

2018 OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING, WARSAW

19 September 2018

Oral statement on human rights concerns around the ongoing impact of the 2008 Georgia-Russia conflict

WORKING SESSION 14: Humanitarian issues

The military conflict in August 2008 between Georgia and Russia led to hundreds of civilian deaths and the displacement of almost 200,000 people. Ten years on the conflict still impacts thousands of people, including **26,000 mostly ethnic Georgians who remain unable to return home.**

While many struggle to rebuild their lives, some see their **livelihoods and overall quality of life further eroded** by the conflict's unfolding legacy. The non-demarcated administrative boundary line has been converted by the Russian Federation and the de facto authorities of South Ossetia and Abkhazia into a "hard border," repeatedly encroaching on Tbilisi controlled territory. In around 25 Georgian villages the "hard border" cuts through family-owned land, separating households from their orchards, pastures, churches and graveyards. Post-conflict **restrictions on movement of people** resulting from the "hard border" have negatively affected **economic, social and cultural rights**. The "hard border" has separated families, restricted local residents' **access to essential services including education and healthcare**, destroyed local markets and cut residents off from places of worship and the resting places of their relatives.

Hundreds are detained every year by Russian and de facto local border guards on their side, for purportedly illegally crossing into South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Several former detainees have reported being ill-treated. At least two detentions have resulted in fatalities, with impunity for those responsible.

The "hard border" and restrictions of movement have left ethnic Georgians living in the breakaway territories vulnerable to **discrimination ensuing from growing restrictions on residency and other rights**. Ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia and South Ossetia face restrictions on travel to Tbilisi controlled territories, including for educational purposes, and **progressive reductions in Georgian-language teaching in local schools**. This situation violates their right to be educated in their own native language under Article 14 of the Framework Convention for National Minorities.

The Russian Federation exercises effective control in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, via its significant military presence, considerable financial contributions to the breakaway regions' budgets and through the performance by its representatives of certain government functions. Consequently, we call on the Russian Federation to ensure that

human rights in these territories are fully respected and protected without discrimination on ethnic or other grounds. All those displaced from their homes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia must be given the option to return in safety and dignity.