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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1808 (2008) of 15 April 2008, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) until 15 October 2008. It provides an update of the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, since my report of 2 April 2008 (S/2008/219).

2. My Special Representative, Jean Arnault, continued to lead the Mission. He was assisted by the Chief Military Observer, Major General Niaz Muhammad Khan Khattak (Pakistan). The strength of UNOMIG on 14 July 2008 stood at 130 military observers (including 9 medical personnel) and 15 police advisers (see annex).

II. Political process

3. UNOMIG continued its efforts to help prevent an escalation of tensions in the zone of conflict and facilitate a resumption of dialogue between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides against the background of a severely deteriorated situation on the ground in both political and security terms. In particular, the indiscriminate bombing at a public place in Gali that resulted in four fatalities, including one UNOMIG staff member, represented a significant escalation in violence.

4. As to the overall approach to the settlement of the conflict, in view of the changing dynamics in the conflict settlement process, characterized by increasingly divergent views on the United Nations-led peace process, as mentioned in my report of January 2008 (S/2008/38), I have asked Bertrand Ramcharan to undertake an assessment of the process, which includes consultations with the parties and the main stakeholders. I intend to report to the Council in due time on the conclusions of this exercise.

5. During my visit to Moscow on 8 and 9 April 2008, I discussed the situation in Georgia with the leadership of the Russian Federation. Throughout the reporting period, my Special Representative maintained regular contact with both sides and with the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, both in Tbilisi and in their respective capitals. The Mission facilitated successive visits to Sukhumi by the senior representative of the United States of America in the Group of Friends; the



High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union, Javier Solana; the senior representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the Group of Friends; the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Per Stig Moeller; and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany, Frank-Walter Steinmeier. My Special Representative participated in a meeting of the senior representatives of the Group of Friends in Berlin on 30 June.

6. During the reporting period, the negotiation process remained suspended. The Abkhaz side continued to insist on the withdrawal of the Georgian forces from the upper Kodori Valley and the signing of a document on non-resumption of hostilities as a precondition for re-engaging in negotiations with the Georgian side. The Georgian side focused on President Saakashvili's peace initiative of 28 March (see S/2008/219, para. 18). It developed its various components, in particular the economic part, sought to acquaint the Abkhaz side with it and shared it broadly with the international community. At the same time, the Government of Georgia continued to emphasize the need to change the negotiating formats, including by granting a prominent role to the European Union, as a condition for substantial progress. The Abkhaz side remained opposed to any modification.

7. Two informal meetings between Georgian and Abkhaz representatives took place, on 12 and 13 May in Sukhumi and from 15 to 17 June in Sweden. While the sides did not comment on their discussions, they publicly reiterated their firm positions on key issues.

8. While negotiations between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides remained stalemated, a combination of developments brought about a dangerous dynamic in the situation around Abkhazia, Georgia. One month after the decision of the Russian Federation to withdraw from the 1996 Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) restrictions on Abkhazia, Georgia (see S/2008/219, para. 14), on 16 April the President of the Russian Federation issued an instruction authorizing direct relations with the Abkhaz and South Ossetian de facto authorities in a number of fields. The Russian Federation stated that the decision was aimed at supporting Russian citizens and the local population and responded to what it called Georgia's aggressive intentions.

9. The Georgian side protested strongly what it considered a blatant violation of Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, amounting to legalizing a factual annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It demanded the immediate revocation of both the March decision to withdraw from the 1996 CIS sanctions and the April instruction. With regard to its opposition to the April decree, Georgia received unequivocal support from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union.

10. On 29 April, citing the possibility of an impending deterioration in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, the Russian Federation reinforced the Russian-manned CIS peacekeeping force with a 525-strong airborne battalion stationed in the restricted weapons zone. UNOMIG established regular patrolling in the areas where that battalion was deployed. At the end of May, referring to the presidential decision on the provision of humanitarian assistance to the Abkhaz side, the Government of the Russian Federation also introduced a military railways unit to rehabilitate the railways south of Sukhumi, outside the area of responsibility of UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force.

11. The Georgian side considered both measures aggressive in nature, in particular vis-à-vis the upper Kodori Valley, and demanded an immediate withdrawal of all additional Russian forces, including the railways troops. The Georgian side argued that these military steps confirmed that the Russian Federation was a party to the conflict and could no longer serve in either a mediating or a peacekeeping capacity. It intensified its calls for a change of the peacekeeping format and proposed in particular the replacement of the current peacekeeping operation with a joint Georgian-Abkhaz police force under European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe supervision and training, without excluding the possibility that the Russian Federation may play a role. It announced that if a substantial change in the peacekeeping format was not achieved, it was ready to request formally the withdrawal of the CIS peacekeeping force.

12. For its part, the Abkhaz side insisted that the strengthening of the CIS peacekeeping force was carried out in response to Georgian plans to implement a military option in the period from April to May. It reiterated its opposition to any change in the peacekeeping format and warned that a withdrawal of the CIS peacekeepers would lead to a resumption of hostilities. The Abkhaz side also indicated that if the Government of Georgia should decide to withdraw its consent to the presence of the CIS peacekeeping force, it would propose an agreement of military cooperation with the Russian Federation to retain its military presence in Abkhazia.

