

PUBLIC

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19 August 2008

Further Information on UA 220/08 (EUR 56/005/2008, 11 August 2008) Civilian lives at risk

GEORGIA/RUSSIAN FEDERATION **Humanitarian assistance to civilians in Georgia**

Humanitarian organizations report that they are still prevented from delivering aid to the disputed region of South Ossetia, leading to fears that civilians in the region are at risk of illness and starvation. It has also been reported that access to displaced people in parts of Georgia, including in the city of Gori, has also been hampered by the general lack of security.

Over 150,000 people are thought to have been forced to leave their homes because of the conflict, according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). On 18 August, Georgian authorities had reportedly registered 70,000 displaced people, but stated that the overall figure of people displaced by the conflict was much higher.

The UN described the humanitarian situation in Gori as "desperate". However, the first UN humanitarian convoy was only able to enter Gori in western Georgia on 17 August. Russian aid teams have reported the humanitarian situation in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, as "catastrophic" because of the destruction of the infrastructure and the local hospital. However, to date international humanitarian organizations have not had access to South Ossetia. The UNHCR told Amnesty International on 18 August that they were awaiting access to South Ossetia. On 19 August, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported that they were waiting for security guarantees to become operational in South Ossetia and in some areas of western Georgia, before they could evaluate people's needs and start delivering aid.

Amnesty International is also concerned that some of the bombardments during the conflict may have amounted to indiscriminate or direct attacks on civilians, which are war crimes. These included, in particular, the Georgian assault launched on 8 August against Tskhinvali, including reportedly 14 hours of bombardment. On 9 August, Russian forces initiated a series of attacks on targets in Georgia, including in particular the city of Gori.

Civilians in Georgia and the Russian Federation remain vulnerable to attacks on the basis of their ethnicity. In Russia, there have been reports of Georgians being the targets of violent attacks in North Ossetia and in Moscow. On 11 August a cafe called 'Georgian cuisine' was reported to have been set on fire in Nazran, Ingushetia. Since the end of hostilities there have been reports of the formation, in and around South Ossetia, of irregular, locally-organized armed groups able to commit abuses with impunity, increasing the potential dangers for civilians. Ethnic Georgian villages in the breakaway region of South Ossetia have been burned.

On 12 August, after five days of fighting in the disputed regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and in Georgia itself, Russia and Georgia agreed to a provisional French-brokered cessation of hostilities. The ceasefire agreement was signed by Georgia and Russia on 15-16 August.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in Russian, Georgian, English or your own language:

- calling on both Georgia and the Russian Federation to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those individuals in need in South Ossetia;

- urging both sides to ensure that displaced people can be guaranteed a safe and durable return to their homes; and that no ethnic reprisals are carried out against the civilian populations in their countries;
- calling for impartial and independent investigations into allegations of violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law during the conflict.

APPEALS TO:

Georgia

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Salutation: Dear President

Ms Eka Tkeshelashvili
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Salutation: Dear Minister

Russian Federation

President Dmitrii Medvedev
Office of the President
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103132 Moscow
Russian Federation

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Salutation: Dear President

Mr Sergei Lavrov
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Salutation: Dear Minister

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Georgia/Russian Federation accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 30 September 2008.