



EMBASSY OF GEORGIA TO THE REPUBLIC OF AUSTRIA
PERMANENT MISSION OF GEORGIA TO THE OSCE AND OTHER
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN VIENNA

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Statement of the Georgian Delegation

Working Session 8: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination

Mr/Madame Moderator,

Let me start my brief presentation by invoking the rights and obligations of the 1965 Convention – the first universal human rights treaty that reflects a deliberate priority of the international community to suppress racial discrimination and, including racially motivated violence. The 1965 Convention prohibits ethnic discrimination and recognizes a right of return. It relates not only to discrimination against individuals but also to discrimination against entire communities. It encompasses educational and linguistic matters and withholding of nationality – these are all practices that have been and unfortunately, are still widely applied by Russia in the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia over nearly two decades beginning in 1991. Due to the policy of Russia, almost 10% of the Georgian population is now living in exile in their own country.

Georgia has a number of political and legal disputes with Russia on different pressing issues. These include but are not limited to the illegal use of force and the continued occupation of Georgian territory. In bringing the case about the ethnic discrimination committed both in and outside the contexts of armed conflicts to the International Court of Justice in August 2008, Georgia has no other purpose but to prevent discrimination and to allow the right of return of IDPs (Under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination). I would like to emphasize that in 2001, 2005 and 2007, the Committee on Racial Discrimination expressly recognized that ethnic discrimination is a central aspect of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Let me briefly shed light on the existing reality in two regions of Georgia occupied by Russia. Some 40 000 ethnic Georgians in the Gali district of Abkhazia have survived at least two waves of ethnic cleansing. Now they are subject to discriminatory measures imposed and implemented by the Russian and Abkhaz authorities, with the aim of forcing them either to abandon their Georgian nationality and citizenship or leave Abkhazia altogether. The increased Russian military presence in Gali since 2008 and Russian control of the administrative boundary line with the rest of Georgia has made the situation for ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia increasingly precarious. This was confirmed by the OSCE in November 2008. The prohibition of education in the mother tongue, compulsory “passportization,” forced conscription into the Abkhaz military forces, and restrictions of

freedom of movement have all limited the ability of ethnic Georgians in Gali to preserve their identity, language and culture – reported the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in April 2009.

The situation is no better in the Akhgori district which was under the control of the Government of Georgia before August 2008. Akhgori has always had a majority ethnic Georgian population. As a result of ethnic cleansing, since 2008, the ethnic Georgian population of more than 7000 in Akhgori has been reduced to less than 1000. This population is subject to ongoing acts of ethnic discrimination, including violent attacks against persons, destruction of their property, denial and restriction of their civil and political rights and other abuses. In April 2009, the Council of Europe found that there was an extensive evidence of systematic looting, pillaging, hostage taking and attacks on ethnic Georgians by South Ossetian militias with Russian forces present and doing nothing to prevent ethnic discrimination. Just recently we received information that the authorities in control are compelling those few residents of Akhgori to give up Georgian passports and receive Russian, and Ossetian documents. This is yet another demonstration of the ethnically targeted policies in the occupied Georgian regions.

Georgia has used political and diplomatic forums to bring these issues to the attention of international community; however, Russia has been irresponsive to Georgia's claims both at bilateral and multilateral forums. Georgia is committed to a renewed, long-term outreach to the populations of its regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, who are under Georgian jurisdiction and are entitled to all benefits available to Georgian citizens. Georgia seeks to engage with these populations, to reduce their isolation and to improve their welfare, in the interest of human and regional security. This policy was set forth in the "State Strategy on Occupied Territories: Engagement Through Cooperation", approved by the Government of Georgia in January 2010 and based on the common principles and values as reflected in the Helsinki Final Act. As a response to this policy of engagement and cooperation, Russian authorities and regimes under its control decided to dilute and eradicate all traces of Georgian historical and cultural roots. As a logical continuation of cycle of ethnic cleansing, Russian authorities together with its proxy regimes have recently announced their decision to change the names of 200 Georgian villages for Russian and Ossetian names. These acts were preceded by the launching of construction of the village Moskovskaya in the place of a village Tamarasheni, which was completely destroyed during and after August 2008 invasion.

What should be done in response to discriminatory measures applied by Russia and the regimes under its control against ethnic Georgian population? How can we stop the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Georgians by Russian authorities?

A number of international reports under the aegis of OSCE, UN, CoE and EU documented violations of human rights in the occupied regions of Georgia under Russia's actual control and provided invaluable recommendations. First of all, Russia should recognize these recommendations and assume the responsibility it has as an occupying power to protect human rights of residents of occupied territories until the full de-occupation of Georgian regions.

Second, let me underline once again that international community should be provided access to these regions and a mandate to continuously report on the status of the human rights in Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia. First such step could be empowering the ODIHR and the HCNM to undertake the follow up mission to the Tskhinvali region and report on the status of the implementation of the recommendations it has set forth in 2008.

We hope for the active diplomatic efforts from the part of the OSCE community. The issues related to ethnic discrimination, the right of return, compulsory passportization, linguistic rights need our adequate and rapid reaction. A decade ago, consequences of the lack of engagement of international community or its belated response to the crisis were detrimental. It is time to express our will, make our efforts and stand united against crime against humanity.

Thank you.