13. Concerned over negative developments in the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process, on 30 June senior representatives of the Group of Friends met in Berlin, with the participation of my Special Representative, to discuss ways and means to prevent further deterioration, in particular through the revitalization of the peace process. Unfortunately, the subsequent period saw a dramatic increase in violence, including indiscriminate bombings of public places in Gagra, Sukhumi and Gali on the Abkhaz-controlled side of the ceasefire line, as well as roadside explosions on the Georgian-controlled side of the ceasefire line. The bombings resulted in four fatalities and left 18 people injured, mostly civilians. Among the dead was one UNOMIG staff member.

III. Developments in the Mission's area of responsibility

14. During the reporting period, the overall situation in the Mission's area of responsibility remained tense. One of the sources of this tension was the intensification of air activities over the zone of conflict. On 5 April, UNOMIG observers reported two Georgian jet fighters of the SU-25 type flying over the Abkhaz-controlled side of the zone of conflict. A violation report was issued. On 13 April, two jet fighters resembling SU-25s were reported by the local population to be flying along the ceasefire line. On 16 April, the Abkhaz side informed UNOMIG that its radar had detected an aircraft overflying the town of Gali some minutes earlier; UNOMIG military observers heard the sound of jet aircraft at the northern edge of the security zone at approximately the same time. On 20 April, the presence of a jet aircraft was reported by several witnesses (see para. 17 below). On 17 May, two jet fighters were observed entering the restricted weapons zone over the Senaki training area. In addition, UNOMIG was informed that on 3 April an Italian C-130 transport airplane carrying an inspection team in the framework of the Open Skies Treaty flew along the ceasefire line without prior notification to

UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force, thus exposing the team and the crew to the hazards of the conflict zone.

15. The Abkhaz side reported having detected a number of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) flights over Abkhaz-controlled territory since August 2007. The Mission was able to verify five Georgian UAV flights over Abkhaz-controlled territory, on 18 March, 20 April, 4 May, 8 May and 12 May 2008. The Abkhaz side claimed to have shot down a total of seven Georgian UAVs on those dates; the Mission has been able to ascertain the downing of three UAVs. After initial denials, the Georgian side admitted to losing a total of three UAVs.

16. After the Mission's fact-finding team investigated the first downing of a UAV, on 18 March, UNOMIG informed the Georgian Ministry of Defence of its position that such flights constituted a violation of the ceasefire and separation-of-forces regime. Indeed, a military reconnaissance mission should be considered a military action and therefore contravenes paragraph 1 of the Moscow Agreement, which stipulates that "the parties shall scrupulously observe the ceasefire on land, at sea and in the air and shall refrain from any military action against each other". UNOMIG also considers actions, whether by air-to-air missile or ground-based air defence systems, taken against Georgian UAVs over the zone of conflict — albeit in a defensive posture — to be violations of the ceasefire regime, since the Moscow Agreement prohibits the introduction and operation of heavy weapons in the zone of conflict.

17. With regard to the second downing of a UAV, on 20 April, on the basis of testimony of witnesses and the analysis of a UAV camera and radar recordings provided by the Georgian side, the Mission concluded that the recordings were authentic and, absent compelling evidence to the contrary, that the UAV was downed by a Russian aircraft. The Mission observed that enforcement of the ceasefire and separation of forces regime was the exclusive responsibility of the CIS peacekeeping force, and enforcement action by third parties, in this case the Russian Federation, was inconsistent with the Moscow Agreement and undercut the ceasefire and separation-of-forces regime. The Mission also reaffirmed that UAV flights are a violation of the Moscow Agreement. The downing of a Georgian UAV on 20 April was considered by the Security Council on 23 April and 30 May (see S/PV.5874 and S/PV.5900).

Gali sector

18. During the period under review, the situation in the Gali sector remained tense, due in particular to the developments referred to above, but also to a general concern about an impending resumption of hostilities.

19. On 29 April an official statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that developments in the zone of conflict required an increase in the strength of the CIS peacekeeping force, which would still remain below the threshold of 3,000 authorized by the CIS Council of Heads of State in August 1994. The same day the CIS peacekeeping force notified UNOMIG of the increase in general terms.

20. Simultaneously, UNOMIG observed an introduction of personnel and military equipment into the zone of conflict, which continued until 1 May. In accordance with its mandate to observe the operations of the CIS peacekeeping force, the

Mission requested from the commander of the force a detailed clarification regarding the increase. It was informed that the additional force included one airborne battalion group of 525 men tasked with increasing monitoring in the restricted weapons zone in the Tkvarcheli and Ochamchira areas, and 20 men attached to one of the existing CIS peacekeeping force battalions deployed in the lower Gali area. The Mission was also assured that no element of the new forces had been deployed outside the zone of conflict. While UNOMIG was not in a position to verify information outside its area of responsibility, its observations on the deployment of forces in the zone of conflict were consistent with the information provided by the CIS peacekeeping force commander regarding the airborne battalion group and its armaments and operations.

