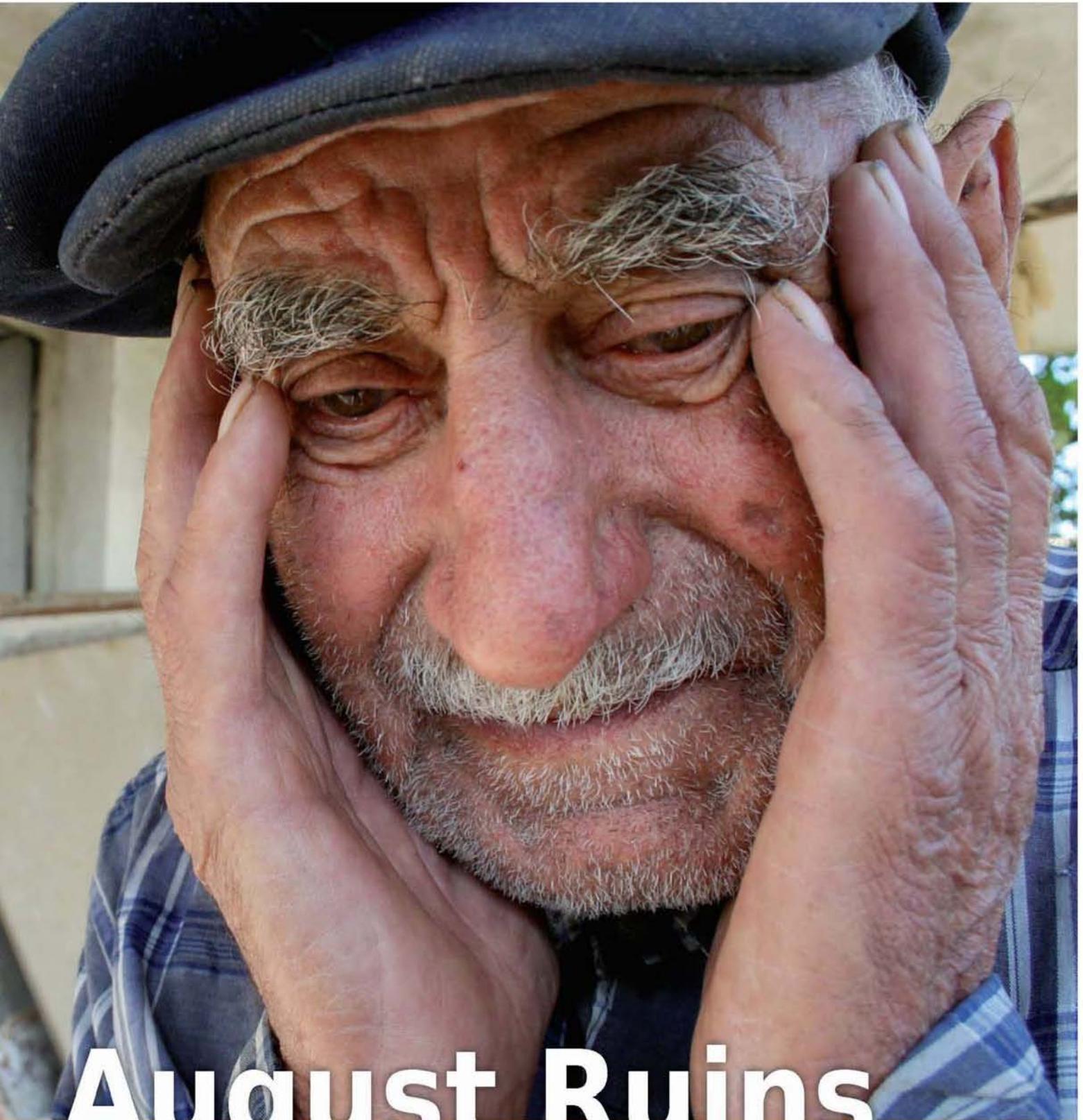


Annex E.5.1

Public



August Ruins

Report of the Georgian Non-Governmental Organizations
on Violation of Fundamental Human Rights &
International Humanitarian Law
August War, 2008



August Ruins

**Report of the Georgian Non-Governmental Organizations
on Violation of Fundamental Human Rights &
International Humanitarian Law
August War, 2008**

