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*Because every 11<sup>th</sup> person in Georgia is an IDP*

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### **Right to Return**

Dear moderator, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen!

On behalf of Coalition for Justice (CFJ), a Georgian non-profit advocating for the rights of the internally displaced persons (IDPs), I would like to bring to your attention the plight of hundreds of thousands of people expelled from two regions of Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s and in the aftermath of the Russian occupation in 2008.

Today, I stand before you as a reminder that as a result of ethnic cleansing of Georgians in Abkhazia and South Ossetia every 11<sup>th</sup> person in Georgia is an IDP.

Since the beginning of the displacement, the Government of Georgia and the international community undertook a series of concerted efforts to help Georgia's IDPs overcome challenges of legal as well as socio-economic nature. Need for improvement remains in the realms of durable housing solutions, employment levels, educational attainment, political participation, etc. But Georgia's displaced have no greater problem than their inability to return home. The displacement is endless, and in the absence of return, it matters little how good the locally available durable solutions are. As an IDP, I attest that the problem of return is the one existential problem for all IDPs!

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind you that there are over 400,000 internally displaced persons in Georgia. During the 18 years of displacement, 10,000 IDPs have died, deprived of an opportunity to return to their ancestral lands. Some 70,000 new lives were brought into this world, who know no other life but that of displacement! But throughout these years, the desire of the displaced to return home has not changed: In a recent survey, 86% of Georgians



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displaced from Abkhazia reiterated their wish to go back.

The right of Georgia's IDPs to return home in safety and dignity has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the OSCE member states. Since 1992, the UN main bodies adopted 37 resolutions demanding the return of refugees and the displaced persons to their homes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But the resolutions remain declarative and efforts fruitless because of the political impasse. In the current political climate the Russian Federation, which exercises effective control over the two regions, continues to represent a single most significant impediment to the return of IDPs and refugees to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Preventing the IDPs return home contravenes the human rights commitments undertaken by the Russian Federation. Under the international human rights law and as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Russia is conventionally bound to ensure the fulfillment of the article 12(4) of the convention which states that "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country". Yet, for almost two decades now, Georgia's IDPs are consistently denied the realization of the right to return home.

Coalition for Justice maintains that the demographic change achieved through ethnic cleansing can only be reversed by means of safe and dignified return of the displaced to their homes. As an IDP, I firmly believe that the return of IDPs and refugees to their homes is the only logical and just solution to their plight. The realization of the right of return must supersede the pursuit of the band-aid solutions offered to IDPs in the short term.

Today, as we discuss the implementation of the OSCE human dimension commitments, I urge all OSCE member states, our partner NGOs and the international organizations, to intensify efforts to protect IDPs' human rights and to stimulate the process of return of IDPs and refugees. The resolution of this problem rests largely with the international community and regardless of its complex political nature it must be attended beyond individual political considerations.

The OSCE member states must be warned that any ambivalence or lack of consensus on the issue of IDP return legitimizes the results of brutal ethnic cleansing of Georgians in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The OSCE member states and the international community must therefore demonstrate



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their unwavering commitment to the protection of IDP rights in Georgia and elsewhere.

Thank you for your attention.