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The consequences of the war between Georgia and Russia

Committee Opinion

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population

Rapporteur: Ms Corien W.A. JONKER, Netherlands, Group of the European People's Party

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population welcomes the report from the Monitoring Committee on the consequences of the war between Georgia and Russia.
2. The committee notes the careful attention paid in the draft resolution to the humanitarian issues arising from the conflict and the impact of these on refugees, internally displaced persons and on missing persons and their families.
3. The committee deplores the undeniable process of ethnic cleansing taking place in the Georgian regions of South Ossetia (hereafter South Ossetia)¹ and the so-called “buffer zone” still occupied by the Russian forces. It insists on all necessary conditions to be provided for the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons.
4. The committee strongly endorses the call for the respect, by all parties to the conflict, of all relevant human rights standards and humanitarian law standards. It considers that the issue of safety of all persons is primordial, and stresses the importance of tackling all threats of violence and intimidation, stamping out lawlessness and removing all mines and unexploded ordnance. The issue of the safe return of internally displaced persons and refugees is one of the greatest challenges in the aftermath of the conflict. Coping with the urgent humanitarian needs of those affected by the conflict is also of primordial importance, in particular with the advancement of winter and the need for adequate shelter and accommodation.
5. The committee is particularly concerned about the lack of access of humanitarian organisations to South Ossetia and the so-called “buffer zone” under the control of Russian troops. Access to these areas must be given to these organisations as a matter of priority, and the security of all those working for these organisations needs to be guaranteed.
6. The committee, with a view to clarifying and strengthening the humanitarian recommendations contained in the draft resolution, proposes three amendments put forward at the end of this opinion.

1. In this document, the terms “South Ossetia” and “Abkhazia” are used for readers’ convenience, without prejudice to the Assembly’s position on the territorial integrity of Georgia.



B. Explanatory memorandum, by Ms Corien W.A. Jonker

1. Introduction

1. The Assembly has, with the assistance of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population, examined many humanitarian issues which are directly relevant to the consequences of the war between Georgia and Russia. Of particular interest in this respect is [Resolution 1497 \(2006\)](#) on refugees and displaced persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia and its [Resolution 1553 \(2007\)](#) on missing persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia from the conflicts over the Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions.

2. Your rapporteur in preparing her opinion has taken into account this past work of the Assembly and has drawn heavily on her first-hand experience in the region during the visit of the ad hoc committee to study the situation on the ground in Georgia and Russia during the period 21 to 26 September 2008. She has also relied extensively on the information contained in the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights' visit report to the conflict region in September 2008.² She endorses fully the six principles for urgent protection of human rights and humanitarian security developed in the Commissioner's report.

3. Your rapporteur would like to pay tribute to the work of all those in the humanitarian field helping to meet the humanitarian needs of those affected by the conflict. She would also like to thank the many different organisations with which she had contact, and in particular the various offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

2. Statistics on displacement

4. The humanitarian consequences of the recent conflict have been vast. According to recent figures from the UNHCR,³ 192 000 persons were displaced by the conflict. Of these, 127 000 were displaced within Georgia, excluding South Ossetia. Another 30 000 persons were displaced within South Ossetia and 35 000 persons sought refuge in the Russian Federation.

5. To date, approximately 65 000 persons have returned within Georgia, but outside of South Ossetia, and 33 000 of the 35 000 refugees in the Russian Federation have returned to South Ossetia.⁴

6. According to the UNHCR about 50 000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Georgia may not be able to return before the winter, although a further 23 000 IDPs should be able to return after the winter. This therefore leaves many IDPs who will not be able to return in the short term or medium term, notably to the so-called "buffer zone" regions of South Ossetia and Upper Abkhazia. Furthermore, there are some IDPs who may never be able to return, even in the long term.

7. Approximately 56% of IDPs are female and 44% are male.⁵

8. In Georgia the greatest number of IDPs are accommodated in collective centres in Tbilisi, although there are also many in the regions and in private accommodation.⁶

9. Gori has become a halfway house for those wanting to move back to their homes in the so-called "buffer zone" and also those leaving their villages because of intimidation by roaming militia in the so-called "buffer zone".

10. According to recent UNHCR reports, Gori is full and many persons are being moved on to other regions.

11. Notwithstanding the desperate situation of these internally displaced persons and refugees, the plight of the estimated 222 000 persons who remain displaced from the earlier conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia needs to be kept in mind. While it is important to tackle the immediate urgent needs of the recent IDPs, durable solutions for all IDPs, from both the earlier and recent conflicts need to be tackled together.

