

Date: 25.02.2025

To: **The Secretary General of ICAO, Juan Carlos Salazar Gomez**

The Council President of ICAO, Salvatore Sciacchitano

RE: **Illegal Operation of Sokhumi Airport, Abkhazia, Georgia**

Dear Secretary Gomez,

Dear President Schiacchitano,

Geocase is a Georgian think tank, focusing on international relations, security, governance and implications of the global order for Georgia. Considering that the occupation of parts of Georgia, including the region of Abkhazia and its creeping annexation is a major security threat for Georgia (and South Caucasus region) and bearing in mind that ICAO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that coordinates the principles and techniques of international air navigation, we would like to bring the below matter to your attention.

As you may be aware, on February 7, 2025, a Russian passenger jet flying from Moscow Vnukovo Airport landed at Sokhumi airport in the occupied region of Georgia, Abkhazia. According to the Russian authorities, this was a test flight, with the regular flights between Russian Federation and the occupied region to commence in early summer.

According to the international law, including ICAO regulations, international flights cannot be implemented in the occupied region of Abkhazia (namely, at Sokhumi international Airport) since according to the Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories, the region and its airspace are subject to a state of emergency, a special legal regime, which bans international traffic in occupied territories.

It should be noted, that the International Civil Aviation Organization has expressed its firm support to the sovereignty, territorial integrity of Georgia and the unity of the Georgian airspace. According to ICAO regulations, Sokhumi Airport and the corresponding airspace have been closed since 1993. Any flight operations from and to the Sokhumi Airport shall be solely subject of authorization and approval from the Government of Georgia. Unfortunately, in the context, when the Government of Georgia is deprived of the possibility to exercise its legitimate jurisdiction over its sovereign region due to the on-going occupation by the Russian Federation's while safety and security of flights cannot be guaranteed in the occupied region of Abkhazia, Georgia. Therefore, any unauthorized flight operation performed in those occupied territories constitutes a breach of the fundamental norms and principles of international law, the Chicago Convention provisions, its Annexes, and at the same time ignores flight safety and aviation security requirements. Adherence to principles, provisions and standards of the Chicago Convention and its Annexes by all Member States are of the utmost importance to ensure safety, security and efficiency in aviation. Moreover, it should be stressed that the Georgian territory, including Abkhazia, has been assigned a special code FIR (Flight Information Region), which cannot be changed without Georgia's consent. Therefore, whatever code the Russian Federation assigns to Sokhumi Airport, ICAO should always consider it part of the Georgian airspace.

Having the said we call upon:

- ICAO to reiterate its loyalty to the position of the UN and the international community and unequivocal support towards Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as to

- underscore that the principles of ICAO prohibit member states from carrying out such air navigation related actions that violate the sovereignty of another state.
- ICAO officials and representatives of member states to give due assessment to Russia's illegal attempt to restore operation of Sokhumi Airport further demanding Moscow to respect international legal norms.
- ICAO to undertake effective measures towards bringing accountable civil aviation authorities of the Russian Federation as well as Russian air companies intending to operate flights in Abkhazia.

Sincerely Yours,

Victor Kipiani

Chairman
Geocase