Participating Non-Governmental Organizations:

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association

Human Rights Center

Union „21st Century“

Union „Article 42 of the Constitution“

Center for the Protection of Constitutional Rights

TBILISI 2009



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**INFRINGEMENT OF FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS
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Besides, we would like to express special thanks to all those young people, who went to the villages of the conflict zone and, so called, “buffer zone” just after the completion of the hot phase of the war and met people, injured as a result of the war, despite the current hazards. They were the first who began collecting information and evidence and started to find out the circumstances of the crime. They were collecting information both in the places of the compact settlements and in the villages where the population returned after the Russian military forces had left. Those young people are:

Nino Khaindrava, Natia Katsitadze, Sopo Japaridze, Shorena Latatia, Ketevan Bebiashvili, Ketevan Abashidze, Nino Jomarjidze, Eka Meshveliani, Mariam Maisuradze, Tamar Abazadze, Mariam Takaishvili, Keti Aghoshashvili, Sopo Tsakadze, Giorgi Dvaladze, Vakhtang Janazashvili, Tamta Mikeladze, Eka Lomidze, Simon Papuashvili, Tea Tedliashvili, Tamar Gabisonia, Vanda Jejelava, Tamar Shotadze, Dimitri Khachidze, Rusudan Mchedlishvili, Tamta Tepnadze, Tsira Javakhishvili, Kakhaber Kakhaber, Ani Tvaradze, Neli Japaridze, Beka Kvitsiani, Natia Tsalani, Nika Legashvili, Sopo Aleksidze, Rati Abakelia, Lasha Chincharauli, Ana Loria, Kakha Kvashilava, Aleksandre Noselidze, Koba Bochorishvili, Besik Kaishauri, Nino Tsereteli, Paata Gachechiladze, Vazha Eradze, Ana Chapide, Soso Janashia, Akaki Samkharadze, Emzar Paksadze, Davit Metreveli.

We wish to express special thanks to all those people who could create the photo and video evidences of the war and its results during the hardest days of August. Unfortunately, the names and surnames of those people are unknown to us in many cases. During the preparation of the foregoing report all that photo and video material, found by us online, had great importance as a visual evidence to many stories told us by our respondents. Since in most cases the names and surnames of the authors of those photo material are unknown to us, once more we would like to thank each of them for installing their work into online open resources and their availability.

Finally, we would like to express gratitude to all the persecuted people who, in spite of the great pain, found strength in themselves to talk to us about their grief. We also thank the inhabitants of Ergneti village, whose help was of great importance for the checking up facts and filling in the lacking information in the final stage of the work.

METHODOLOGY

Present work came to life based on the materials collected by the Georgian non-governmental organizations **Georgian Young Lawyers' Association**, **Human Rights Center**, **Union "21st Century"**, **Union "Article 42 of the Constitution"**, **Center for Protection of Constitutional Rights**, and researchers selected by them. The work is significant also in that it is the result of rapid and organized actions of Georgian Human Rights NGOs aimed at documenting in a coordinated manner the breach of norms of human rights law and humanitarian law immediately after the end of the war. Remarkably, organizations involved in the project continue defending the interests of up to 400 war victims in the European Court of Human Rights.

At that, preparing the book would have been impossible without an ardent desire to restore justice, which was constantly felt in the attitude of persons who had survived the war. Their assistance was crucial in the establishment of facts and verification of information.

Throughout the work on the present document we tried to collect to a maximum extent and analyze fully the materials, which depict the 2008 conflict. To this end, materials were processed based on special methodology that we have developed and through application of fact-comparison technology.

The document is based primarily on the interviews with IDPs and personal stories. We created the area, where persons affected by the conflict tell about their tragedy themselves, as the conflict dynamics, motivation of the parties, and the scale of the tragedy are illustrated the best in the stories of the conflict victims. All other materials that were obtained through open resources were used for verifying these very stories and specifying the facts.