2. Commissioner for Human Rights, Strasbourg, 8 September 2008, CommDH(2008)22. "Human Rights in Areas Affected by the South Ossetia Conflict. Special Mission to Georgia and Russian Federation".

3. UNHCR emergency operation in Georgia, 12 September 2008.

4. Of the 2 000 persons remaining in South Ossetia, most are children, the elderly or the sick.

5. The Georgian Agency for Civil Registration has recorded a total of 129 723 IDPs of which 56% are female and 44% are male.

6. According to information provided by the Ministry of Refugees and IDPs, about 37 500 IDPs remain in Tbilisi collective centres and 10 000 are staying in private accommodation, and there are a further 24 000 in the regions in Georgia.

3. Persons killed or wounded

12. The number of persons killed in the recent conflict appears lower than first feared.
13. According to statistics provided by the Georgian authorities,⁷ the total number of Georgian citizens killed⁸ amounts to 364 persons (170 military personnel and 194 civilians).
14. In terms of wounded, the Georgian authorities have indicated a total number of 2 234 persons, with 69 persons currently being treated in hospital.
15. In South Ossetia, the Russian authorities have informed the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights that there were 133 confirmed deaths. Concerning wounded persons, 220 persons were treated in Tskhinvali and 250 persons in Vladikavkaz. During your rapporteur's visit she received revised indications from Russian NGOs that 300 persons were killed and approximately 500 persons were wounded.

4. The missing

16. On the Georgian side, 54 persons remain missing from the conflict⁹ and six persons are missing on the South Ossetian side.
17. The ICRC continues to receive tracing requests from families of the missing and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights continues to keep pressure on the relevant authorities to co-operate with each other to clarify the fate of the missing.
18. Parties to the conflict need to solve the issue of the missing as soon as possible, taking into account also the missing from the previous conflict, which includes 10 Georgians and 122 South Ossetians. The issue of the missing from the conflict over Abkhazia also needs to be taken into account.
19. Your rapporteur considers, as a priority, that the parties to the conflict should be called upon to treat the issue of the missing as a humanitarian and human rights issue and not a political issue.
20. A number of steps should be taken by the relevant authorities, including establishing a multilateral co-ordination mechanism with co-operation between commissions for missing persons (which have to be created where they do not exist).
21. The authorities should also collect all relevant data and take all necessary steps in order to identify, recover and exchange the remains of missing persons, provide material social and psychological assistance to the families of the missing and support the important work of the ICRC in this field of activity.

5. Prisoners of war and hostages

22. Your rapporteur notes the important work carried out by the ICRC and also the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights in arranging for the release and exchange of prisoners of war and other persons detained as a result of the conflict. Your rapporteur fully supports all calls for the release and exchange of these persons and calls for action to be taken by the relevant authorities to eliminate the practice of hostage taking.

6. Humanitarian assistance

23. Humanitarian assistance continues to be a priority. It is needed by those who are unable to return, but also many of those who have been able to return and even some of those who never left.
24. Accommodation through the winter months is a pressing priority for those who have returned to damaged or destroyed property and those who are unable to return.

7. "Russian Invasion of Georgia, Facts and Figures", 20 September 2008, document distributed by the Georgian Permanent Representation to the Council of Europe.

8. The number is based on human remains received by the Georgian authorities.

9. The Georgian Ministry of Defence issued new statistics concerning the missing on 29 September indicating that there were 54 persons missing, which included 43 unknown soldiers buried in Tbilisi.

25. Immediate urgent assistance is required for the most needy, and a more long-term approach to aid is also required bearing in mind the need for sustainable solutions, including integration measures and new income generating opportunities, for all displaced persons whether they are recently displaced or displaced from the earlier conflicts.

26. The international community has reacted quickly in providing assistance to the region. The Russian authorities have provided generous support to refugees from South Ossetia and the Georgian authorities have similarly mobilised resources to meet the immediate needs of those persons displaced within Georgian territory under its control. These resources are, however, not enough, and humanitarian organisations have faced problems in having access to North Ossetia (with the Russian authorities refusing international aid)¹⁰ and also South Ossetia and the so-called “buffer zone”, where one of the few organisations with access is the ICRC.

