

Caucasus security talks “productive”

By [Global Research](#)

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Practical steps to ensure security in the Caucasus and the return of refugees in the wake of the August conflict in South Ossetia have been agreed in Geneva. The second round of talks involved Russia and Georgia, while South Ossetia and Abkhazia took part in the discussions for the first time.

The European Union, the United Nations, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) co-chaired the talks on Tuesday and Wednesday.

An earlier round of negotiations that began on October 15 was suspended after Georgia refused to attend meetings involving Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The UN Secretary General’s special envoy for Georgia, Johan Verbeke, told a news conference after the meetings that the participants had moved on from procedural discussions and had agreed on steps to demarcate borders and return refugees.

“I’d call this a quantum leap. All of the delegations did speak, all of the delegations listened,” he said.

Working group sessions were held to discuss the means of preventing further violence. EU Special Representative for the Georgia crisis Pierre Morel noted that “all the participants in these working groups were fully engaged in a productive discussion on the key questions of the security and stability of the region, and of displaced people as well as refugees”.

Morel said, though, that the situation in the Caucasus remains unstable. Shootings and abductions have been reported along the border between Georgia and South Ossetia after the armed conflict, with the sides blaming each other for continuing violence.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov praised the result of the Geneva discussions, saying they might contribute to creating an atmosphere of trust.

“We take part in them for this purpose. But we are aware of new realities in the region. From now on Russia ensures the security of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in order to avoid new provocations,” Lavrov said.

Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin, who represented Russia at the talks, said Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were equally represented.

“It was critically important that all three Caucasus states had absolutely equal representation in all activities, without exception,” he told journalists in Geneva.

Karasin also said Russia would continue to press for an embargo on offensive arms supplies to Georgia and a legally binding pledge from Tbilisi not to use force against South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

A Georgian Foreign Ministry official taking part in the talks, Shota Utiashvili, welcomed the outcome of the talks. He added, however, that talks on Georgian refugees' return to the disputed areas and the establishment of international monitors' presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia - which the republics have opposed - will be a lengthy process.

The third round of talks has been scheduled for December 17-18.

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