

Security Council Open Debate on the Protection of Civilians in conflict

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Statement by H.E. Mr. Tsiskarashvili, Representative of Georgia

Georgia welcomes this open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. I take this opportunity to commend the Portuguese delegation's efforts in convening this important meeting.

More than 10 years have passed since the first debate was held in the Security Council on this issue, yet armed conflicts still affect millions of persons who are deprived of basic necessities and who are vulnerable to violations of their rights, displaced from their homes, targeted through indiscriminate attacks and other violations. In many cases, the principal victims of armed conflicts are women and children.

The United Nations must protect the dignity of each and every one and uphold the rights of all those who have been affected by conflicts. It goes without saying that we need to do more at the international, regional and national levels.

The August 2008 war has had devastating consequences for civilians, especially for those who have been ethnically cleansed from two regions of my country, Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region. Since our previous statements in the Council, nothing has changed on the ground with regard to civilians living under occupation in these territories. At least 20 per cent of sovereign Georgian territory remains under illegal foreign occupation in violation of the six-point ceasefire agreement brokered by France on behalf of the European Union. Hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees continue to suffer. They are denied their right to return to their homes and villages — a right referred to numerous times in this very Chamber. The practices of forced displacement, denial of property rights and other massive, gross and systematic human rights violations continue to occur there.

Safe and unhindered access of humanitarian actors to people in need of protection and assistance is another important element. Regrettably, the occupying Power, in clear violation of the six-point agreement, has continued to block the access of humanitarian aid and international humanitarian actors to the Tskhinvali region. Clearly, the denial of the access of humanitarian personnel to victims of conflict amounts to a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

Almost a year has passed since Georgia announced the non-use-of-force commitment. Although the Charter of the United Nations authorizes us to do so, Georgia has renounced military means in order to restore its territorial integrity. The relevant letters have been sent to the Secretary-General and to other international organizations, but instead of a reciprocation to that gesture of peace, the response we have received has come in the form of the illegal installation of an additional military contingent, missiles and rockets in the occupied regions. We believe that the geopolitical ambitions of one particular country cannot stand in the way of international efforts aimed at easing the plight of those suffering from forced displacement and ethnic cleansing.

Although the topic I will touch on is not technically part of the debate, it may affect the issues I have highlighted. Earlier today, Georgia and Russia signed a package of documents that pave the way for Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization. We hope that Russia can demonstrate the same level of pragmatism it has shown during these talks when it is faced with resolving other bilateral issues, first and foremost the right of more than 400,000 men, women and children to return to their homes in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region in safety and dignity.

One of the purposes of today's debate is to see the international community more engaged in addressing all of the relevant challenges. In conclusion, I wish to underline that Georgia fully supports and encourages the continued efforts of the international community in making the protection of civilians a reality for all of those who are caught up in conflict.