



IDP Rights Organizations Respond to Shamgona Tragedy

On April 7, the media reported tragic information of several people's washing ashore by the Enguri River near the village of Shamgona^[1]. According to the reports, the Gali district residents were trying to cross from the occupied territory to Georgian controlled territory through the Enguri River^[2]. All of them died while crossing the Enguri River.

We, signatory Organizations, extend our condolences to the deceased's families and

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express our concern at the inadequate protection of Georgian citizens' rights living in the occupied territories by state agencies. For years, NGOs have been responding to the restrictions on citizens' rights living in and around the occupied territories and the crisis situation^[3] existing there and have called on the authorities to take effective action.

As a result of the Covid-19 virus pandemic, the checkpoint's closure without any warning and indefinite time on the Enguri deprived the population of access to all basic and vital services. The closure of the so-called administrative border resulted in complete isolation of the local population and a humanitarian crisis because they did not have access to adequate medical care, food, pensions, or other necessary services^[4]. It should be noted that the state took effective measures that the beneficiaries receive pensions; in particular, at a certain time near the bridge, it became possible to withdraw money through mobile banking machines or to use Russian bank ATMs in the Gali area.

The introduction of a five-day mandatory quarantine for the population moving out of the occupied territories to receive basic services has created a new barrier in the life of the population. Refraining from crossing to the Georgian-controlled territory due to barriers and/or bypassing the so-called "border" has posed a threat to the health, economic, physical and other security of the population. The uncontrolled crossing of the dividing line to access basic services and receive social assistance has claimed the lives of many people to date^[5].

For the protection of the rights of Georgian citizens in the occupied territories we, the signatory organizations call on:

To the Government of Georgia:

- Use all possible diplomatic and international legal mechanisms to protect the rights of persons living in the occupied territories;
- Review the decision of the Government of Georgia to pass a five-day mandatory quarantine for Georgian citizens leaving the occupied territories and conduct PCR tests for the population at checkpoints, which will ensure timely and safe movement of residents;
- The government should ensure that the needs of medical facilities in the so-called frontier region in the territory controlled by Georgia are met;

- Provide simplified electronic mechanisms for the population living in the Occupied Territories to process paperwork and resume terminated social benefits.

To International Organizations:

- With the active involvement of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions and the Participants in the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism, urgently launch negotiations on the safe and unrestricted movement of people living in uncontrolled areas;
- Intensify efforts to carry out monitoring activities by their representation in the occupied territories and establish a human rights monitoring mechanism.

To Georgian Security Service:

- Investigate the causes of the tragic event promptly and identify those responsible.

IDP Women Association "Consent"

Georgian Young Lawyers Association - GYLA

Cultural-Humanitarian Found "Sukhumi"

Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts

Abkhaz Intercont Foundation

Fund of Women Entrepreneurs

Association "Peaceful and Business Caucasus"

"Center for Peace and Civic Development"

[1] InterpressNews, "Rescuers removed the bodies of 3 people from the Enguri River, they were trying to cross into the territory controlled by the Georgian government

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from Gali", 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3rXyp3p> [last viewed 07.04.2021]

[2] Statement by the State Security Service, 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/31Wn8pD> [last viewed 07.04.2021].

[3] GYLA Statement, "The Situation of People Living in the Occupied Territories is Still Alarming" 30.12.2019. Available at: <https://bit.ly/37ZcbGz> [last viewed 07.04.2021].

[4] LivePress, "Home Like a Prison - Locked in Gali", 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3t1oXxe> [last viewed 07.04.2021].

[5] Reginfo, "A nurse who came from Gali to visit a doctor died in a Covid hotel", 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3wA6gDb> [last viewed 07.04.2021].