We tried to use all available means to verify each fact and detail communicated to us during the interviews. In this process we got familiar with 21 reports published by various Georgian and international organizations after the conflict, various materials and information published by the Government of Georgia over year and a half, statistical data of the State Department for Statistics and the Ossetian on-line sources, post-2002 data of various elections held in Georgia (to check the dynamics of population movement), daily reports of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and reports of the OSCE Observer Mission publicly available on-line, satellite imagery, maps and surveys, media reports and facts covered by the Georgian, Russian, and Western media directly from the conflict, documents available on web pages of various state agencies of Georgia, documentation, testimonies, and final reports submitted with the "Interim Parliamentary Commission Studying the Military Aggression and Other Actions of the Russian Federation to Undermine Territorial Integrity of Georgia" of the Parliament of Georgia, and finally, the report and attached documentary materials of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, set up under the aegis of the European Union.

On one hand, upon the request of “Amnesty International”, a research was conducted by the Human Rights Department of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, whose photographs, maps, and analysis are combined in the report published on 9 October 2008 “High-Resolution Satellite Imagery and the Conflict in South Ossetia”, while on the other hand, similar comparative analysis of satellite imagery was conducted by the UN special agency UNOSAT, whose information, including the attached imagery and maps, is also available on-line.

The American Association for the Advancement of Science conducted its research on approximately 1,000 square kilometers, including town of Tskhinvali and its neighboring 24 villages. Objective was to assess the degree of demolition and destruction of civil infrastructure. Southern and Eastern parts of Tskhinvali fell within the cover zone. Satellite materials were obtained in full for the two dates, for 10 August 2008, when the Georgian armed forces have withdrawn, Tskhinvali and its adjacent territories have already been abandoned and fighting has no longer occurred except very minor occasional clashes. Second date is 19 August 2008, when the cease-fire agreement is already in force and, accordingly, any violence should be over. Of concern here is the remark of the authors of the study that the analysis is not perfect and that due to cloudiness in part of the territories, distinguishing a real picture proved to be almost impossible. Owing to this reason, the analysis of number of villages, for instance Tkviavi, Shua-Khelchua, and Karbi was conducted only partially. In light of the latter information, the analysis of 24 settlement points examined by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and inspection of available factual material it can be concluded that during the period from the launch of military hostilities, i.e. 7 August until 19 August, 626 objects were destroyed in the so-called Tskhinvali Region. Out of these, only 202 were destroyed before 10 August including 182 in the town of Tskhinvali, while 424 objects were destroyed on 10-19 August, when the Georgian troops were no longer present in these territories and the military activities have ended.

Similar information is contained in the second satellite material, which was studied by the UN ad-hoc organization UNOSAT, and which will be discussed in detail during the description of respective villages.¹

Mentioned documents have pivotal importance for the purposes of our report, as they enable us to verify the testimonies given by the IDPs and compare concrete, visual materials with other pieces of information at our disposal. Accordingly, these two documents will be used numerously in the present report when discussing the respective villages and the damage inflicted to them.

At the outset we have to note regrettably that our work concerns only the events unfolding in the territory of former South Ossetian Autonomous District and its adjacent territories in the Shida Kartli Region and does not extend to the events of the Kodori Gorge during the August 2008 war, due to the scarcity of information.

1 www.aaas.org/international/geotech/ge/georgia.kml; Further, www.unosat.org

Further, due to restricted movement in the conflict zone we could not access the facts, evidence and information in the possession of the Ossetian side, as well as verifying the facts available in open resources proved to be impossible. For this very reason, present work concerns only those facts and events that we were able to verify and specify. In case of such possibilities, we are ready to visit the other side of a conditional border, listen to the eye-witnesses, examine the facts, verify them through other available sources and resources, and offer the impartial analysis to the interested audience.

Immediately upon completion of the active hostilities, already on 15 August our researchers visited the compact settlements of IDPs and started searching and collecting the initial information. Special questionnaire was developed right at the first phase of the project: *"Questionnaire for systematization of information in the interviews conducted with the victims for description of damage inflicted to the population as a result of August 2008 conflict"* (see Annex #1), which gave us the possibility to confine the information into a unified system and, accordingly, to verify facts contained therein.

Notably, despite of the uniform form of questionnaires, in number of cases information is incomplete. For instance, date and place of interviews are missing, names and nicknames are not specified, etc. On some occasions information is very scarce and contains only general info on start of war and damage inflicted on a village, while a story of a specific family is missing. There are cases when owing to a hard stress and shock caused by the war and its consequences people exaggerate facts, etc. It has to be stressed that one of the reasons of flawed materials obtained by the organizations lies also in the fact that at the first stage of search of information each organization was focused on various issues, which in itself led to abundant information in some one area. For this very and other similar reasons, it is crucial for us that each fact, which was used in the present document, was fundamentally verified through all available factual materials and sources. To this end, on many occasions our researchers and author of the work have visited the affected villages to verify the facts (obviously the territories, which are accessible to the citizens of Georgia). At the final stage of the study, in October-November 2009, several additional visits were paid to the conflict zone to specify last details and verify the known facts with eye-witnesses.

