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President Orders Immediate Cease Fire, Says Russian Peacekeepers Acknowledge Having Lost Control Over Separatist Rebels

“Let’s stop this spiral of violence and resume direct negotiations,” says Saakashvili; offers wide autonomy, unconditional amnesty for separatists

President Saakashvili announced tonight that Georgia has unilaterally ceased fire in the current fighting with separatist rebels in the region of South Ossetia. “We must stop this spiral of violence,” he said in a televised address to the nation, and added that the central government would engage in direct negotiations to end the conflict.

The President also implored the international community to do whatever was necessary to bring the separatist rebels to the negotiating table, underscoring that Georgia did not want to see any further violence. “Let’s give peace and dialogue a chance,” he appealed.

The President said the Government was in constant contact with the Russian Federation, which informed Tbilisi that Russian peacekeeping forces have lost control over the separatist rebels.

“As I speak, there is intense fighting going on and there are many dead and wounded,” Saakashvili said. He said he had ordered the Government forces to desist from any armed action. He called this unilateral cease fire a “painful” order to issue, since it could put the Government forces and civilians in harm’s way. But he said it was essential in order to allow calm to prevail.

The President also underscored that Georgia and Russia should be “natural allies” in bringing peace to Georgia’s conflict zones. He reaffirmed the Government’s proposal to grant broad “European style” autonomy to the South Ossetia region, and offered for Russia to serve as the guarantor. Saakashvili also announced an unconditional amnesty for separatist rebels who surrender of their own accord.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Full text of President Saakashvili’s Address

<http://www.president.gov.ge>