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MONITORING CONDITIONS OF IDPs IN
GORI

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The Human Rights Centre (HRIDC) is a non-governmental human rights organization, without any political or religious affiliations. The purpose of HRIDC is to increase respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in Georgia, as well as to contribute to the democratic development of the country.

HRIDC implements projects to ensure compliance with human rights laws and standards. We cooperate with international organizations and local organizations which also share our view that respect for human rights is a precondition for sustaining democracy and peace in Georgia.

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Monitoring Condition of IDPs in Gori

Background

The representatives of the Human Rights Centre have been visiting conflict zone after the August 23 onwards for the purposes of monitoring and documentation of alleged human rights violations. Particular attention was paid to the material conditions of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the so-called city of tents as well as in other temporary IDP centers. Additionally, the aim of the visit was to identify the individual cases of alleged violations of human rights for the purposes of bringing these cases to the European Court of Human Rights. Moreover, to document alleged occurrence of war crimes and crimes against humanity and to hand over the documented information to the Prosecutor's Office of the International Court. The Human Rights Centre has also carried out several visits to the conflict zone with its partner organizations the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, the Austrian Helsinki Association and Caucasia Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Studies. These included visits to the villages that now fall under the effective control and jurisdiction of the Government of Russian Federation.

Material Conditions of IDPs residing in Gori

Monitors of the Human Rights Centre concluded that the majority of temporary settlements the material conditions have been unacceptable and which is often equaled to inhuman and degrading treatment. Some of the most common problems observed severe overcrowding of the settlements, lack of food, unhygienic conditions and lack of medical care. The government's response to pressing needs was delayed while assistance provided by some international organizations such as ICRC or UNHR was insufficient or ineffective. Some illustrative examples observed include but are not limited to the following, as found in IDP settlements visited by the HRIDC monitors:

Former milk factory of Gori

Former milk factory of Gori have been used as a refugee shelter since the early 1990s. It is mainly occupied by the IDPs from the first wave of South Ossetia conflict that has taken place in the early 1990s. There were new arrivals IDPs who have recently been sheltered in this building. Most of the inhabitants are elderly and children. The material conditions of the old three store building can be described as poor, with malodorous "unpleasant" stench

of toilets that can be noted before even entering the building. Windows are covered with scrapes of metal and plastic. The sanitary conditions are extremely poor and pose a serious public health threat to those warehoused in this facility.

IDPs prepare the food on their own. Even what food they have is inadequate, as only a limited amount of food has been delivered by humanitarian organizations, which IDPs could not recall by name; these deliveries take place but once a day. The health of the elderly inhabitants of the centre, as well as children is not being monitored at all and there are no medicines available for those who are in need.



New wave of elderly IDPs at the former Gori milk factory are pessimistic about their future



Arrival of warm borsch is always a pleasant surprise

Nina, 77, is from the village of Kekhvi, Gori District. She recalls that shooting started on 4-5 of August. At this time, there were buses that were meant to take people away from the village. Most of the villagers left with these buses. However, Nina decided to stay behind in her village. She had contact with two of her neighbors Lili and Makvala who also remained in the village. She had some food stocks and could easily maintain herself. Nina explains that she personally saw how persons who were dressed in military uniforms and whom she could not recognize and they went about looting and burning the houses. Nina also recalled that she saw this military people stealing cars, tractors and other forms of transportation from the village. Those people spoke Ossetian. Around 15th of August Ossetian men in military uniforms came to her and requested her to go with them. She was taken to Tskhinvali. She was searched, probably in a police building, which she recalls was a two storied building. During the search she was asked to name her identity and hand over all her personal belongings and money. Two men who were searching her spoke Georgian. Nina had saved up her pension and had about 500 GEL and it was also confiscated. She was later taken to the cell in the basement of the same building. She describes a cell as a small dark room which was inhabited with approximately 50 people

including men women and children. There were no beds, mattresses or chairs in the cell. Nina recalls that she had spent approximately 5 days in this cell. During these five days she slept on the floor made of concrete. One day she not provided any food. Another day, she was only provide a small amount of buckwheat. Small pieces of bread were brought to the people in the cell. Nina saw one man in the cell named Misha who was rather aggressive. He had described that his brother had been killed. Around August 27th the people were taken from the cell and placed in two buses. The buses delivered us to the town centre of Gori city. Nina recalls that she was then taken to Tbilisi and proceeded on the same day to Rustavi, which is near Tbilisi. Nina remembers she was settled in Rustavi school #2. Around September 3rd was relocated from Rustavi to Gori. Nina later learned from relatives that her house had been burned to the ground.

Gori Kinder garden No 12

Kindergarten No 12 is plagued by a severe sanitation problem. The building itself is old and living conditions are poor and substandard. There is inadequate space due to severe overcrowding. No privacy is provided to the inhabitants. A single room is often packed by six-seven families with four-five members in each family unit. Sewage pipes are damaged and the contaminated effluent leaks into the rooms where people are living. Even though enough quantity food has been provided to the residents, they still complain about the overall quality of the food. There have been even some reported cases of food poisoning. One of the most common problems named by the resident was extremely delayed medical assistance. Usually medicine only arrives after 3-4 days of consulting a doctor, and in many instances it is no longer needed as the illness has passed.



