

September 2009



## FACT SHEET ON THE REPUBLIC OF ABKHAZIA'S REFUGEE PROGRAM

Since the 1992-93 Abkhazian Georgian war, more than 60,000 refugees have been successfully resettled in Abkhazia, which represents the largest peaceful resettlement program in modern times. This has occurred in spite of an ongoing campaign by the Georgian government to politicize the refugee process by provoking ethnic tensions, creating impediments to the safe return of refugees and establishing legal and diplomatic barriers to an international resolution.

The following points are designed to provide background on the refugee situation in Abkhazia.

- **WHY HAVE SO MANY PEOPLE FLED ABKHAZIA?**  
During the 1992-93 war, Georgian troops launched a massive attack on the civilian population of Abkhazia, destroying schools, hospitals, cultural relics and government buildings. This attack, which was aimed at annihilating the Abkhazian population and bringing the territory firmly under Georgian control, caused a massive exodus. More than 500 villages were destroyed. Though the Abkhazians successfully fought off Georgian attackers, the conflict did not end. In the decades following, Georgia repeatedly tried to destabilize Abkhazia, launching military incursions in 1998, 2001 and August 2006. Each conflict triggered another outflow of refugees.
- **HOW MANY REFUGEES HAVE BEEN FORCED TO LEAVE ABKHAZIA?**  
Since the 1992-93 war, an estimated 190,000 refugees have left Abkhazia. They included Abkhazians, Georgians, Mingrelians, Greeks, Jews and Russians.
- **HOW MANY REFUGEES HAVE RETURNED?**  
The largest concentration of Georgians within Abkhazia was in the Gal region. Since the war, more than 52,000 refugees have returned to Gal. In addition, at least 15,000 Georgians have returned to other regions of Abkhazia. Claims by the Georgian government that there are more than 500,000 refugees still displaced from their homes are absurd.
- **WHAT RIGHTS DO GEORGIAN RETURNEES HAVE?**

Under Abkhazian law, citizens are treated equally regardless of race, nationality, sex or religion.

- **DO RESIDENTS OF GAL HAVE ANY SPECIAL RIGHTS?**  
To assist the residents of Gal in their resettlement, the government of Abkhazia has provided them with some special privileges. They include an exemption from compulsory military service, free emergency medical care, Georgian-language schools, scholarships for higher education and small business assistance.
- **ARE GEORGIANS FORCED TO TAKE ABKHAZIAN PASSPORTS TO LIVE IN ABKHAZIA?**  
The identity documents valid for residency in Abkhazia include the following: passports from Abkhazia or the Russia Federation or an identity document known as Form 9. An identity document is required to hold a job, purchase real estate, enroll children in school and receive medical care. According to the Gal administration, 1,642 Georgian residents of Gal have applied for and received Abkhazian passports. Reports that Georgians have been forced to take Abkhazian passports are untrue.
- **WHY HAS THE ABKHAZIAN GOVERNMENT REFUSED TO ALLOW GEORGIAN REFUGEES BACK TO THEIR HOMES IN EASTERN ABKHAZIA?**  
The Abkhazian government has not prevented refugees from returning, and to the contrary, has overseen the largest peaceful resettlement of refugees in history. However, to ensure the safety and economic security of its population, the Abkhazian government insists that certain preconditions be met before it opens its door to thousands of additional people. Those conditions include a Georgian pledge of non-violence and an independent assessment of the current refugee situation in Abkhazia, including a full accounting of all refugees resettled to date.
- **ARE THERE ANY REFUGEES WHO HAVE NOT BEEN ALLOWED TO RETURN?**  
The Abkhazian government maintains the right to prosecute any citizens who have participated in subversive activities, such as armed attacks or kidnappings. The government has a list of people accused of those activities and they will be arrested and prosecuted if they return to Abkhazian territory. Since August 2008, five people have been killed and more than 10 injured as a result of terrorist attacks involving Georgians.
- **HOW HAS THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT IMPEDED THE SUCCESSFUL RESOLUTION OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM?**  
To begin with, Georgia's government is responsible for creating the refugee problem by its repeated and unsuccessful efforts to retake its former territories in Abkhazia and South Ossetia by force. Georgia's leaders have attempted to sabotage the resettlement process by supporting subversive activities inside Gal and harassing and intimidating Georgians who have chosen to return to Abkhazia. Georgia has also demanded that international groups freeze economic development and social programs in Abkhazia and South Ossetia or risk prosecution under Georgian law. Georgia adopted a law that makes it a crime for

representatives of international organizations to enter Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These laws have forced international groups to make a choice between working in Abkhazia or Georgia. Finally, economic sanctions imposed by Georgia, and supported by its Western backers, have made it difficult for Abkhazia to obtain the necessary funding needed to implement a successful refugee resettlement program.