27. A humanitarian co-ordination group has been set up including UN agencies and NGOs under the UN Resident/Humanitarian Co-ordinator. The humanitarian response has been organised by sectors, such as food, protection (including education), water and sanitation, shelter and non-food items, logistics, health and nutrition, telecommunication, security and recovery.¹¹ The ICRC is participating in the co-ordination group in an observer capacity.

28. The European Commission will propose an aid package for Georgia covering 2008-10 for reconstruction and return. Furthermore, a donor's conference will be held in October in Brussels probably after the European Council meeting on 15 October. Your rapporteur notes the importance of well co-ordinated and donor aid response, taking into consideration the needs stated by the government and civil society organisations operating in the country.

29. There are some concerns that have been raised with your rapporteur during her mission on the use being made of aid being provided by donors and your rapporteur encourages all donors to keep control over where their money is being spent.

30. In terms of emergency aid, there is still a lack of beds and sleeping accessories. Food is distributed primarily by the World Food Programme (WFP), but this does not always cover all the needs, in particular those of sick persons, children and the elderly. Access to food is particularly problematic in the so-called “buffer zone”, due to the restrictions on movements and the lack of access to the region by humanitarian organisations. Access to health facilities and hygiene items remains insufficient.

6.1. Accommodation

31. Many properties, in particular those belonging to Georgians, have been looted, damaged or raised to the ground by fire or by bulldozers. Your rapporteur witnessed many damaged and destroyed houses in the so-called “buffer zone” and also in South Ossetia. While there was damage caused to many of the houses in South Ossetia, and in particular in Tskhinvali, during the conflict, your rapporteur was appalled at the extent of damage to houses belonging to Georgians in the so-called “buffer zone” and also in South Ossetia itself in the aftermath of the conflict.

32. Providing suitable accommodation remains a priority and a challenge and is foremost the responsibility of the Georgian Government in the areas in which it is in effective control.

33. Many IDPs in Georgia had to be housed initially in schools, but they have recently been transferred to other public buildings to allow the schools to re-open. Many of the public buildings being used are in need of urgent repair and transformation. The UNHCR, ICRC and other relevant organisations and governmental agencies are working on these accommodation and shelter issues, but winter is on its way and much still has to be done.

34. Gori, which has been used as a stepping stone for those wanting to return to the conflict zones, and also as a place of haven for those still fleeing insecure areas, is full to capacity and has about 2 300 persons living in tents.

10. Your rapporteur is concerned that in North Ossetia there is a reduction in aid being provided, and that this risks putting additional pressure on the North Caucasus region which still has 5 000 IDPs or refugees from earlier conflicts. It is therefore all the more important for the Russian authorities to allow humanitarian organisations to carry out work in the region.

11. See Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 29 August 2008, “Georgia: Tentative return of some of the people who fled August 2008 conflict”.

35. There are also severe accommodation problems in Tskhinvali where, according to the Russian Minister of Emergency Situations, 10% of the houses cannot be repaired and 20% of houses need to be reconstructed.¹² There is, as a result, an urgent need for construction materials to rehabilitate damaged houses and apartments.

6.2. Children

36. Many of the schools in the conflict areas have been damaged or looted and furthermore many of the schools in Georgia's interior have been used to provide emergency accommodation for displaced persons. The result has been delays in starting the academic year. Schools have started in the meantime, and while most IDP children are now attending schools, some of them are still seeking places.

37. In South Ossetia, the functioning of the education system is not yet back to normal and many of the 2 000 persons remaining in North Ossetia are children, who are receiving schooling until their schools re-open in South Ossetia.

38. The Georgian authorities have estimated the number of children displaced at the beginning of September at 64 397, the majority of whom are under 12. Many of these children are reported to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety crises and depression.

39. Your rapporteur is obviously greatly concerned by the situation of the children affected by the conflict and invites all parties to take the necessary measures to ensure that their safety, health and education needs are fully met.

6.3. Health

40. Health issues should remain a priority, both in terms of treating physical health problems but also mental health problems arising from the trauma of the conflict.

41. The ICRC has a number of travelling health units reaching out to those in need in the so-called "buffer zone" and in South Ossetia, but it is a general problem that many of the medical facilities in the conflict zones have been destroyed. In the region of Shida Kartli, which includes Gori, 13 out of 19 medical facilities have been destroyed.

