

**Statement by the Delegation of Georgia
At the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Working Session 9, Humanitarian issues and other commitments, including:
combating trafficking in human beings, refugees and displaced persons, persons
at risk of displacement
Warsaw, September 20, 2019**

I would like to update the distinguished audience on the situation of IDPs and alarming developments in the occupied regions of Georgia.

As you are aware, Starting from the early 1990 ethnic Georgians have become the victims of several waves of ethnic cleansing and now several hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees are deprived of their right to safe and dignified return to their homes. Apart from this reality being tragic enough, the turning of event indicates that the situation is only going to worsen and we are likely to see more IDPs and refugees from the Russia occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia. Since the military aggression against Georgia in 2008, Russia has been trying to isolate the occupied regions from the rest of Georgia and remove Georgian traces as a part of the active policy of forced Russification.

In order to realize the full scope of severity of the situation one needs to know the challenges that the residents of the occupied regions face every day. Occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia have been actively militarized by Russia since 2008. Two active Russian military bases, illegally stationed in both regions with thousands of military personnel and ever increasing number of offensive military weaponry coupled with regular large-scale military drills instill sense of deep fear in the local residents, especially ethnic Georgians.

Russian occupation regime in Tskhinvali continues installation of razor and barber-wire fences and other artificial barriers along the occupation line depriving people of the access to the private property, homes, agricultural lands, graveyards and religious sites. Quite recently, on 7 August 2019 Russian FSB troops entered the territory controlled by the Georgian Government and launched the process of erection of artificial barriers in the vicinity of the village of Gugutiantkari, Gori Municipality. The fences cut through the houses of locals. As a result, the families had to leave their houses and gardens and join the huge part of Georgian population who have become IDPs. Moreover, the entire village is losing the access to its farm plots and grazing lands.

Regular restrictions to the freedom of movement is a hard pressure on conflict-affected people. Tskhinvali occupation regime arbitrarily closes the so-called crossing points. Just recently, on 4 September the Russian occupation regime closed the crossing points for unidentified period of time, fully isolating occupied region and further aggravating humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of conflict-affected people.

Arbitrary detentions, the cases of torture and murder of Georgian IDPs, David Basharuli, Giga Otkhozoria, Archil Tatunashvili and Irakli Kvaratskhelia have become a dangerous practice. Moreover, ethnic Georgians are the subject to ethnic discrimination. Russian occupation regime aims at blending their identities into Russian as now they are

restricted from the right to education in native Georgian language in both occupied regions. In Gali district the occupation regime representatives force Georgians to change their names into Abkhaz ones or register as foreigners in their homeland. The pressure on the locals is only increasing, which is a sign of another wave of ethnic cleansing.

It is easy to realize that those ethnic Georgians currently living in the occupied regions will be forced to join the groups of many other IDPs and refugees, as they have to endure more challenging and unbearable living conditions. This will result into another humanitarian catastrophe unless decisive steps are undertaken by international community.

It is obvious that in these circumstances the presence of international security and human rights mechanisms on the ground is essential. We urge the international community to continue pushing the Russian Federation to provide unrestricted access to the occupied regions of Georgia and comply with 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement.

On its part, Georgia firmly pursues peaceful conflict resolution policy. We have fully implemented the 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement and are committed to constructive participation in the Geneva International Discussions, where the issues of IDPs and refugee has been one of the core agenda items. Nevertheless, we could not manage to hold any substantial discussions on this issue due to Russia's destructive attitude. Additionally, we are actively using other available platforms to make the voices of the IDPs heard and to ensure their fundamental right to safe and dignified return to their homes. UN General Assembly annual resolution on Status of IDPs and Refugees is extremely important in this regard, which is of a pure humanitarian nature and highlights the existing challenges and deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied regions.

Despite the counteraction of the Russian Federation Georgia tries to enhance confidence building between the war-torn communities and encourage people-to-people contacts through the peace initiative "A Step to a Better Future". In parallel with the other policy dimensions reconciliation is on top of Georgia's agenda and the initiative is aimed to improve socio-economic situation of the conflict-affected people on both sides of the divide and increase people-to-people interaction and confidence-building.

In closing, let me underline that International support is crucial in the process of peaceful conflict resolution. Only with the consolidated efforts of the International Community, we can make Russia respect the fundamental principles of the International Law.