Interviews with approximately 1,294 families were recorded during the first stage of the study. Initial interviews were recorded mainly in the centers of compact settlement, due to which they are relatively chaotic and very emotional. At that, in number of cases information is not read in full (in approximately 18% of questionnaires). Therefore, at the second stage of the project, namely from March through October 2009, majority of interviews was specified and more detailed information was obtained. Accordingly, as a result of verifying the information, the study was based on the stories of 1,055 families, which, pursuant to the information available in the questionnaires (indication of number of family members was foreseen), overall comprises the stories of 4,721 persons.

Distribution of interviews by organizations is provided clearly in the tables below (Table #1 and Table #2), illustrating number of respondents by the status of questionnaires.²

Table #1: *Distribution of claimants by the organizations and status of filling the questionnaire*

Organization		Number of Questionnaires	Percentage
1	Georgian Young Lawyers' Association	343	32.51%
2	Union "Article 42"	323	30.62%
3	Human Rights Center	83	7.87%
4	Center for the Protection of Constitutional Rights	87	8.25%
5	Union „21 st Century“	214	20.28%
99	Others	5	0.47%
TOTAL		1055	100%

On the bases of the information provided by 1055 families, we have managed to bring the following information to the interested parties, systematized by the damage:

² Tables demonstrate that the filled questionnaires fall mainly on three organizations - Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), "Article 42 of the Constitution", and "21st Century" - more than 80% of total number of filled questionnaires. Same organizations are leaders in respect of number of potential respondents as well, however the distribution is somewhat different. Georgian Young Lawyers' Association distinguishes from leader organizations by "lossless" work, which has managed to fill in the 99% of questionnaires of potential respondents and provide full information. Major reason of failure to fill in the questionnaires by other organizations lied in the fact that receiving full testimonies during the initial visit of victims was impossible, whereas the repeated visits were paid to only those who had consented to applying to the court. In several occasions victims themselves refused to use their interviews in the present work and attempt to recover losses through the court, as in their opinion this opportunity was devoid of any prospects.