42. The reproductive health needs, in particular of IDP women, require priority attention. There are worrying reports of pregnancies as a result of sexual violence, a rise in the number of premature deliveries of babies, and an increase in the number of abortions.¹³ More funds are needed to adequately cover the hygiene and reproductive health needs of the IDPs and to still serve the rest of the population not affected by the conflict.¹⁴

6.4. Situation of "old" IDPs

43. The action plan for the "old" IDPs of the civil wars in the 1990s, of whom 222 000 remain according to the UNHCR, which resulted in the plight of almost 300 000 Georgians and another 100 000 other ethnic groups who have mostly been unable to return since, was adopted the week before the escalation in the conflict. With the new influx of IDPs it is clearly going to adversely affect the "durable solutions" being worked upon for these "old" IDPs. Your rapporteur is concerned about the plight of all IDPs and urges the Georgian authorities to deal with "old" and "new" IDPs together when looking at the issue of durable solutions for both these groups.

44. Your rapporteur expresses particular concern about the approximately 45 000 "old" IDPs who resettled in the Gali District in Abkhazia whose human rights situation was already precarious before the outbreak of the recent war and who are particularly vulnerable in the post-war situation. She urges the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, UNHCR and other international human rights bodies to pay particular attention to this issue and take the necessary steps to defuse the current tension.

12. Special press release by Memorial Human Rights Center, "A Month After the War", 11 September 2008.

13. European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF), "Main Findings, Emergency Reproductive Health Needs in Georgia". This report was prepared after the EPF conducted a fact-finding mission to Georgia on 19 and 20 September 2008.

14. UNFPA Georgia.

7. Access to South Ossetia and the so-called “buffer zone”

45. Access to South Ossetia, and the so-called “buffer zone” continues to be restricted, making it extremely difficult for human rights issues to be monitored and humanitarian needs to be estimated and catered for. The problem is in part due to the insistence of the Georgians that assistance should pass from the south, through Georgia, and the insistence of the Russians and the de facto authorities in South Ossetia that assistance should pass from Russia in the north. Furthermore, tension and lawlessness in the so-called “buffer zone” continues to raise significant security concerns not only for the lives of the persons living in these areas or returning to these areas, but also for their property and livelihoods.

46. The ICRC is, however, one of the few organisations which has free access both to South Ossetia and to the so-called “buffer zone”. The UNHCR has only, since the middle of September, been able to have limited access to these areas and has started analysing the conditions for return and the needs of returnees.¹⁵

47. Your rapporteur highlights the importance of free access being given to all relevant humanitarian organisations both within the so-called “buffer zone” and in South Ossetia. Furthermore, it is essential that the security of these organisations is guaranteed by the relevant authorities.

48. Your rapporteur notes, in addition, the similar problems of access to Abkhazia, and highlights the importance of free access also being granted to humanitarian and other organisations.

8. Security situation

49. The security situation in the so-called “buffer zone” remains a key issue. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)¹⁶ in a recent activity report concluded that “criminality and harassment of the villagers by South Ossetian elements appear to be widespread”, with the main risks being “unexploded ordnance (UXO) and armed groups from South Ossetia and possibly the Northern Caucasus”.

50. There continue to be reports of properties being burned down, kidnappings taking place and killings being carried out.¹⁷ An 18-year-old boy was, for example, reportedly kidnapped from the village of Kordi. Furthermore, a Georgian policeman was shot and killed at the Karaleti checkpoint on 10 September. According to the Georgian Public Defender’s Office a total of 1 200 houses in the so-called “buffer zone” have been partially or heavily damaged.¹⁸

51. Your rapporteur, having visited the region can attest to the widespread damage and destruction both in the so-called “buffer zone” and also in South Ossetia, where remaining Georgian properties have been targeted.

52. While there are few reports of killings of Georgians in these areas, there is an undeniable process of ethnic cleansing taking place. Georgians are being threatened with their lives or told to renounce Georgian nationality. Their properties are being burned down or bulldozed. The result of all these acts is that these areas are “cleansed” of persons and families of ethnic Georgian background. In South Ossetia itself, there are, according to reports received during your rapporteur’s mission to the region, only a few hundred ethnic Georgians remaining.

53. The Russian Forces stationed in the so-called “buffer zone” have a mixed record in dealing with lawlessness, with there being some reports of Russian intervention to protect locals, for example by escorting them to work in fields, and other reports of the failure of the Russian Forces to prevent the destruction of houses and looting. Russian Forces have restricted OSCE patrolling in many areas and talks between the Russian Federation and the OSCE have recently broken down on the issue of sending more monitors to the area. The 28 current OSCE monitors, however, continue to carry out their work.

