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Georgia/Russian Federation: The impact of the war one year on

One year after the war between Georgia and the Russian Federation, thousands of civilians remain stranded away from their homes with little prospect of return in the near future. They, and many of those who have managed to go back, face a future of insecurity, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

“Hundreds of thousands of people have to face a new reality created by the conflict and the authorities have the responsibility to make the transition as smooth as possible. They are also responsible for providing justice and reparation for the victims,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

“The authorities on all sides of the conflict have the responsibility to guarantee the rights of those forced to flee their homes to return in safety and dignity and to be in control of their destiny.”

Around 192,000 people were displaced during the war that began on the night of 7-8 August 2008. Of the 38,500 people who left South Ossetia for the Russian Federation, all but an estimated 4,000 are said to have returned. However, 30,000 of the estimated 138,000 ethnic Georgians displaced by the conflict have been unable to return to their homes. Of these, 18,500 ethnic Georgians who fled South Ossetia and Akhalkalaki District are facing long-term displacement.

Most of the displaced people in Georgia have been provided with alternative accommodation or compensation. Eighteen thousand people now live in 36 new urban or rural settlements, provided with basic furniture and facilities. As they told Amnesty International, their biggest problems remain the remoteness of some of the newly built settlements which deprives them from easy access to hospitals and schools and, most importantly, to work, making them dependent on humanitarian aid.

Amnesty International’s report, [*Civilians in the aftermath of War: The Georgia – Russia conflict one year on*](#), uncovers ongoing tensions and fragile security against which people are trying to rebuild their lives while no one has been held accountable for the numerous breaches in international law which took place during the conflict.

A big challenge remains security in the region of conflict where some areas have become virtually depopulated. Additionally, many ethnic Georgian returnees in areas adjacent to South Ossetia no longer have access to their fields or orchards as now they lie in the territory under the jurisdiction of the de facto authorities of South Ossetia, or because the area has not been cleared of explosives.

The lack of clarity of the demarcation line between Georgia and South Ossetia established after the war is a further source of insecurity.

The situation is aggravated by the reduced capacity for international scrutiny after the closure of the monitoring missions of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the UN, while the only internationally mandated monitors, those of the European Union Monitoring Mission, currently cannot enter areas controlled by the de facto authorities in South Ossetia (and the other breakaway region of Abkhazia).

“The authorities on all sides of the conflict must ensure the security of all those residing in areas affected by the conflict and of those who had to flee but now wish to return to their homes. Political concerns should not prevent the parties to the conflict from implementing their obligations under international law to ensure the rights of the people under their control,” Nicola Duckworth said.

Amnesty International’s previous research immediately after the conflict found significant evidence that war crimes and possible crimes against humanity had been committed during the conflict and its aftermath. Georgian forces did not appear to take appropriate precautionary measures to protect civilians, dozens of whom were killed, in their assault on Tskhinvali on the night of 7-8 August 2008. South Ossetian militias reportedly looted and destroyed houses and property in several Georgian-majority villages of South Ossetia, amid reports that Russian forces failed to take adequate action to prevent such actions. Russian aerial and artillery attacks also hit villages and towns amid reports that some attacks may have either been indiscriminate or directly targeted at civilians. Both Georgia and Russia used cluster bombs

“To date, no one has been brought to justice either by the Georgian or Russian authorities in relation to serious violations of international or national law during the conflict and its immediate aftermath” Nicola Duckworth said.

“There can be no reconciliation, and no lasting peace, without truth and accountability.”

Amnesty International calls on the parties to the conflict to take measures to ensure prompt, independent, thorough and impartial investigations into allegations that their respective forces committed crimes under international law during the conflict, including war crimes. Wherever there is sufficient admissible evidence, the parties should ensure that anyone reasonably suspected of crimes under international law is brought to justice in proceedings which comply fully with international fair trial standards.

See also: [*Civilians in the line of fire: the Georgia-Russia conflict.*](#)