Table #2: Volume of damages incurred by the family members of a respondent

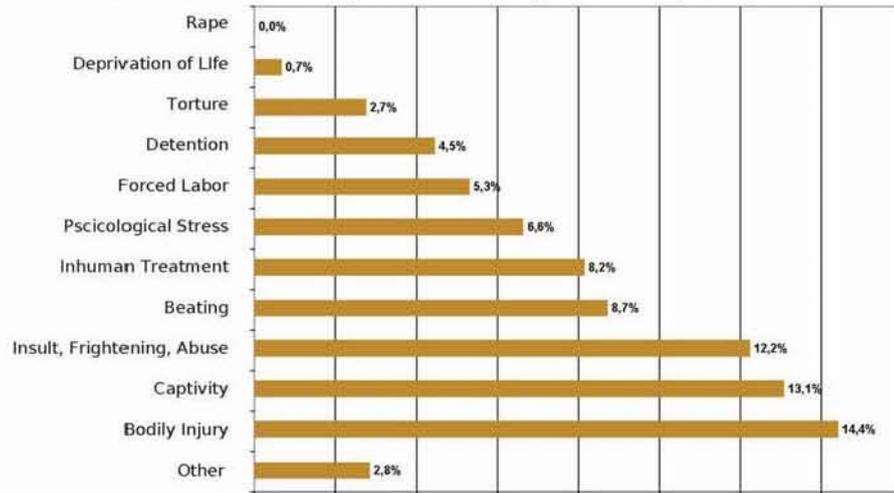


Table #3: Volume of damages incurred personally by the respondent

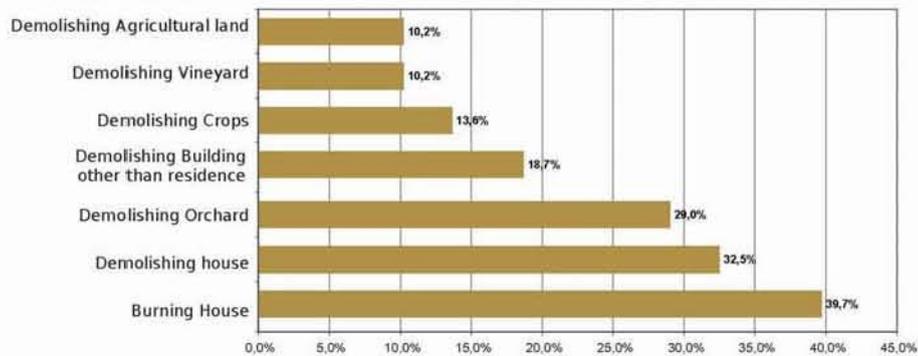


Table #4: 20 localities where the most of the damage has been identified by the respondent

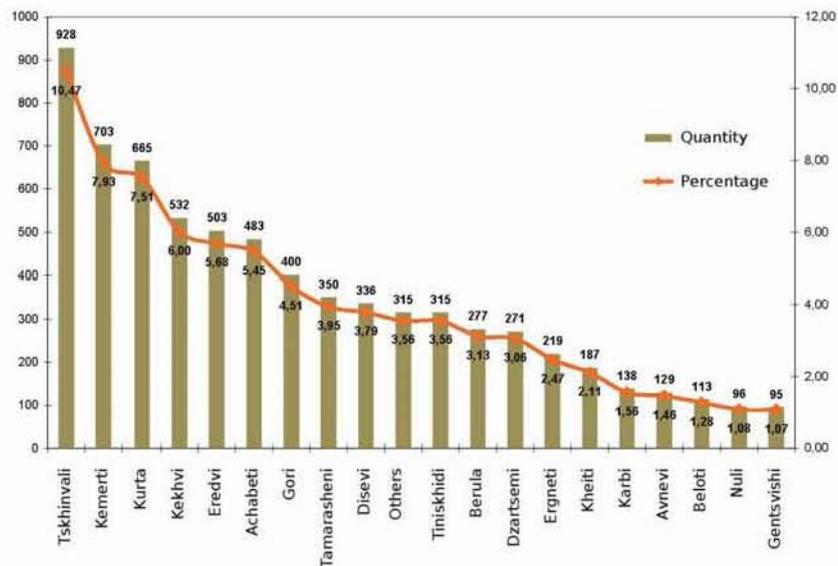
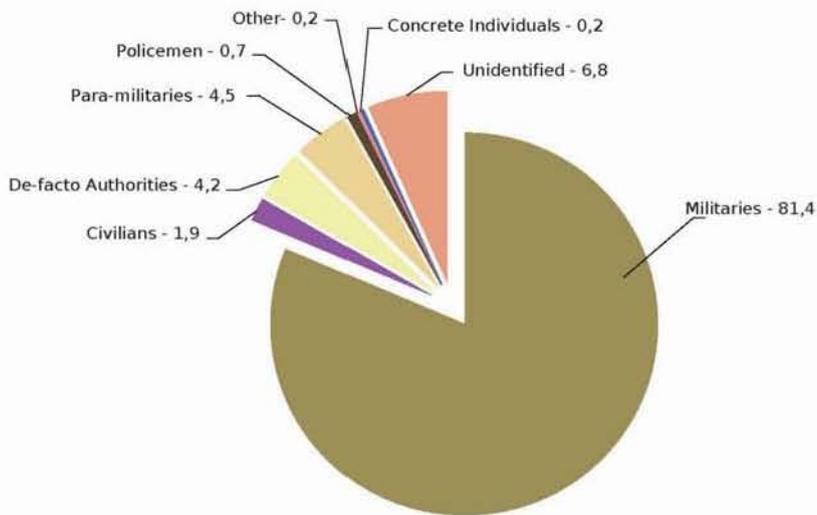
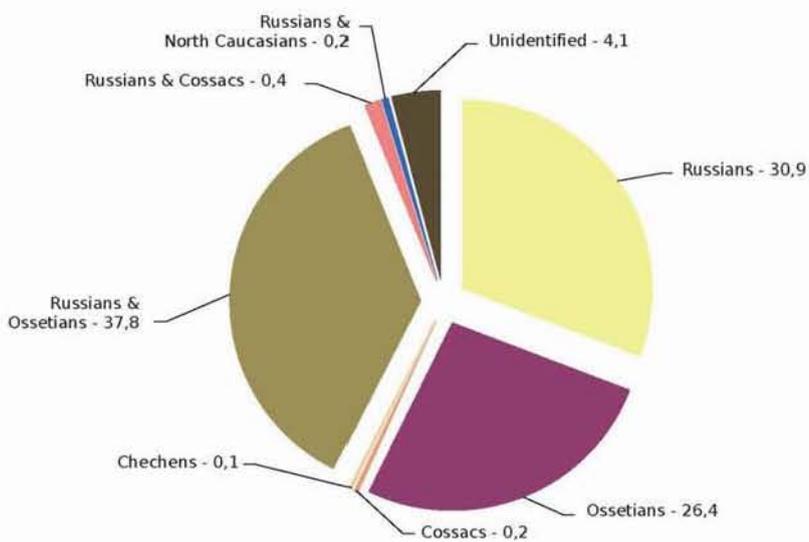