54. Your rapporteur emphasises that the Russian occupying forces have an obligation to stamp out lawlessness (including physical assault, robbery, kidnapping, harassment, looting and torching of property, etc.). This is an obligation of any occupying power in accordance with Article 43 of the Hague Convention of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

15. UNHCR Emergency Operation in Georgia, 19 September 2008.

16. OSCE Activity Report No. 15/08, 1 August-14 September 2008.

17. OSCE Activity Report No. 15/08, 1 August-14 September 2008.

18. “Public Defender Reports on Killings, Destruction in Buffer Zone Villages”, Press release, Civil Georgia, Tbilisi, 14 September 2008.

55. In view of the many different reports, both during the conflict and in the aftermath of the conflict, of human rights and humanitarian law abuses, your rapporteur supports the call for all perpetrators of these abuses, no matter which side they may have been on, to face justice and be held accountable.

9. Mines and unexploded ordnance

56. Of concern to your rapporteur is the large number of mines and also bomblets left over from cluster bombs, allegedly used by both sides. Also of concern to your rapporteur is the use of “frog” type mines which jump into the air when stepped upon and explode at head height or chest level.

57. Your rapporteur considers a full investigation is needed into the weapons used and their compliance with international humanitarian law requirements. All parties have a responsibility to identify and remove all mines and unexploded ordnance and exchange information on the use and location of such materials. All parties should make full use of offers of assistance in mine clearance and ordnance removal. Parties also need to undertake as a matter of urgency, mine awareness programmes among the population at risk.

10. Fear and hatred

58. The conflict has undoubtedly increased the fear and hatred of both Georgians and South Ossetians. This fear and hatred is particularly strong among South Ossetians towards Georgians. All relevant authorities need to take steps to counter this fear and hatred in society in order to be able to move forward in healing the wounds of the conflict.

11. Monitoring of the return situation and protection issues

59. Monitoring of the return situation of IDPs and refugees is essential in the light of security concerns. Your rapporteur welcomes that the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia has as part of its mandate the monitoring of the “political and security aspects of the return of internally displaced persons and refugees”.¹⁹ However, this monitoring in itself is not sufficient taking into account the lawless situation in the so-called borders zone. Consideration therefore needs to be given to providing the EU Monitoring Mission with policing and protection responsibilities²⁰ in order to fill the vacuum of lawlessness. Other possibilities should also be examined such as the joint patrolling of Georgian police together with EU monitors to ensure that both monitoring and protection can take place at the same time in the so-called border zone.

60. The importance of this monitoring and protection will become even more important as and when the Russian forces withdraw from the so-called “buffer zone”. It is not just in the so-called “buffer zone” that protection issues remain. In parts of South Ossetia, such as in Akhalkgori District, the local Georgian population is put under pressure to leave, including pressure to change their Georgian passports and take up Russian passports instead.

61. The Council of Europe, OSCE, UNHCR, other UN agencies and other human rights and humanitarian organisations need to be given access to all areas in order for them also to carry out monitoring, and, where appropriated, protection. Full support and guarantees of safety need to be given to the ICRC, which is already present in the region.

12. The right to return

62. Your rapporteur considers that all persons, whether refugees or IDPs (from the earlier conflict or the recent conflict), have a right to return on a voluntary basis.

63. As indicated by your rapporteur earlier, the burning down or bulldozing of houses belonging to Georgians is an attempt to hinder or destroy the prospects of return, and these actions must be stopped immediately.

64. Your rapporteur recognises that return in safety may not be an option for certain people and that under the Pinheiro principles developed by the United Nations, all internally displaced persons should have the right to return in safety and dignity, or to resettle voluntarily or integrate locally.

19. “Joint Action setting up the EUMM”, published 17 September 2008. See Article 3.2.

20. See also calls made by Human Rights Watch in a statement of 16 September 2008, “Georgia: EU Mission Needs to Protect Civilians”.

13. Conclusions

65. Your rapporteur considers that the humanitarian situation arising from the conflict requires the onward going attention of the Parliamentary Assembly and the international community. In consequence, your rapporteur considers that there is an urgent need for a much fuller report on the humanitarian situation arising from the conflict, taking into account the needs of all IDPs and refugees, and not just those from the most recent conflict. The committee stands ready to prepare such a report.