21. The Georgian side stated that lack of advance notification and the introduction of an airborne battalion were in clear violation of a number of CIS regulations relating to peacekeeping and demanded an immediate withdrawal of the newly arrived forces and equipment (see para. 11 above).

22. During the reporting period, the Mission's freedom of movement was restricted on a number of occasions. Its attempts to monitor the camp of the new CIS peacekeeping contingent in the restricted weapons zone were initially obstructed by the Abkhaz de facto police. UNOMIG patrols were prevented by the Abkhaz de facto law enforcement agencies and de facto officials from having access to the northern part of the restricted weapons zone. Twice, de facto police confiscated cameras from UNOMIG patrols and returned them later. Unidentified local residents verbally abused patrols in the restricted weapons zone and obstructed their movement on two occasions. Outside the conflict zone, a United Nations vehicle was confiscated by Abkhaz de facto Ministry of Defence personnel and later returned. After the Mission protested such actions, the de facto authorities issued instructions to heads of de facto law enforcement agencies to ensure cooperation with UNOMIG patrols. No similar incidents have occurred since.

23. During the reporting period, in addition to the violations mentioned above in relation to the Mission's freedom of movement, UNOMIG issued a violation report to the Abkhaz de facto authorities over the presence of two military vehicles in the security zone on 20 April.

24. On 21 May, the day of the Georgian parliamentary elections, the Mission monitored movements across the ceasefire line at the Inguri bridge. Contrary to allegations at the time, the local population was not prevented from crossing the ceasefire line. However, following a series of bomb blasts in public places in Gagra and Sukhumi on 29 and 30 June 2008, in which 12 people were injured, the Abkhaz de facto authorities, who blamed the incidents on Georgian special forces, ordered the closure of the ceasefire line from 1 July. The Government of Georgia denied any involvement in the incidents and protested the restrictions on the freedom of movement of Gali residents, and in particular that of school students who were to take exams on the Georgian-controlled side of the ceasefire line.

25. The most serious incident in years in the UNOMIG area of responsibility happened late in the evening of 6 July, when four people were killed and six injured following an explosion in a cafe in the town of Gali, near the Mission's sector headquarters. The fatalities were a UNOMIG language assistant, the head of the Gali de facto Abkhaz security service, another de facto security service officer and a young woman. A second UNOMIG language assistant was among the six wounded.

Abkhaz de facto authorities have blamed Georgian security forces for the blast, calling the incident “a terrorist attack”. The Government of Georgia stated that this act of violence was in “the interest of forces hoping to prolong the presence of illegally deployed Russian military forces in Georgia ... and those who want to derail Georgia’s European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations”. Coming in the wake of the indiscriminate bomb blasts in Gagra on 29 June and Sukhumi on 30 June, the Gali bombing marked a worrying new level of violence.

26. Criminal incidents reported to UNOMIG patrols during the period under review (without counting the casualties from the incident of 6 July) included two killings, one robbery and two abductions.

27. The United Nations police continued to liaise with the Abkhaz de facto law enforcement agencies in Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli districts. Twenty-four training courses were provided for 216 Abkhaz de facto militia officers in traffic security, police tactics, forensics, police management and other policing skills, in addition to donating police equipment and books.

28. From 2 to 5 June, the United Nations police held a seminar in the town of Ochamchira on prevention of domestic violence and juvenile delinquency, bringing together 16 participants from the Abkhaz de facto Supreme Court, State Security Service, General Prosecutor’s Office and Ministries of Interior, Justice, Health and Education, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The seminar was conducted by the NGO La Strada-Ukraine, the de facto Ministry of Internal Affairs and the NGO Association of Women of Abkhazia. United Nations police also organized educational events and distributed learning materials to children on the subject of traffic safety.

29. The spring conscription in the de facto Abkhaz armed forces started on 1 April 2008. No allegation of arbitrary recruitment came to the attention of the Human Rights Office during this period. The Office is providing legal advice in a previous case of alleged arbitrary recruitment of an ethnic Georgian from the Gali district.

30. The issuance of Abkhaz “passports” in the Gali district started formally at the end of March. It appears that during the following two months the issuance was put on hold. In June the de facto authorities in the Gali district restarted the process, with limited results, owing to the reluctance of Gali district residents to state in the application forms that they renounce their Georgian citizenship.

31. The Human Rights Office followed up on a case involving a Georgian priest who was sent from Tbilisi to Gali to conduct religious services in the Georgian language. Abkhaz religious authorities denied him authorization to do so, following which the priest was expelled from Gali. While unable to pronounce on issues of religious jurisdiction, the Human Rights Office found no confirmation of media allegations of physical abuse against the priest.

Zugdidi sector

32. During the reporting period, the situation on the Georgian-controlled side of the ceasefire line remained generally tense because of the developments mentioned in the sections above, as well as a number of incidents that took place in the Zugdidi sector. These included several incidents involving personnel of the CIS peacekeeping force and the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, an alleged attack against two buses in the Khurcha area near the ceasefire line on the day of Georgian

parliamentary elections, and a number of explosions that took place on 2, 6 and 9 July. This tension notwithstanding, the observation posts of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs operated at the usual personnel and alertness levels.

