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Remarks by President João Soares on Georgia debate

Recent weeks have been a very difficult time for many people in the OSCE region. Most importantly, my sincere sympathy goes to those hurt and killed during the conflict in Georgia. Our attention has focused on this conflict, and I am pleased that we could bring representatives together here in Toronto to discuss the issue.

On 8 August, immediately upon the resumption of hostilities, I issued a statement calling for restraint. As I said on that day: "War is never a solution in the OSCE area". I was happy on that day to be able to lend the Assembly's strong support to the work by the OSCE and the OSCE Chairmanship.

The OSCE, which has a permanent presence through the OSCE Mission to Georgia has continued to do remarkable work in seeking to end this conflict. I applaud the brave efforts of the men and women in the OSCE Mission, who have continued their work under very difficult circumstances.

To lead the Assembly's efforts, I appointed President Emeritus Goran Lennmarker as my Special Envoy. In recent weeks, Goran and I have regularly been in touch with officials and colleagues in both Georgia and Russia.

As parliamentarians, it is not usually our job to negotiate peace agreements. However, we have a very important role: as elected officials with direct connections to the public, we can help to build support for the long and difficult work of building a lasting peace. As parliamentarians in this international Assembly, we must also ensure that parliamentary dialogue continues in an open and constructive manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we will hear from representatives of Georgia, of Russia, and from the OSCE. It is my hope that we will all gain a better understanding of recent events. However I urge everyone here to take a forward-looking approach and to focus on finding solutions to the current crisis.

There will be no voting here today. We are here for an open discussion – our contribution will be an improved understanding of this difficult situation and of possible ways forward.