**Statement by H.E. Mr. Ilia Darchiashvili, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia**

**At the OSCE 30th Ministerial Council Meeting**

**Skopje, 30 November 2023**

Mr. Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

I would like to express sincere gratitude to the Chairperson-in-Office, to H.E. Bujar Osmani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, for his leadership and guidance of the OSCE in these turbulent times and thank him for hosting us in his beautiful country at the 30th meeting of the Ministerial Council.

Let me also cordially thank Secretary General, Helga Maria Schmid and the Heads of the OSCE institutions for their stewardship throughout this difficult year.

Excellences,

The fundamental principles and core tenets of the Helsinki Final Act are being repeatedly and bluntly violated as the OSCE is approaching its 50th anniversary. Russia’s full-scale military aggression against my country back in 2008, followed by attempted annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014 and ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, has compromised international rules-based order and security in the region, claiming lives of thousands and uprooting millions. We continue to stand with Ukraine and Ukrainian people and reiterate our unwavering support to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognized borders.

Dear colleagues,

Russia’s war against Georgia has been the first open attempt to forcibly redraw the borders of a sovereign State after the Cold War.

For over 15 years now, Russia continues its illegal occupation of Georgia’s indispensable Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, in flagrant violation of the fundamental principles and norms of international law.

The people living in the occupied territories are subjected to grave human rights violations. Being isolated by kilometers of barbed wire fences, they are cut off their relatives, farmlands, orchards, places of worship, deprived of freedom of movement, access to basic needs. Illegal detentions and kidnappings are a rampant practice that puts their health and life under risk. Recent killing of a peaceful Georgian citizen, Tamaz Ginturi, by the Russian occupation forces in the vicinity of his native village Kirbali of Gori municipality, is yet another act of violence against ethnic Georgians.

Mr. Chairman,

Georgia is dedicated to peace and seeks the peaceful solution to the conflict with its policy based on two pillars of 1) de-occupation of Georgia’s territories by the Russian Federation, and 2) reconciliation between the divided communities.

The Geneva International Discussions play particular role as the format with the Russian Federation to ensure the implementation of the EU-mediated 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement, return of IDPs and refugees to their homes as well as other security, human rights and humanitarian challenges stemming from Russia-Georgia conflict. Georgia, together with partners will continue to engage, to generate progress and concrete deliverables of importance for people on the ground. I again echo the OSCE Chair that afterall, “it’s all about people”.

Georgia’ peace policy of reconciliation and engagement is focusing on people. It involves specific initiatives like a “Step to a Better Future” aimed at fostering confidence-building and improving social-economic conditions of population living under the burden of occupation.

Let me refer to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) judgments of January 2021, March and April 2023, and also to the decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) of June 2022, which legally attest Russia’s occupation and effective control over Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia and its responsibility for the gross human rights violations.

Along with these decisions, firm and consolidated stance of international community is of utmost importance to ensure that Russia ceases aggression, fulfils its international obligations, respects sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbors and withdraws its forces from illegally occupied territories.

Let me take the opportunity to thank the Group of Friends of Georgia within the OSCE for their outspoken and staunch support.

Georgia pledges its continued contribution to the OSCE, as a guardian of the Helsinki Principles. These principles lay the foundation for the OSCE to serve its purpose and address unprecedented challenges to the European security, we face now.

We stand ready to do our share - for the functional and efficient OSCE that entails strong leadership and mandate of the autonomous institutions. We therefore encourage the decision on all four heads to remain in their offices.

In closing, let me once again express our heartfelt gratitude to the North Macedonian Chairmanship and wish success to the 2024 Chair of the OSCE - the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta. Minister Borg, I assure you of Georgia’s support and cooperation.

Thank you.