33. A number of tripartite meetings between UNOMIG, the Georgian side and the CIS peacekeeping force arranged by UNOMIG were held; and since late March, in coordination with the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, the CIS peacekeeping force has resumed its patrolling of the Georgian-controlled Ganmukhuri pocket north of the Inguri river.

34. In mid-April, the Abkhaz de facto authorities reported a Georgian build-up in the Zugdidi district and along the ceasefire line. The CIS peacekeeping force also conveyed its concern to UNOMIG about a possible Georgian build-up in the restricted weapons zone. UNOMIG carried out extensive patrolling of the security and restricted weapons zones, and while there was apprehension among the local population regarding a possible conflict, there were no signs of substantial increases in the deployment of security forces in the zone of conflict.

35. The period under review has been marked, since mid-May, by a number of incidents involving the personnel of the CIS peacekeeping force and the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs. In most cases, the Georgian media were present during those incidents, and reports were later broadcast. On 17 May an armoured personnel carrier that was part of a CIS peacekeeping force convoy moving towards its headquarters in the village of Urta was reported to have been involved in a traffic accident with a civilian vehicle; on 17 June, four CIS peacekeeping force personnel travelling in a truck transporting anti-tank missiles were stopped. In both cases, CIS peacekeeping force personnel were forcibly disarmed and detained by a large contingent of heavily armed law enforcement agency personnel, taken to a police station in Zugdidi for investigation and released later. Representatives of UNOMIG Zugdidi sector headquarters were present at the police station until the release of the detainees.

36. In both cases, the Georgian side complained that the CIS peacekeepers had not coordinated their movements with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and in the second case it claimed that anti-tank missiles were inconsistent with a peacekeeping mission. The CIS peacekeeping force denounced the arrest and detention of its personnel as provocations and gross violations of the Moscow Agreement. It should be noted that an anti-tank sub-unit is an integral part of the motorized rifle battalion of the CIS peacekeeping force's Southern Operational Group. The type of missiles transported by the CIS peacekeeping force is compatible with the anti-tank systems held by the sub-unit. These incidents raised the tensions between the CIS peacekeeping force and the Georgian side. In the course of July, a variety of incidents involving the CIS peacekeeping force and the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs continued to take place. Albeit of a less serious nature, they reflect a state of tension that has the potential to deteriorate further.

37. The most serious incident in the Zugdidi area during the period occurred on 21 May, the day of the Georgian parliamentary elections, in the vicinity of the village of Khurcha located near the ceasefire line. On that occasion, heavy firing took place around a football field where a number of people, mainly from the Gali district, were requested to gather to be transported by bus to the town of Zugdidi in order to vote. The account of the event showed that after an initial burst of small arms fire by the would-be attackers, the people assembled on the field fled; the

empty buses were then hit by rocket-propelled grenades and caught fire. Three persons were brought to the hospital, one severely injured. The Georgian security forces arrived rapidly at the scene and fired for a protracted period in the direction of the ceasefire line. The entire incident was recorded by the Georgian media. The Georgian side immediately accused the Abkhaz side of being responsible for the incident. The Abkhaz side denied any involvement.

38. The Mission's investigation into this incident was able to establish the locations from which the attackers fired, approximately 100 metres from the buses, on the Georgian-controlled side of the ceasefire line. While no hard evidence has been found so far regarding the identity of the perpetrators, inconsistencies in the circumstances surrounding the incident, in particular the fact that the incident was filmed in such a way as to suggest that events were anticipated rather than simply recorded as they were happening, require UNOMIG to continue its investigation.

39. On 2 July an explosion occurred in the early morning hours next to the M-27 road, near the CIS peacekeeping force checkpoint at the Inguri river bridge crossing on the Georgian-controlled side of the ceasefire line. The Abkhaz side had closed the bridge to movement by persons since 1 July. On 6 July a series of four explosions took place within a span of about 250 metres along the M-27 road between the village of Rukhi and the Inguri river bridge crossing. On the same day, another explosion was reported in a cornfield along the ceasefire line approximately 400 metres north-east of a Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs observation post. No injuries were reported in any of the explosions. UNOMIG is investigating the incidents.

40. On 9 July an incident took place on the ceasefire line when two rocket-propelled grenades and small arms were allegedly fired by unknown perpetrators at former Ministry of Internal Affairs observation post 217, near Akhali Abustmani on the Georgian-controlled side, causing slight damage to the structure of the post. No casualties were involved. This incident is also under investigation.

41. From 27 May to 2 June, the CIS peacekeeping force conducted the yearly rotation of the Southern Operational Group. The 526th motorized rifle battalion (553 personnel and 49 armoured personnel carriers) replaced the 529th motorized rifle battalion (414 personnel). Overall, the withdrawal of the CIS peacekeeping force's equipment as part of the rotation was transparent and well-coordinated with the Georgian authorities and UNOMIG.

