

STATEMENT BY JOHN MCCAIN ON THE CRISIS IN GEORGIA

For Immediate Release

Monday, August 11, 2008

ARLINGTON, VA -- Today, in Erie, Pennsylvania, U.S. Senator John McCain delivered the following statement regarding the current conflict between Georgia and Russia:

"Americans wishing to spend August vacationing with their families or watching the Olympics may wonder why their newspapers and television screens are filled with images of war in the small country of Georgia. Concerns about what occurs there might seem distant and unrelated to the many other interests America has around the world. And yet Russian aggression against Georgia is both a matter of urgent moral and strategic importance to the United States of America.

"Georgia is an ancient country, at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and one of the world's first nations to adopt Christianity as an official religion. After a brief period of independence following the Russian revolution, the Red Army forced Georgia to join the Soviet Union in 1922. As the Soviet Union crumbled at the end of the Cold War, Georgia regained its independence in 1991, but its early years were marked by instability, corruption, and economic crises.

"Following fraudulent parliamentary elections in 2003, a peaceful, democratic revolution took place, led by the U.S.-educated lawyer Mikheil Saakashvili. The Rose Revolution changed things dramatically and, following his election, President Saakashvili embarked on a series of wide-ranging and successful reforms. I've met with President Saakashvili many times, including during several trips to Georgia.

"What the people of Georgia have accomplished in terms of democratic governance, a Western orientation, and domestic reform is nothing short of remarkable. That makes Russia's recent actions against the Georgians all the more alarming. In the face of Russian aggression, the very existence of independent Georgia and the survival of its democratically-elected government are at stake.

"In recent days Moscow has sent its tanks and troops across the internationally recognized border into the Georgian region of South Ossetia. Statements by Moscow that it was merely aiding the Ossetians are belied by reports of Russian troops in the region of Abkhazia, repeated Russian bombing raids across Georgia, and reports of a de facto Russian naval blockade of the Georgian coast. Whatever tensions and hostilities might have existed between Georgians and Ossetians, they in no way justify Moscow's path of violent aggression. Russian actions, in clear violation of international law, have no place in 21st century Europe.

"The implications of Russian actions go beyond their threat to the territorial integrity and independence of a democratic Georgia. Russia is using violence against Georgia, in part, to intimidate other neighbors such as Ukraine for choosing to associate with the West and adhering to Western political and economic values. As such, the fate of Georgia should be of grave concern to Americans and all people who welcomed the end of a divided Europe, and the independence of former Soviet republics. The international response to this crisis will determine

how Russia manages its relationships with other neighbors. We have other important strategic interests at stake in Georgia, especially the continued flow of oil through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which Russia attempted to bomb in recent days; the operation of a critical communication and trade route from Georgia through Azerbaijan and Central Asia; and the integrity and influence of NATO, whose members reaffirmed last April the territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of Georgia.

"Yesterday Georgia withdrew its troops from South Ossetia and offered a ceasefire. The Russians responded by bombing the civilian airport in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, and by stepping up its offensive in Abkhazia. This pattern of attack appears aimed not at restoring any status quo ante in South Ossetia, but rather at toppling the democratically elected government of Georgia. This should be unacceptable to all the democratic countries of the world, and should draw us together in universal condemnation of Russian aggression.

"Russian President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin must understand the severe, long-term negative consequences that their government's actions will have for Russia's relationship with the U.S. and Europe. It is time we moved forward with a number of steps.

"The United States and our allies should continue efforts to bring a resolution before the UN Security Council condemning Russian aggression, noting the withdrawal of Georgian troops from South Ossetia, and calling for an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgian territory. We should move ahead with the resolution despite Russian veto threats, and submit Russia to the court of world public opinion.

"NATO's North Atlantic Council should convene in emergency session to demand a ceasefire and begin discussions on both the deployment of an international peacekeeping force to South Ossetia and the implications for NATO's future relationship with Russia, a Partnership for Peace nation. NATO's decision to withhold a Membership Action Plan for Georgia might have been viewed as a green light by Russia for its attacks on Georgia, and I urge the NATO allies to revisit the decision.

"The Secretary of State should begin high-level diplomacy, including visiting Europe, to establish a common Euro-Atlantic position aimed at ending the war and supporting the independence of Georgia. With the same aim, the U.S. should coordinate with our partners in Germany, France, and Britain, to seek an emergency meeting of the G-7 foreign ministers to discuss the current crisis. The visit of French President Sarkozy to Moscow this week is a welcome expression of transatlantic activism.

"Working with allied partners, the U.S. should immediately consult with the Ukrainian government and other concerned countries on steps to secure their continued independence. This is particularly important as a number of Russian Black Sea fleet vessels currently in Georgian territorial waters are stationed at Russia's base in the Ukrainian Crimea.

"The U.S. should work with Azerbaijan and Turkey, and other interested friends, to develop plans to strengthen the security of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline.

"The U.S. should send immediate economic and humanitarian assistance to help mitigate the impact the invasion has had on the people of Georgia.

"Our united purpose should be to persuade the Russian government to cease its attacks, withdraw its troops, and enter into negotiations with Georgia. We must remind Russia's leaders

that the benefits they enjoy from being part of the civilized world require their respect for the values, stability and peace of that world. World history is often made in remote, obscure countries. It is being made in Georgia today. It is the responsibility of the leading nations of the world to ensure that history continues to be a record of humanity's progress toward respecting the values and security of free people.

"Thank you."