

Report HCA Vanadzor on Humanitarian Crisis in Georgia

The visit was organized to Tbilisi and Gori on September 6-8, 2008 with the aim of being acquainted with the situation in Georgia because of the hostilities in South Ossetia.

During the visit meetings were held with HCA Georgian National Committee (Alexander Rusetsky), "Multinational Georgia" Movement (director Arnold Stepanyan), "Consent" association of enforced displaced women (director Yulia Kharashvily), "Re" Studio (director Mamuka Kuparadze), employees of the Armenian Embassy in Georgia, Armenian Apostolic church-Virahayots diocese representatives, IDPs living in the building of the Geophysics Institute at Georgian Academy of Sciences and officials.

A visit was made also to the tent camp of IDPs in Gori.

Evidences by IDPs

Our interviews with the IDPs living on the 5th floor of the building of the Geophysics Institute at Georgian Academy of Sciences resulted in the following picture.

According to the IDPs they have not been ready for such events and what happened was unexpected. That's why there was such a big panic. "We lived with the Ossetians in peace and we were friends, it's Russians' fault."-said one of the IDPs.

Before the attacks, the Ossetians had been warned and left their settlements; they had not told the inhabitants of their neighboring Georgian village. They did not manage to take anything.

"At 8 o'clock in the morning the Russians and Ossetians made us come out of our houses. We did not manage to take anything even for children"-said one of the IDPs.

According to one of the elderly men bombing started at 8 o'clock in the morning. "My wife got injury and now she is in hospital. 11 people died in our village"-he said.

It is 26 km from Gori to Tskhinvali and all the villages to the north of Gori up to the borders of South Ossetian autonomy region are Georgian. The total number of population in the villages is about 10,000 people. Not everyone was able to leave their houses due to the panic. According to some assessments, 50-60 people remained in each village and became hostages. People are making phone calls asking to save them.

People mainly ran away through the forests. One of the IDPs says that when bombing started they were in the forest and have stayed there for 14 days and then they moved to Tbilisi and Gori. According to one of the militaries, when they had to leave the military units, the Russian troops blew up some of the buildings by blowing up the bombs in the bases.

On the way from Gori to Tskhinvali, about 300m from Gori, a Russian military post is located, as the driver accompanying us told us and he strictly refused our proposal to go there saying that they might not only confiscate his car, but also it was dangerous for his life. Because of the bombing by the Russian

military planes in Gori, not only the buildings were destroyed but also there were victims among civilians. 11 people from a family of IDPs died during air bombing in 1992 military actions.

The total number of registered IDPs is 127,000 people. On the first days, the number of registered IDPs was 90,000 and then it increased by 40,000.

About 10,000 IDPs can go back to their homes. The government is trying to do some work in this direction. Those are the residences, which are under so-called "buffer zone." They are controlled by the Russian Army and the houses there are not damaged. The work is difficult to do because it is necessary to clean the territory of mines and to neutralize munitions. It is impossible for 15000-16000 IDPs from South Ossetia to return to their places.

The Situation of IDPs

As there was panic and the people weren't ready, accommodation of IDPs and provision of support was badly organized. It was important to receive and provide them with accommodation in the first stage.

At first IDPs settled in hotels, in the territory of different establishments in Tbilisi, then in nursery schools, schools and abandoned buildings. Taking into consideration that classes start at schools on September 15, new problems will arise with the IDPs and the government.

During settling people, the families had to be divided into 2 parts due to lack of space. There are not enough beds, mattresses, plates, spoons, cups, etc. and people get them from neighbours.

According to one of the soldiers from the military unit near Gori, during the last month people have been able to overcome not only hunger, but also depression. They want to come back as they live in schools in bad conditions and it is hard to survive.

As one of the doctors says, during the last 5 days (September 1-6) 500 people received medical assistance. Many people suffer from problems with respiratory organs, cardiovascular diseases and problems with the nervous system. Medicine is enough for medical assistance and it is provided not only in the tents but also in the city hospitals. About 10-11 people live in a tent. There are different centers for children, where conditions are far from being good. For the IDPs lack of information about their future is depressing. The government promised that they would return in two months but these people do not have any information. The low level of awareness increases uncertainty.

It must be noted that during the visit we could not see any news or program in any Georgian electronic media about the situation of IDPs. There was more about the political events rather than the problems.

Before the state could organize and provide humanitarian aid, the local inhabitants had done it by giving food, clothing and other necessary things. It was necessary for the state to distribute food, clothing and linen, as there were many children and pregnant women among IDPs. They also got mattresses on their way.

Every morning each person was given a sausage, an egg and a loaf of bread in the evening. According to one of the IDPs a little plastic cup of sugar was given for the whole week.

The tents provided by the international organizations, in particular by UN Agency on refugee issues, could house only a part of the IDPs. In Gori 2200 families were settled in the tents.

As the weather is still warm it is possible to survive, but it will be a problem when the weather changes for the worse. One of the children says it is already cold in the tent at night. However, for the IDPs the support is insufficient and they are desperate.

International Humanitarian Aid

Within the framework of the support provided by different countries and organizations children get help. For instance, 300 children are in Poland now. Medical assistance has been organized by a Polish organization, and local doctors help people free of charge.

The International Committee of the Red Cross distributes food in the tents in Gori. One of the NGOs in Armenia, "Civil Society Development Center," officially applied to Georgia to bring 20 children to Tsakhkadzor for a rest there.

IDPs got support by Azerbaijan, Poland, and Georgian Diaspora and by some organizations moved from Georgia to Israel. Humanitarian aid of 400,000 manat was allocated by Azerbaijan by the request of non-governmental organizations. Humanitarian aid was also provided by the Armenian Apostolic Church - Virahayots diocese in Georgia as well as by the Armenian Community in Tbilisi.

The Situation of Armenians who Suffered from the Conflict

According to some assessments, the number of Armenians residing in the conflict zone is about 1500. The number of victims is 300 people who are in the same hard conditions as the IDPs are. There are no death cases in Gori and Tskhinvali region, but there are refugees who have already come back from Tbilisi to Gori, and 60 families are at their relatives in Akhalkalak. The Armenian Community and the church have been calling for peace since the first day of the conflict. They remain very calm. The Armenians organized protest in front of the Russian Embassy in Georgia. There are about 100,000 Armenians living in Tbilisi who are united closely with the Georgians. Armenia's initiative for the reconstruction of the destroyed railway and the bridge had its best reaction. It must be noted that construction of the bridge was done with Georgian and Turkish managers. The Armenians in Georgia behaved as real patriots; they didn't run away, which was greatly appreciated by the Georgians.

Reconstruction

On our way from Tbilisi to Gori we saw that construction was being held in different parts which is accepted as attempts to come to normal life. In Gori damaged buildings were being restored. The residents of those buildings were involved in the construction (if they wished) and they were paid about 20-25 lari (14, 3 and 17, 9 USD).

Conclusions

The study of the consequences of the South Ossetian Conflict made to come to the following conclusions:

- The IDPs are in very unfavorable conditions especially when the weather is getting colder. They need such things as food, clothing, bedding and place to live
- The humanitarian aid and resources allocated by the state are not enough to solve the minimal problems of the IDPs
- Before the hostilities, the Russian Federation had prepared the South Ossetin population who were not Georgians to keep them away from the military actions
- In spite of the numerous statements of the Russian officials their military actions were mainly against civilians as in answer to the military actions by the Georgian army towards Tskhinvali

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