

Progress report on UNOMIG's fact finding in relation to the armed incident of 20 September 2007

1. On 20 September, an armed clash between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides took place in an isolated area outside the Zone of Conflict. Seven Abkhaz personnel were apprehended by the Georgian side, several were wounded and two former Russian officers reportedly on contract with the Abkhaz *de facto* border guards were killed.
2. On 21 September 2007, with the consent of the Georgian authorities and the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities, the Chief Military Observer ordered the UNOMIG Fact Finding Team (FFT) to conduct an independent enquiry into the incident.
3. The two sides provided different versions of the incident. The Abkhaz *de facto* Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that Georgian forces attacked a training camp established in 2006 on Abkhaz-controlled territory at the foot of Mt Bokhundjara. The camp was designed to train newly conscripted personnel in mountaineering, engineering, land navigation, among others. According to this version, the personnel present at the camp on 20 September were border guards conscripts who had arrived at the camp a couple of days before and were training under the leadership of two former Russian officers serving in the *de facto* Ministry of Internal Affairs.
4. For its part, the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that a group of Abkhaz saboteurs had entered Georgian-controlled territory to disrupt work on the road to the upper Kodori valley, currently under construction, in an attempt to establish control over the upper Kodori valley by blocking roads and controlling the air corridor leading to it. According to this version, the Georgian Government received specific information concerning the presence of Abkhaz elements on Georgian-controlled territory and the clash took place as the Georgian security forces were in the process of intercepting this group.
5. From 21 September until 8 October 2007, the FFT visited the Bokhundjara area; it interviewed a number of Georgian and Abkhaz servicemen who witnessed the incident, including all seven Abkhaz *de facto* personnel detained by the Georgian forces during the incident; it

participated in the autopsy of the two men killed, which took place at the Republican Hospital morgue in Sukhumi; and at the request of the Mission, the German Government agreed to facilitate a DNA analysis of blood samples collected both from the men killed in the incident as well as from the Bokhundjara area. The FFT received good cooperation from the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Abkhaz *de facto* authorities. The FFT is currently in the process of analysing the evidence and the testimonies it has gathered until now.

6. While this analysis has not yet been completed, the outcome of the DNA analysis and the testimonies of witnesses from both sides in relation to the place of the incident are fully consistent and they indicate that the incident occurred at the location designated by the Abkhaz side, on the Abkhaz side of the administrative boundary, at approximately 300 meters from that boundary.

7. Examination by UNOMIG forensic experts of the bodies of the two former Russian officers suggests that both were killed by gunshot wounds caused by automatic weapons fired at short and point-blank range. For the time being, however, the FFT is not in a position to ascertain the exact circumstances of their death. The analysis will continue in this respect.

8. With regard to the broader context in which the 20 September incident took place, the FFT was given access to some Georgian MIA operational information that strongly suggests that there was movement of Abkhaz elements deep in Georgian controlled territory. However, UNOMIG is not in a position to authenticate that information. At this time, the Mission cannot therefore confirm or refute Georgian statements concerning their operations.

9. The Mission hopes that further deliberation on existing evidence and additional testimonies if required will help clarify those aspects of the incident that remain uncertain. UNOMIG thanks the Georgian Government and the Abkhaz *de facto* authorities for their cooperation and trusts that such cooperation will continue to be available in the future.

11 October, 2007