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Georgia-Russia conflict: Security for civilians and accountability for governments

As European Union monitors take up their posts in Georgia, ongoing security concerns, unexploded ordnance from the 7-13 August Georgia-Russia conflict and the large scale destruction of property in some parts of the conflict area continue to undermine the right of tens of thousands of people to return to their homes.

"Shootings, looting and ethnically motivated attacks in South Ossetia and the adjacent Russian-controlled 'buffer zone' are undermining the welfare of the remaining residents and the right to return of those ethnic Georgians who fled their homes," said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director at Amnesty International.

"The Russian and Georgian authorities, as well as the de facto South Ossetian administration must make every effort to guarantee security and provide assistance to all people without discrimination. Those forced to flee their homes must be allowed to return safely and those unable or unwilling to do so, must be resettled," Nicola Duckworth said.

Unexploded devices must be cleared urgently and Amnesty International is calling on all parties to the conflict to disclose all information about the munitions used.

International monitoring missions, which are currently excluded from operating in South Ossetia, should cover all areas affected by the conflict, include human rights monitoring in their mandates and report publicly on their findings.

Hundreds of civilians were killed and many more were wounded during the conflict and afterwards. Civilian property, mainly that owned by ethnic Georgians was looted and destroyed.

Information collected by Amnesty International in fact-finding visits to the region in August 2008, together with that from other sources, indicate that serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law may have been committed by all sides during the conflict and its immediate aftermath.

"Those responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law must be brought to justice. International law requires it and the long term peace and stability of the region depends on it," said Nicola Duckworth.

Amnesty International therefore calls on the parties to the conflict to agree to, and the international community to deploy, a full fact-finding mission to carry out a thorough investigation of all allegations of serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law in the course of the conflict.

"Present needs should not be allowed to obscure responsibility for past deeds," Nicola Duckworth said.

Background

According to UNHCR, an estimated 163,000 people were forced to flee their homes, including 127,000 displaced in Georgia proper and another 36,000 to the Russian Federation. Since the cessation of hostilities the great majority of the South Ossetians who fled to the Russian Federation have reportedly been able to return.

Of the estimated 127,000 persons displaced within Georgia, only around 68,000 have been able to return home, and another 5,000 were expected to be able to do so late this year. A further 23,000 are expected to be able to return in 2009. However, UNHCR has warned that 31,000 people may not be able to return in the foreseeable future. Of this figure, approximately 22,000 were displaced from South Ossetia, 8,000 from inaccessible parts of the buffer zone, and 1,000 from Abkhazia.

See also:

[*Georgia-Russia conflict: Protection of civilians and accountability for abuses should be a priority for all*](#), AI Index: EUR 04/004/2008;

[*Council of Europe: Monitoring of the human rights impact of the Georgia-Russia conflict must continue*](#), AI Index: EUR 04/003/2008.

Note to editors:

Amnesty International has also written to the governments of Georgia and the Russian Federation and the de facto administration of South Ossetia to request further information regarding alleged violations of international, humanitarian and human rights law, prior to publishing a report on its findings.