



August 11, 2008,  
The Kremlin, Moscow

## Opening Remarks at a Meeting with Leaders of the Parliamentary Factions in the State Duma

DMITRY MEDVEDEV: Colleagues,

Today's meeting with the leaders of the parliamentary factions is taking place in extraordinary circumstances and is extremely important for us all. On the night of August 7-8, Georgia committed an act of military aggression directed primarily against the people of South Ossetia and the Russian peacekeeping brigade deployed in this region. They used heavy artillery, tanks, aviation and the regular army to literally wipe Tskhinvali, its homes, hospitals and schools, from the face of the Earth. Several thousand people have become victims of the ensuing humanitarian disaster, and a large number of them are our fellow citizens.

In just a few hours all of the agreements that existed at that point were made null and void, not to mention that all the basic principles of international law have been violated: the wounded have had no chance to get treatment and refugees have not had the possibility of evacuation. This is the tragic result of the unspeakable aggressive act that Georgia, the Georgian authorities, has committed.

Right from the outset I want to thank all the parliamentary parties for taking a responsible approach and standing firm and united in support of the decisions the Russian leadership has taken in these difficult circumstances. I hope that you will be just as swift to help explain this position in the international organisations and defend it in your contacts with voters, with your supporters and with the foreign counterparts with whom you have ongoing contact.

I am also grateful to all the public and religious organisations and the youth organisations that have firmly condemned these acts of aggression and called for their immediate end. All the peoples of the multiethnic Caucasus region are watching developments with great concern. I call on you, given the possibilities you and your parties have, to be attentive to the need to maintain interethnic peace and tolerance in our society.

As I have said, my duty as President right from the outset was to protect our fellow citizens and not let the crimes committed against civilians and peacekeepers go unpunished. Russia wants to end this barbarity against the Ossetian people and against our citizens as soon as possible.

Our common task now is to deal with the humanitarian disaster that has taken place. I have already given instructions to the Government and the Government started taking steps to implement them straight away at today's meeting. It is taking all necessary measures to normalise the situation. Personnel from the Emergency Situations Ministry, the Federal Migration Service, the Health Ministry and other state agencies are all involved in this work and all the required resources will be made available.

The Emergency Situations Ministry has already set up a field hospital near the border with South Ossetia. Medicines and first aid supplies have been sent to the region. More than 120 tons of civilian supplies have been delivered over these last few days.

At its meeting today, the Government Presidium decided to allocate 500 million roubles for priority aid to house refugees and give the wounded medical treatment. Ten billion roubles will be allocated for the first stage of reconstruction work in Tskhinvali and villages in South Ossetia. This money will be used to rebuild housing, the electricity supply, water treatment systems and the social infrastructure.

I would like to inform you separately that I have already decided to increase pay for the soldiers and officers taking part in the peacekeeping operations, for everyone currently in South Ossetia. The Government will draw up the corresponding resolutions.

More than 35,000 refugees have crossed the border over this latest period. The regions of the Southern Federal District are taking them in, of course, providing them with help and giving them accommodation in children's holiday camps, schools and places of temporary shelter. I know that the whole country is collecting clothing, tents and food to send. It is important that public organisations, especially the political parties that have great influence and an extensive organisational network, join in this kind of humanitarian work.

I repeat now what I said several days ago, namely that Russia has historically always been the guarantor of the security of the peoples of the Caucasus. This is our mission and our duty. We have never been just passive observers in this region and never will be.

I have said that our tactic with regard to the Georgian leadership, which unleashed this aggression, is that of enforcing peace in accordance with the United Nations Charter. We consider this tactic absolutely effective and the only possible option. I remind you that history has seen numerous examples of attempts to appease aggressors. This was something the Western countries tried 70 years ago, and we know what tragedy this ended in. I am thinking above all of the lessons of the 1938 Munich Agreement.

We are doing everything within our power. Russia will not leave its fellow citizens in misfortune and will strive to normalise the situation.

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