

Dear moderator, dear participants, ladies and gentlemen!

I am representing Georgian non-governmental organization Coalition for Justice, which aims at seeking justice for IDPs from the occupied territories of Georgia.

It is a well known fact that as a result of conflicts inspired by Russia in the ancient Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the beginning of the 1990s and Georgian-Russian August War of 2008 more than 400 thousand people – Georgians, Abkhazians, Ossetians, Greeks, Jews, Armenians, Russians, Ukrainians, Estonians - were forced to leave their homes and accommodate in the temporary shelters on the rest of Georgian territory or abroad.

In legal terms IDPs in Georgia certainly exercise all civil rights, but this is not long term solution of their problems. When we are talking about IDPs problems, we should mention about the main source of these problems. More than 400, 000 IDPs cannot return to their homes because Russia has special interests in the region. In spite of dozens of UN Security Council Resolutions, huge number of attempts of the western countries and international organizations, and the international community in general, to ensure dignified and safe return of IDPs, the problem is still unresolved. Not to mention about the non-fulfillment of the six-point ceasefire agreement brokered by the French President, vetoing the prolongation of the OSCE Mission's mandate and UN Observer Mission's mandate in Georgia, and what is most important – recognition of independence of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population during the conflicts of the early 90s and in the aftermath of the August War is evident and it has been officially recognized by a number of OSCE conventions and UN Resolutions. This led to the serious demographic changes in occupied regions. The property rights of IDPs were and still are brutally violated on the occupied territories: over decades they cannot return to their own homes, which are destroyed, burnt, looted and, in many cases, illegally sold.

From the second half of 1990s some IDPs return to Gali District (Abkhazia, Georgia), however they are still living under conditions of total ethnic segregation. Their rights are permanently violated: education in Georgian language is prohibited, freedom of movement is restricted, ethnic Georgians are forced to take Abkhazian or Russian passports and to serve in Abkhazian army, the facts of looting and kidnapping of Georgian population has permanent character. It must be also mentioned that all traces of Georgian culture are deliberately erased in churches and monasteries on the territory of Abkhazia. The same situation is in Tskhinvali region.

There is catastrophic environmental situation in Abkhazia: to meet the infrastructure needs of the Sochi Olympics, Russian Federation impudently explores and exports raw materials from the region. Hence, there is a reason to fear that in the course of the illegal extraction of inert materials, the unique and fragile environment of the subtropical Black Sea coastal zone will suffer heavy and irreparable damage. Illegal cutting and export of unique tree species is taking place in the region,

while on Gali wetland territory is undergoing construction of military bases that will result in ecological imbalance.

The IDP community in Georgia represents the substantial part of the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the rights and wishes of those forced from their homes must be a critical consideration in any possible roadmap for the future. It is very important to us that our communities are not forgotten outside of Georgia and that our interests are understood by the international community.

We ask that the OSCE member states not forget that a longer-term solution is needed that upholds the right of return of all citizens of these territories, including the ethnically cleansed. In all cases, we strongly believe that an end to the Russian occupation of our home regions will be crucial to an eventual solution.

Coalition for Justice

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