42. In June, UNOMIG patrols noted an increase in the frequency of training conducted by the Georgian side, in terms of both the number of trainees and the number of training areas. The training was conducted either in the security zone, for the personnel of law enforcement agencies, or in the restricted weapons zone, for the personnel of the Ministry of Defence.

43. During the reporting period, UNOMIG continued to observe routine movements towards the upper Kodori Valley by personnel and mostly logistical vehicles belonging to the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs. These movements were generally rotations of personnel conducted overland and represented a significant increase since the previous reporting period owing to improved weather conditions. The number of flights observed decreased slightly. The procedures agreed by the Georgian side for notification and verification of movements through the security zone to and from the upper Kodori Valley were generally not followed.

44. Criminal incidents reported to UNOMIG patrols during the reporting period included two killings, one attempted killing, eight robberies and seven abductions.

45. The UNOMIG police component implemented a systematic advisory programme with the Georgian police. A total of 35 joint patrols with the local police were also carried out. In addition, 23 training courses were conducted for 247 police officers in police tactics, self-defence, forensics, community policing, traffic police matters and other policing skills. United Nations police also facilitated the participation of 10 Georgian police officers in a modern-policing training course at the Police School of the Estonian Public Service Academy, from 16 May to 14 June.

46. On 28 May, a model police station with a training facility, planned and overseen by United Nations police in accordance with European standards, was inaugurated in the village of Lia (see para. 63).

47. United Nations police conducted 10 public surveys on public security matters in 16 communities within the security zone. United Nations police also organized educational events and distributed learning materials to children on the subject of traffic safety.

Kodori Valley

48. Over the reporting period, the general situation in the Kodori Valley was calm until 9 July, when a serious incident was reported in the Achamkhara area, in the lower Kodori Valley (see para. 52).

49. The UNOMIG team returned to its base in Adjara, in the upper Kodori Valley on 9 April, after a six-week absence owing to winter weather conditions. Upon return, the team did not observe any visible change in the strength of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs personnel relative to the figure of 578 personnel reported to UNOMIG by the Georgian authorities on 23 June. However, during the period under review, the team was not allowed access to some areas, in particular the Kvabchara Valley, which made it impossible to verify the official figures. While the Abkhaz side and the CIS peacekeeping force expressed their concerns regarding an alleged introduction of additional Georgian personnel, including from the Ministry of Defence, and of heavy military equipment into the upper Kodori Valley, the Mission did not observe signs of a large-scale induction of security forces. However, UNOMIG requested the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs to ensure more transparency, especially in those areas that had been inaccessible, in order to enable the Mission to ascertain fully the facts on the ground.

50. UNOMIG observed new infrastructural development in the upper Kodori Valley, including a road network, accommodation, logistic installations and the storing of fuel. These infrastructural facilities would seem to exceed the requirements for the declared strength of the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs personnel. Flying has remained the prevalent mode of transport to the upper Kodori Valley, as the Kalamri Suki Pass and the Khida Pass were not continuously passable for road traffic. Some ground movements observed by the UNOMIG post co-located with the CIS peacekeeping force post at the northern edge of the zone of conflict on the way to the Kodori Valley were not accounted for as among arrivals in the upper Kodori Valley. This suggests that some convoys went to other destinations between that position and the upper Kodori Valley.

51. As weather conditions improved, the Georgian security forces reoccupied their summer positions at the Maruki Pass north of the Kodori Valley, at the border with the Russian Federation. The Abkhaz side has reportedly done the same at the Adanga Pass, in a neighbouring area. These positions, located away from the Kodori Valley, are beyond the scope of UNOMIG monitoring. The relative closeness of these positions to each other can result in skirmishes between the sides, especially due to differing interpretations of the delimitation between Georgian- and Abkhaz-controlled areas in the Kodori Valley.

52. On 9 July there was a clash between the Abkhaz and Georgian sides on the Achamkhara heights in the lower Kodori Valley. The Abkhaz side claimed that an Abkhaz de facto security post was raided by the Georgian side, resulting in two Abkhaz reservists being injured. The Georgian side stated that one of its patrols was attacked while securing the Achamkhara heights in anticipation of a UNOMIG visit to the Kvabchara Valley. It reported that three Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs personnel were injured. It may be recalled that in June 2007 the Georgian side occupied the Achamkhara heights, creating a potentially serious stand-off between the sides that was de-escalated when the Georgian side subsequently withdrew its personnel. An investigation by UNOMIG is in progress.

53. Despite the Mission's repeated calls on the sides to cease aerial activity in the zone of conflict, overflights were also observed in the Kodori Valley. The Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Abkhaz side and the CIS peacekeeping force personnel reported observing UAV flights above the lower and upper Kodori Valley on 8 and 22 April, 22 and 24 May, 6 and 30 June and 4 and 5 July. None of the sides admitted to flying UAVs in the Kodori Valley.

Mission-wide developments

54. Weekly quadripartite meetings have remained suspended since 2 November 2006. The UNOMIG fact-finding team completed the draft report on the Joint Fact-Finding Group investigation into the disappearance of David Sigua and submitted it to the members of the Group for their consideration.