66. In conclusion, your rapporteur highlights the importance for all parties to the conflict to:

66.1. respect all human rights norms and also humanitarian norms under the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols. Particular attention is drawn to the need to respect the European Convention on Human Rights and the interim measures ordered by the European Court of Human Rights and any relevant judgments. Furthermore, all those responsible for human rights violations should be held accountable.

66.2. remove all mines and unexploded ordnance. This implies all parties to the conflict exchanging information on the use and location of such materials, and also the involvement of experts on mine and ordnance location and removal. Furthermore, awareness raising of the dangers of these unexploded mines and ordnance needs to be carried out for those at risk;

66.3. co-operate fully with all international monitoring missions whether from the UN, the OSCE, the EU, the Council of Europe or other international bodies;

66.4. ensure that all persons displaced by the conflict should have the right to return on a fully voluntary basis and to refrain from using displaced persons as a political pawn when tackling the issue of return. Furthermore, all internally displaced persons should have the right to return in safety and dignity, or to resettle voluntarily or integrate locally;

66.5. release and exchange, immediately, prisoners of war and others detained as a result of the conflict, without requiring reciprocity from any other side;

66.6. ensure that all hostages are released and the practice of hostage taking is eliminated;

66.7. solve the issue of missing persons from the recent and earlier conflict, ensuring that the issue is treated as a humanitarian issue and not a political issue. Furthermore, establish a multilateral co-ordination mechanism with functioning commissions for missing persons on the different sides of the conflict;

66.8. take steps to counter fear and hatred resulting from the conflict, in particular in South Ossetia, and the so-called "buffer zones" and in the Gali district in Abkhazia;

66.9. comply fully with the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights' six principles for urgent protection of human rights and humanitarian security developed after his August 2008 visit to the region.

67. In particular, your rapporteur urges the authorities of the Russian Federation, and where appropriate the "de facto" authorities in South Ossetia and in Abkhazia to:

67.1. take urgent measures to guarantee the security of all persons within the so-called "buffer zones", South Ossetia and in particular in the Gali district and Upper Abkhazia. The de facto authorities in South Ossetia and in Abkhazia and the Russian occupying forces have an obligation to stamp out lawlessness (including physical assault, robbery, kidnapping, harassment, looting and torching of property, etc.). This is an obligation of any occupying power in accordance with Article 43 of the Hague Convention of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949;

67.2. provide all conditions in the areas under their occupation or control in the so-called "buffer zones", South Ossetia and Abkhazia for the safe return of all internally displaced and refugees, including those for the civil wars of the 1990s;

67.3. provide, without delay, the UNHCR and all humanitarian organisations with access to the areas affected by the conflict, in particular in the region of South Ossetia and the so-called "buffer zone". All organisations providing humanitarian assistance in these areas should be guaranteed safety.

68. Furthermore, your rapporteur is greatly concerned by the need for protection for those returning to or still living in the so-called "buffer zone" and South Ossetia, and recommends that the European Union should be called on to strengthen the EU monitoring mission and give it a mandate and resources not only to monitor,

but also to protect persons and property. The European Union should also ensure that the issue of return of displaced persons and refugees should remain high on the political agenda, including in any EU-Russia high level meetings and discussions.

69. As a final point your rapporteur calls upon member states of the Council of Europe to fund and support the aid and assistance operations carried out by the relevant authorities and also the aid and assistance operations carried out by humanitarian organisations in the region. In providing this assistance, due consideration must also be given to the 222 000 IDPs from the previous conflicts and their needs for durable solutions.

C. Proposed amendments to the draft resolution

While supporting the draft resolution tabled by the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee), the Committee on Migration Refugees and Population proposes the following amendments:

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 22.2, at the end of the paragraph, add the following sentence: “. Mine and unexploded ordnance awareness raising for all persons concerned needs to be carried out;”.

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 22.5, after the words “release and exchange, immediately,” add the word “hostages”.

Amendment C (to the draft resolution)

In paragraph 14, where it says “14 persons remain missing”, replace the number “14” with the number “54”.

Reporting Committee: Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee).

Committee for opinion: Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population.

Reference to committee: urgent procedure debate, Reference No. 3489, 29 September 2008.

Opinion approved by the committee on 1 October 2008. See [Resolution 1633](#) and [Recommendation 1846](#) (35th Sitting, 2 October 2008).