK was deeply concerned by the illegal so-called Parliamentary election which took place on 12 March 2022 in Abkhazia, and the illegal so-called Presidential elections which took place on 10 April 2022 in South Ossetia. We welcome that the proposed illegal referendum in South Ossetia did not go ahead, and strongly indicate that it should not be rearranged in future.

We call on Russia to reverse its recognition of the so-called independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and end all practices aimed at creeping annexation of these territories into the Russian Federation. We welcome initiatives by the government of Georgia to promote reconciliation among the populations separated by the Administrative Boundary Lines and urge Russia not to obstruct these valuable peace building and people to people contacts.

Co-chairs, the UK reiterates our unwavering support for your work. As the only international forum that brings together all sides from the conflict, the GID plays a vital role in trying to achieve a lasting resolution. We welcomed the 56th round of Discussions held on 5 October and your continued open channels of communication following the 10-month pause since the 55th round held in December 2021. We stress the importance of continued communication as you look towards the 57th round of talks. The UK continues to support UN Women to help facilitate the meaningful participation of grass-roots women peacebuilders in the formal dialogues, so we also urge further discussion in future rounds on the role of women in peacebuilding and security.

We remain grateful to the OSCE for its engagement in the GID and the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism meetings, as well as in the implementation of confidence-building measures. Although we welcome the functioning of the

IPRM in Ergneti and the last meeting which took place in September, we highlight the need to restart regular meetings of the Gali IPRM. These meetings play an important role in preventing the escalation of the conflict and in helping to provide safety and security to people on the ground.

We call upon the Russian Federation to immediately fulfil its clear obligation under the 2008 ceasefire agreement to withdraw its forces to pre-conflict positions, as well as its commitments to allow unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the return of internally displaced persons to return to their homes in safety and dignity.

The burden lies with Russia to take these actions, respect the territorial integrity of Georgia as well as its neighbours including Ukraine, and rebuild the trust that underpins the OSCE and the GID.

Thank you.