55. With regard to the explosion that occurred in the village of Nabakevi on 29 February 2008 (see S/2008/219, paras. 19 and 30), the fact-finding team's investigation was inconclusive with regard to the identity of the perpetrators. The investigation will resume if new evidence becomes available. The fact-finding team also concluded its investigation into the events surrounding the operations of UAVs within the UNOMIG area of responsibility, which is summarized in paragraphs 15 to 17 above.

56. With regard to the strengthening of UNOMIG observation capability, the Mission intends to continue consultations with the two sides concerning the acquisition of UAVs with a view to improving transparency in the Mission's area of responsibility.

IV. Cooperation with the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States

57. UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force continued to maintain close cooperation in fulfilling their respective mandates. Since mid-February, the CIS

peacekeeping force has been informing UNOMIG of its plans to rectify the insufficiency of armoured personnel carriers and other vehicles in both the Northern and Southern Operational Groups. In total, 81 armoured personnel carriers and 26 miscellaneous vehicles were to be replaced with similar vehicles or, in the case of trucks, replaced by armoured personnel carriers. UNOMIG was unable to monitor precisely the vehicle replacement.

58. The CIS peacekeeping force continued to escort UNOMIG through the lower Kodori Valley during regular rotations of personnel for its Kodori team base. The CIS peacekeeping force also provided assistance to UNOMIG forward bases, which were periodically established adjacent to the CIS peacekeeping force checkpoints or observation points on both sides of the ceasefire line.

V. Human rights issues

59. During the reporting period, the United Nations Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia, continued its efforts to promote human rights and to provide support to local NGOs. As mandated, the Office carried out its activities throughout Abkhazia, Georgia.

60. The Office continued its regular visits to detention facilities, monitored court trials and provided legal advisory services to the local population. The Sukhumi office received 38 visitors over the reporting period, with the majority of claims relating to property rights and to the treatment of detainees. The Office followed up on alleged violations of the right to freedom of movement and continued discussions with the de facto authorities about the fate of the last remaining death-row inmate in Abkhazia, Georgia.

61. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) began the implementation of two projects. One supports the Human Rights Centre at Sukhumi University and is aimed at raising awareness about human rights issues, and the other provides assistance to schoolteachers and students in training on project proposal preparation, implementation and reporting in order to facilitate participation in mini-grant competitions in schools, organized by OSCE. It also conducted a two-day training session for Abkhaz journalists on the subject of media freedom.

VI. Humanitarian and rehabilitation activities

62. During the reporting period, through its trust fund, the Mission continued to implement projects focusing mainly on the health sector and the rehabilitation of electricity lines. The Mission continued working on the rehabilitation of a hospital, a dispensary and a youth house in the Gali sector and the rehabilitation of a hospital in the Zugdidi sector.

63. A new police station was constructed in the village of Lia, with the Mission's support and funding from the European Commission, to replace the one destroyed in an attack in January 2004. It was inaugurated on 28 May. The second phase of a training project for 24 detainees at Dranda prison, aimed at facilitating their future reintegration into society, began in May.

64. In April, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) began the rehabilitation of the water supply systems in the Gali, Tkvarcheli and Ochamchira districts. During the reporting period, UNDP also initiated a project on assisting female entrepreneurs, providing training on business management and business plan development and organizing a workshop on gender issues. UNDP also continued supporting local farmers by strengthening local pest-management capacity. It provided farmers' groups in the Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli districts with knapsack sprayers, biopesticides and relevant information.

65. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), with the support of its partners the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, continued to implement the "Strategic directions for Abkhazia" project, including community-based protection and confidence-building activities, education-related projects, basic shelter repair, income generation, agricultural support and training activities. UNHCR also initiated preliminary discussions on and received positive indications from the sides regarding a profiling exercise aimed at enhancing understanding of the problems and needs of the people living in Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli districts. In April, UNHCR held a three-day planning workshop in Gali and Zugdidi with the participation of representatives of seven donor countries. Donors had an opportunity to visit project sites and beneficiaries on both sides of the ceasefire line and understand that humanitarian needs in the zone of conflict require much broader support from the international community. The Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, Craig Johnston, visited Georgia in May and discussed the situation of returnees and prospects for further returns with high-level representatives from both sides.

66. During the first half of May, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) organized a series of training sessions on immunization management for health-care practitioners throughout Abkhazia, Georgia. The training will enable the participants to coordinate the implementation of a mass-immunization campaign against measles and rubella, scheduled for October 2008. UNICEF also provided technical and material assistance in support of the vaccination campaign, including support for local community-based organizations to raise awareness about the benefits of vaccination.

