

## Press Release

The fourteenth dialogue workshop in an ongoing series on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and peace process took place outside Oxford from 23-28 April 2004, bringing together government officials, politicians and public figures from both sides of the conflict. The series provides a forum for participants to discuss and analyse opportunities and obstacles in the peace process in an environment that encourages creative thinking, realism and mutual respect. As an informal and non-official process no decisions are taken.

Participants in the workshop reflected on the political changes in both Georgia and Abkhazia during the past year. They recognised that these changes present potential openings in the peace process but many of the same challenges still remain.

The strategies of the parties to the conflict were examined. The participants acknowledged that there are dangers in the status quo persisting and that taking creative steps will be necessary to introduce a more positive dynamic in the resolution process. Recognising that inappropriate or rash changes could make the situation worse they explored how the parties can enable one another to take the initiative for change while minimising risk. It was emphasised that the behaviour of the two parties and the perceptions of one another's actions have a crucial impact on their receptivity to engage in constructive dialogue. Examples of this were the way in which the threat of force or the reluctance to recognise the concerns of the other party diminish trust and create cycles of mutual suspicion thereby narrowing options for progress. Third parties reinforce or reverse these trends by their behaviour and positions. The participants explored specific steps that could be taken to break out of such trends and cycles.

Sir Brian Fall, the UK Special Representative for the South Caucasus, visited the workshop and outlined the current approach to the peace process of the Secretary General of the United Nations. He highlighted the need for a commitment to a peaceful resolution of the conflict as well as pointing out the importance of resolving practical issues such as the return of IDPs and refugees. He emphasised the willingness of the international community to support activities that contribute to the socio-economic wellbeing of those who have suffered as a result of the conflict and its non-resolution. The participants welcomed his contribution.

The workshop was characterised by a constructive exchange. It is hoped that this will contribute to a culture of dialogue and understanding between the respective communities.

The Abkhaz participants in the workshop were Guram Gumba, Manana Gurgulia, Inal Khashig, Ruslan Kishmaria, Stanislav Lakoba, Garik Samanba and Viacheslav Tsugba. The Georgian participants were Irakli Alasania, Kakha Ardia, Dato Darchiashvili, Zurab Erkvania, Nikoloz Gvaramia, Giorgi Khaindrava, Tinatin Khidasheli and Paata Zakareishvili. Everyone took part in their individual capacity, not representing any organisation or institution.

The workshop was organised by the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management (Berlin) and Conciliation Resources (London), two international non-governmental organisations that have worked in the Caucasus for a number of years and with experience facilitating similar processes in other regions of the world. Facilitation was by Clem McCartney, Jonathan Cohen, Oliver Wolleh and Rachel Clogg.

The workshop was funded by the Rapid Reaction Mechanism of the European Commission and the United Kingdom Global Conflict Prevention Pool.

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