

Emergency Operation in Georgia

Update, 26 August 2008

New humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Gori

Today the UNHCR staff in Gori reported a new influx of IDPs to the city of Gori from two directions. By the end of the day 365 arrivals were registered consisting of different groups:

- First, people who have fled from Georgian villages in the buffer zone north of Gori after reportedly being harassed and intimidated by Ossetian militia
- Second, would-be returnees who have started moving from Tbilisi towards the villages north of Gori but have not been able to continue due to security concerns existing in their home villages.

The IDPs who have fled the Georgian villages in the buffer zone next to the South Ossetian border told UNHCR staff that they have made the decision to leave due to massive harassment by Ossetian militias in the past two days. They claimed that the number of Ossetian militia in the Georgian villages and the brutality of their attacks has increased considerably since Sunday, 24 August.

IDPs from the village Megvrekisi, which is about 6 kilometers from the South Ossetian boundary, reported that there were only some 80 old people left in the village, as everybody else fled when the conflict broke out two weeks ago. On Sunday and Monday militias repeatedly entered to the village, looted the houses, tried to extort money and harassed the inhabitants, beating some of them up severely. This is why another 65 villagers decided to flee. They walked towards Gori in small groups and spent the night in the open.

Reports that three people were killed during the militia attacks could not be verified as yet.

Now about 15 to 20 people are said to be left behind in the village of Megvrekisi. They are the most vulnerable elderly. Villagers said that there was no electricity and not potable water when they left. In the village of Ergneti there are reportedly four people left.

A UNHCR team tried to reach the villages by the Ossetian border but advised at a Russian checkpoint not to continue as the security situation did not allow movement in the buffer zone. Also, the ICRC did not have access to those areas for one week.

The newly arriving IDPs were gathering outside the Gori municipality to be registered and transported to shelters for the night. No one had to spend the night in the open



UNHCR spearheads swift and coordinated response

UNHCR immediately started erecting a tented camp on a football ground in Gori with a capacity of 1,000 individuals. 100 tents, providing shelter for some 500 individuals, were supplied by UNHCR and the rest by the French Government. Water and electricity are being installed at the site urgently. Most of the work was done by Georgian volunteers.

The Government and the local municipality have been prompt in responding to the situation on the ground. 18 kindergartens in the city were turned into accommodation centers.

The Head of the Parliamentary Committee on IDPs, Koba Subeliani and the Head of Central Registry Agency, Giorgi Vashadze came to inspect situation in Gori and to coordinate with UNHCR.

The Italian Red Cross agreed to deliver a kitchen while other aid agencies offered hygiene kits. UNHCR is organizing emergency shipment of left over emergency kits (blankets, kitchen sets and jerry cans).