Typical overcrowded room with three generations sharing the space



Daily portion of buckwheat

"Tent Town" of Gori

The so-called "Tent Town" in Gori remained to be the largest IDP settlement with over 2000 residential units until its final disbandment. The size of the settlement made its management difficult from the start. However, the overall lack of diligence of the part of the Georgian Government to resolve the most pressing needs of the "Tent Town" residents did not contribute to the elimination of major problems experienced. The settlement was managed by the Italian Red Cross together in cooperation with UN High Commission for Refugees UNHCR. However, as representatives of IRC and UNHCR have said, the Georgian Government was not cooperative enough in solving the problems faced by IDPs.

Similar to other settlements, those living in the "Tent Town" residents experienced the same kind of problems but in a more precarious manner. Food was delivered only twice a day and with no breakfast provided in the morning. The standard lunch menu included: two sausages, one egg and two loaves of breads for four persons. Standard dinner menu included: buckwheat, boiled beans and pasta. Residents often complained about the quality of the food, saying that it was not prepared based on Georgian tastes and traditions, was often without flavor and even if they were starving they would have been unable to eat such food. Moreover, the unappealing menu was rarely changed, even on occasions when it was changed; it did not make much difference. The Human Rights Centre representatives, after receiving numerous complaints from the "Tent Town" residents approached the Italian Red Cross representatives who were in charge of food preparation. Mr. Vakhtang Chichinadze, who served as a chief cook in the camp explained that lack of diversity of the food was due to the insufficiency of various food supplies. Some of the ingredients that were used such as beans, pasta and sausage were prepackaged. Meat was not included in the ration because of the high temperature and the risk of food poisoning. Nonetheless the IRC managed to deliver daily portion of 2300 calories to each of the residents. In light of food safety concerns, IRC assigned a qualified person to be responsible for checking the quality of drinking water on a daily basis. IRC representatives identified that the content of the chlorine was not detectable in the drinking water. Absence of the chlorine in drinking water increased the risk of biological condemnation of water to unacceptable levels which could result in epidemic diarrhea.

Zhuzhuna, 65 has not heard anything from her son since the 12th of August.
Zhuzhuna is a cleaning lady in Tkviavi hospital. Her family lived in a small shelter

close to the hospital, together with her husband and son and mother-in-law. When the bombings started on 8th of August she was hiding in her garden with her mother-in-law. On 10th of August they left Tkviavi. However, her husband and son decided to stay behind in the village to protect their home and belongings. Her son also left Ktviavi on 12th of August with two of his friends. Three of them were detained by Russian military on their way to Gori. They were all taken to Tskhinvali and held in a police detention centre for three days. Zhuzhuna's son was taken outside the prison cell, where he was held together with his friends and no one has seen him since.



Tent town was often inundated with waste which local government failed to collect on time

Residents complained about hygiene problems, in particular the lack of basic toilet supplies: soaps, detergents, tooth paste and access to sanitary toilets. Woman complained about insufficiency of sanitary napkins. Residents could not take shower because of the absence of hot water and because of the fact that cabins that were designated for shower were extremely dirty. UNHCR representative explained that there was a problem with waste collection. In fact, the local government was in charge of the waste collection problem. However, in spite of this responsibility, they failed to provide for trash service in timely and efficient manner. Such a situation caused concentrations of organic and inorganic waste which posed a serious risk of disease generation and the breeding ground for vermin.

Health care issues were noted by many of the residents of “Tent Town” and they complained about the low level of qualifications medical personnel as well as the amount and kinds of medicines that were being made available. In addition, there was no efficient operative system to provide for medical assistance. Usually, the medicine was delivered to sick after 4-5 days following a medical examination. Children, who were often sick due to the repeated stress, suffered the most because of slow response in the provision of medical assistance.



Internally displaced children had to learn how to survive in a harsh environment

Conclusion and recommendations

Some basic assumptions can be made as a result of monitoring carried out by the representatives of the Human Rights Centre: follow-up actions of the Government of Georgia aimed to assist IDPs have been insufficient and lacked overall coordination. The result has been in many instances they have been left without shelter, food and urgent medical assistance. Moreover, IDPs find that government officials lack the capacity, will or ability to deal with their problems. Taken together, the incompetence of governmental

officials has made an already difficult situation more acute. The result is that humanitarian assistance has been provided haphazardly. There have been allegations of favoritism, mismanagement and even some suggestions of corruption. Taken together, the situation reflects an overall lack of transparency, political will and competency. To add injury to insult, there have been instances of verbal and even physical abuse from local government officials when they were approached by people in urgent need of assistance. Key governmental officials have directed insults towards IDPs and blocked access for them to address them to address their concerns. Mr. Saba Tsitsikashvili, a coordinator of the HRIDC's Gori office has become a subject of persecution by the regional administration for attempting to help IDPs in Gori and for criticizing failure of local government to provide assistance to those in desperate need.

Based on above the Human Rights Centre recommends Georgian authorities:

- To address and fully eliminate the pressing humanitarian needs of IDPs with due diligence and political resolve;
- To implement all necessary measures to improve the material conditions of IDPs, which includes but not limited to adequate housing in single or extended family units, food, medical care and psychological needs;
- To especially pay attention to the developmental and educational needs of children and special needs persons to assure that they receive basic education that corresponds to the generally accepted educational standards, and that they will not fall behind in their studies and normal development stages
- To allocate necessary funding train an adequate number of administrative personnel that is able to effectively deal with IDP in a concerted and effective fashion;
- To guarantee safe and voluntary return of IDPs and whenever this is not possible, to implement all necessary measures aimed at integration of IDPs into temporary residential areas, which should among others include measures aimed at employment of IDPs.