Table #4: *Violators identified by the respondents by institutional belonging***Table #5:** *Violators identified by the respondents by ethnic origin*

We have united the problems identified by persons interviewed by us under several major categories, which are recounted in the present work. These are:

- Deprivation of life;
- Bombardment of villages and civilian population;
- Destruction of property;
- Destruction of villages;
- Persecution and expulsion on ethnic grounds;
- Captivity and treatment during the captivity.

| INTRODUCTION • CHRONOLOGY OF CONFLICT |



- 1.1. Introduction
- 1.2. Positive Dynamics - Main Bait
- 1.3. Status of South Ossetian Autonomous District within the state of Georgia
- 1.4. Legal Overview
- 1.5. Chronology of Conflict Development
- 1.6. After the Rose Revolution
- 1.7. Year 2008 - Mounting Confrontation
- 1.8. Georgia - August 2008



1

Georgia is a small country, with the small territory and small population. Shida Kartli is even a smaller spot on the Earth. Accordingly, the scale of our tragedy will never equate with the genocide in Rwanda, ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia, and the tragedy of Darfur and Cambodia. Yet, it is impossible and unjust to legitimize anyone's release from responsibility due to the size of the territory or population.

If the crime has been committed, issues of liability have to be addressed. International law and the protection mechanisms set up by the democratic world have to be applied equally in all instances and regardless of the size and influence of this or that state.

Undermining the world order and operating under double standards will eventually lead mankind to much graver consequences than depriving tens of thousands of afflicted Georgian IDPs a possibility to establish their own truth and restore their rights.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The "frozen conflict" in the South Caucasus in August 2008 left many politicians, journalists, and researchers with a feeling of a resumption of a cold war, the reemergence of many other problems forgotten and abandoned in the past, and new challenges and threats.

During and following the five-day August war, articles emphasizing international threats took the dominant position in the world media. Here are some portions of media coverage of the 2008 August war, for demonstration of dominant mood of those days.

The French "**Le Monde**" wrote on 12 August that "this was the Russian revenge", which revealed the weaknesses of Europe.

The left-liberal Austrian daily "**der Standard**" wrote on 9 August: "In South Ossetia the stakes are no less than the defense against a post-soviet imperialism", while on 16 August it rang the alarm bell by writing "the Baltic states and Ukraine will be the next".

In the 11 August edition the Swiss conservative newspaper "**Neue Zürcher Zeitung**" directly pointed to Russia's actions in South Ossetia by saying "we recognize this from Chechnya".³

On 25 August, 2008 Journal "Times" addressed the issue of Russian-Georgian war with an article of Zbigniew Brzezinski, "How to Stop a New Cold War. What does the Russian invasion in Georgia tell us about today's world?"⁴ On 12 August "**Time**" published several articles - "Continuation of Cold War", "Russia Starts Fighting", and on 27 August - "New (Old) Russian Imperialism", while on 22 August it was asking in an alarming tone "Are Russians Coming or Going?"

"**The Economist**" wrote about Russian imperialism on 16 August as well: "Once Georgia was a pearl of its empire, and Russia psychologically never managed to accept it as a sovereign state. Nostalgia for the Soviet Empire is a long-term leitmotif of the Russian ideology".