67. The World Food Programme (WFP), in collaboration with World Vision International, continued to assist the most vulnerable categories of the population through food-for-work and food-for-education programmes. Food-for-work projects, benefiting 9,400 persons in the Gali, Ochamchira and Tkvarcheli districts, are aimed at rehabilitating agricultural infrastructure, reclaiming abandoned land and planting crops. In view of the impending phasing out of WFP activities in the region, it continued to explore partnership possibilities with other United Nations agencies and with NGOs to ensure the sustainability of its projects. Within the scope of the food-for-education programme, take-home rations were provided to over 1,050 most-at-risk schoolchildren in 71 schools in the Ochamchira, Tkvarcheli, Gali, Gulripsh, Sukhumi and Gagra districts, while also ensuring the children's school attendance. In cooperation with Médecins sans frontières, food was also provided to 70 tuberculosis patients in the Gulripsh hospital.

VII. Support issues

68. During the reporting period, UNOMIG continued its HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaign. The Mission held training sessions for all mission personnel. Materials were distributed and displayed in the Mission area.

69. UNOMIG continued to implement Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, and welcomed the expansion of the role and contribution of women as military observers.

70. UNOMIG implemented ST/SGB/2008/5, "Prohibition of discrimination, harassment, including sexual harassment, and abuse of authority". It circulated the bulletin to all Mission personnel in April, and the corresponding mandatory online training programme was completed by all civilian staff in June. In addition, the UNOMIG conduct and discipline refresher briefing was delivered to all categories of Mission personnel, focusing on recent policy developments and other conduct issues, such as prostitution and pornography.

71. In response to recent misconduct incidents linked to illegal narcotics, UNOMIG is implementing a zero-tolerance policy.

72. Following recent updates in the content of the online training course, the mandatory Integrity Awareness Initiative was relaunched in UNOMIG in March. All civilian Mission staff were requested to complete by 31 May three mandatory online training courses in conduct and discipline (on standards of conduct, the Integrity Awareness Initiative and prevention of workplace harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority).

VIII. Observations

73. I have consistently stressed the need for strict observance of the ceasefire and separation-of-forces regime in the area of responsibility of UNOMIG in order to prevent a resumption of hostilities and create a climate conducive to dialogue between the two sides. Unfortunately, after a period of relative stability in the winter, the last four months have witnessed a resurgence of tensions stemming from, inter alia, clear disagreements as to what constitutes observance or violation of the ceasefire regime. Taking into account the terms of the Moscow Agreement and the volatility of the overall situation in the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process, I underline the need for all involved to observe the most rigorous separation of forces on land, at sea and in the air, with the CIS peacekeeping force having responsibility for the enforcement of that separation. I am aware of the repeated calls by the Georgian side for a change in the peacekeeping mechanism. But while this and other discussions with respect to the Georgian-Abkhaz peace process are ongoing, I call upon every stakeholder in this process to preserve the integrity of the ceasefire regime. Following a number of recent incidents, I appeal to the Abkhaz side to observe the freedom of movement of UNOMIG and to the Georgian side to observe the freedom of movement of the CIS peacekeeping force in their respective areas of responsibility.

74. The increase in tensions during the period under the review did not involve only the ceasefire regime. I have condemned the bombings and roadside explosions that took place from 29 June to 6 July on both sides of the ceasefire line, with the

indiscriminate bombing in public places on the Abkhaz side leaving four people dead, including one UNOMIG staff member, and 18 wounded. While investigations by UNOMIG into the incidents that have occurred in Gali and elsewhere in the zone of conflict are still ongoing — the bombings in Gagra and Sukhumi took place outside the Mission's area of responsibility — I am deeply concerned by this resort to indiscriminate violence, an unprecedented development with unpredictable consequences for a fragile peace process.

75. In addition, against the background of already strained relations between the Russian Federation and Georgia, developments during the period under review have brought differences between the two countries to a new level, with Georgia blaming Russia for “accelerated annexation” of Abkhazia and Russia accusing Georgia of preparing for the imminent implementation of a military option in Abkhazia. While the UNOMIG mandate is limited to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, both the conflict prevention and conflict resolution dimensions of its mandate are significantly affected by this deterioration in the relationship between key actors in the process and the polarizing effect it has on the broader international context. By many accounts, the chain of events that began to unfold in March 2008 brought the Georgian, Abkhaz and CIS peacekeeping forces close to major confrontation in the second half of April.

76. This bears out the relevance of the assessment of the peace process that is currently being undertaken, which includes consultations with the two parties and those international organizations and Member States, including the Group of Friends, that have been most directly involved in the peace process. The assessment will, inter alia, explore the possibility of a coordinated international response to avert further worsening of the political and security situation. International consensus remains key if the peace process is to be put back on track.

77. I conclude by expressing my thanks to my Special Representative and the staff of UNOMIG for their persistent efforts in an increasingly difficult environment, as illustrated by the death of a UNOMIG staff member in Gali on 6 July 2008. I convey my condolences to his family, and I wish a prompt recovery to our UNOMIG staff who were injured in the same incident. I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to Major General Niaz Muhammad Khan Khattak, who is leaving the Mission after completing three years as the head of the UNOMIG military contingent, and who has served with great distinction as the Mission's Chief Military Observer during a very challenging period. My thanks go also to the members of the Group of Friends and those Member States and organizations that continue to contribute to the peace process.

