



OFFICE OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Unrepresented
Nations and Peoples
Organization

Den Haag, 14 July 1992

H.E. V. Arzinba,
President of the Supreme Council
of the Republic of Abkhazia
Sukhumi
Abkhazia

Mr. President,

The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization presents its compliments to the Supreme Council and to the People of Abkhazia.

I have the honor to address this letter to you concerning the situation in Abkhazia. I am sure you will agree that it gives reason for serious concern. It is my understanding that relations between the Supreme Council of Abkhazia and the Emergency Council of the Republic of Georgia have reached a low point. Which may result in open conflict unless a concerted effort is made soon to seek a negotiated solution to existing differences. The tragedy that can result from such conflicts is all too well demonstrated in South Ossetia.

I write to you in a modest effort to assist in seeking a peaceful way to reduce tensions and work towards a mutually satisfactory resolution of differences. The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization may be in a unique position to provide such assistance, since both the Georgian and Abkhazian peoples are represented in the Organization as Members.

Georgia became a Founding Member of UNPO one and a half years ago when its people were struggling for self-determination. In fact its representatives were also members of the Preparatory Committee that conceived and designed the organization months earlier. At the time, there was no Georgian government that

truly represented the people of Georgia. As events later showed, the National Congress of Georgia and the National Democratic Party of Georgia were indeed representative of the aspirations of the Georgian people for freedom and independence.

Abkhazia became a Member in August 1991 at the close of the Second General Assembly of UNPO. It did not become a Member as a result of opposition or defiance towards Georgia or the Georgian people. Quite the contrary. It was the representatives from Georgia who introduced and recommended the Abkhazian representatives to UNPO.

The membership of both parties was in accordance with the requirements of the Covenant of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization. The Covenant provides for the admission of distinct peoples regardless of their political status at the time of admission.

Of course the political status of Georgia has changed in the past year, as it has now achieved independent statehood. Under the Covenant of UNPO, however, Members who become independent and are admitted to the United Nations retain a moral duty to support and take part in the activities of UNPO as Supporting Members without a vote.

I have taken the liberty of stating the above situation of Georgia and Abkhazia to reassure both parties in the present dispute that UNPO has the interests of both parties very much at heart. The willingness of UNPO to assist in this matter is therefore sincere and based on principles both parties have adhered to.

Last week I returned from a brief fact-finding visit to Abkhazia at your invitation. I had the pleasure of meeting several deputies of very different political persuasions. Thus, besides having the pleasure of meeting with you, I spent time in intense discussion with Abkhazian, Greek, Russian and Armenian Deputies who support the basic views represented by yourself. At the same time, I went to the military barracks in Sukhumi and elsewhere to meet and discuss the situation with Georgian and other Deputies who left the Supreme Council premises to hold their own separate parliamentary sessions and espoused a very different stand that appeared to reflect the views of the government in Tbilisi.

The conclusions I reached should be considered as preliminary, given the short duration of my visit. They can be summarized as follows:

The dispute that has arisen between mostly Georgian Deputies in the Abkhazian Supreme Council and the government in Tbilisi, on the one hand, and Abkhazian Deputies and Deputies representing a number of minority constituencies in Abkhazia, such as Greeks, Russians, and Armenians, on the other, is a purely political dispute.

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Persons on all sides of the dispute whom I met believe the problem is not based on ethnic animosity or other popular feelings. All agree, however, that if a resolution is not found and open fighting breaks out ethnic conflict will result.

Many historical arguments are brought forward by people on both sides of the dispute to bolster their point of view. Whatever the validity of historic arguments, and one should not underestimate the importance of history, those arguments often have the effect of diverting from the principal questions at issue.

In this case, I understood the essence of the dispute to be the allocation of responsibility and authority with respect to Abkhazia to the governments in Tbilisi and in Sukhumi, respectively. Governance with respect to the economy, cultural and educational affairs seemed to be the main issue of debate. Other important issues concern the method of representation in the Abkhazian parliament, given the ethno-demographic composition of the region.

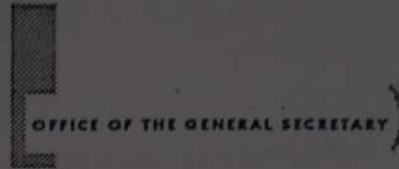
Feelings of nationalism, on the one hand, and of victimization, on the other, naturally arise, but are not always helpful in looking for solutions. At the same time, these and other feelings are very real and must be fully acknowledged.

The problems faced in relation to Abkhazia are not simple, and I realize that such a brief summary of conclusions can not do justice to the many complexities of the situation. The newness of the reemerged Georgian state, the interests of neighboring countries, and the politically volatile situation in the entire Caucasus region, only adds to the complexity and difficulty of the situation.

Having said that, I believe, as most people I spoke to in Abkhazia do, that the situation can be resolved through earnest negotiations and patience. I am also convinced that once force is used to attempt to impose a solution the chance of finding a mutually satisfactory, and therefore lasting, solution will be drastically reduced. It is for this reason that I address this letter to you, in the hope that UNPO may be able to facilitate a dialogue between the parties to the present dispute.

As a first step, I wish to extend an invitation to both parties to enter into exploratory talks, without preconditions of any kind, in The Hague or any other location both parties find acceptable. UNPO is perfectly willing and would be greatly honored to host the talks, but it is equally willing to cooperate with other international organizations or governments to suitably host the meeting(s).

In the first instance, the talks would focus on trying to



precisely identify and describe the areas of dispute, without in any way prejudicing or compromising either party's stand on any issue.

Alternatively, or in addition to hosting or otherwise facilitating bilateral negotiation, UNPO could send an eminent mission to Sukhumi and Tbilisi with a view to mediating the dispute or some facets of it.

Mr. President, I therefore have the honor to formally extend an invitation to you or representatives designated by you to come to The Hague, or if not convenient, to an other location, to meet with representatives of the Government of Georgia. The time and other particulars of the meeting will be arranged according to your wishes and those of the Georgian Government.

Given the urgency of the situation, I would appreciate being informed of your response to this invitation or other suggestions you may have at your earliest convenience. I am today sending a similar invitation to Mr. Eduard Shervadnadze, a copy of which I enclose for your information. In the interest of completeness, I also enclose a copy of your letter of invitation and of UNPO's Covenant, both of which, taken together, set the framework for UNPO present involvement.

In the hope we can be of service to you and your people, but also to your neighbors,

I remain, dear Sir,
Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M C van Walt'.

Dr. M.C. van Walt van Praag
General Secretary

cc. Shervadnadze
Encl.