Annex

A. Countries providing military observers (as at 14 July 2008)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of military observers</i>
Albania	3
Austria	3
Bangladesh	8
Croatia	3
Czech Republic	5
Denmark	5
Egypt	5
France	3
Germany	12 ^a
Ghana	1
Greece	4
Hungary	7
Indonesia	4
Jordan	7
Lithuania	2
Moldova	1
Mongolia	0
Nepal	1
Nigeria	1
Pakistan	11 ^b
Poland	2
Republic of Korea	7
Romania	2
Russia	4
Sweden	3
Switzerland	4
Turkey	5
Ukraine	5
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	5
United States of America	3
Uruguay	3
Yemen	1
Total	130

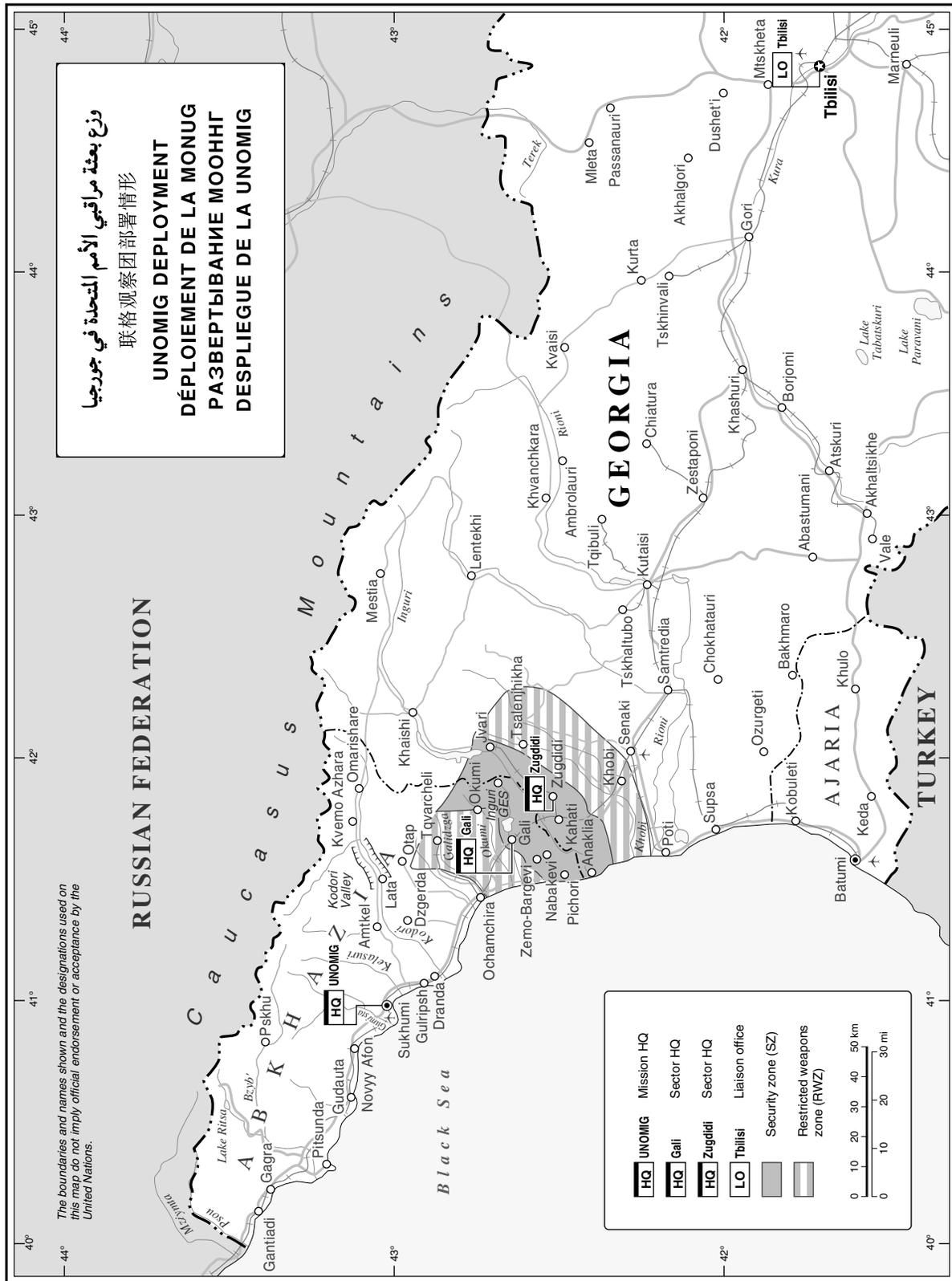
B. Countries providing civilian police personnel (as at 14 July 2008)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of civilian police personnel</i>
Czech Republic	1
Germany	4
Ghana	1
Israel	1
Poland	2
Russian Federation	2
Sweden	1
Switzerland	2
Ukraine	1 ^c
Total	15

^a Three military observers and nine medical personnel.

^b Includes the Chief Military Observer.

^c Senior Police Adviser.



Department of Field Support
 Cartographic Section

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