The "**Washington Post**" criticized Russian politics and wrote on 11 August: "at least now the West will know who Vladimir Putin is". An article of similar content, written by one of the leaders of the Russian opposition Gari Kasparov was published on 15 August in "**The Wall Street Journal**", "How the West Fueled Putin's Sense of Impunity".⁵ The same newspaper wrote on 29 August in the article "Russia and the New "Axis of



3 See, Prof. Hans-Georg Heinrich, Kirill Tanaev: „Georgia & Russia: Contradictory Media Coverage of the August War“, Caucasus Review of International Affairs, From Vol. 3 (3) - Summer 2009 at http://www.cria-online.org/8_2.html

4 See, Zbigniew Brzezinski, "How to Stop a New Cold War", August, 25, 2008, at <http://www.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20080825,00.html>

5 See, Garry Kasparov, „How the West Fueled Putin's Sense of Impunity“, August 15, 2008, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121876037443642795.html>

Evil" - "With Russian tanks now presiding over the dismemberment of the Republic of Georgia, can a lame-duck Bush administration -- weary from its long drubbing by critics over Iraq and eyeing the exit door -- rise to the challenge Russia has chosen to pose to the Free World?"⁶

On 14 August **"Time"** wrote "large states dislike strengthening of other large states. A trap was set up in Georgia". In the author's opinion, Russia set up this trap in Georgia for the US.⁷

The US **"New York Times"** wrote on 11 August: "The list of ways a more hostile Russia could cause problems for the United States extends far beyond Syria and the mountains of Georgia".⁸ In the same article newspaper send working to Western leaders: "Russian troops stepped up their advance into Georgian territory on Monday, attempting to turn back the clock to the days when Moscow held uncontested sway over what it considers its "near abroad," and arousing increasing alarm among Western leaders."

Following Russia's invasion in Georgia, many analysts asked directly whether the world was on the verge of a new cold war.⁹ Western media immediately started comparing the August War to Brezhnev's "Prague Spring" and Hitler's operations carried out in 1938. **"The Economist"** magazine wrote on 16 August - "brutal and effective action was Vladimir Putin's victory over not only Georgia, but the West as well". Obviously, the West was more concerned after the President Medvedev's statement of 26 August - "we are not afraid of anything, including the prospect of a new Cold War".¹⁰

This is a very brief overview of the sea of materials that appeared in western media in August 2008 and throughout entire fall that followed. The absolute majority of articles stressed the threats that the five-day war created for the rest of the world, Russo-American relations, and vast geo-political interests.

It would be unfair not to mention that there were articles of different type as well, which considered the analogies of a "Cold War" and the aggression of Soviet troops in Eastern Europe as excessive.¹¹ Nevertheless, such material was clearly dominated by reviews and analyses with distinctly anti-Russian tendencies. Critiques and questions towards the Georgian side were heard here and there in August-September but intensified later in October-November when mili-

6 See, Arthur Herman, "Russia and the New Axis of Evil", The Wall Street Journal, August 29, 2008; at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121997069397081905.html>

7 "Vladimir Putin's mastery checkmates the West. Russia has been biding its time, but its victory in Georgia has been brutal - and brilliant" by Michael Binyon at Time, August 14, 2008.

8 See, Helene Cooper, „Russia Steps Up Its Push; West Faces Tough Choices“, August 11, 2008, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/12/world/europe/12dipl.html>

9 *The End of the Frozen Cold War?*, by Vladimer Papava, at Caucasus Review of the International Affairs, vol. 3 (1) - Winter, 2009.

10 *Georgia: the war in words*, Key quotes from the crisis, by IISS, at www.iiss.org/dtratcom

11 See the statement of the President of Czech Republic Klaus: "I refuse to accept this widespread, simplified interpretation which paints the Georgians as the victims and the Russians as the villains. ", He has publicly rejected all comparison with the events of Prague in 1968. „Czech political scene split over Georgia,“ 15-08-2008, by Daniela Lazarová, <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/107261>

tary confrontation halted and journalists and analysts were given a possibility of more in-depth thinking and analysis.

Regardless of the tendency towards historical analogies and threats of a resumption of the cold war, and despite the spirit of the discussion and diverse account of threats, one thing that virtually everyone agreed with was that the five-day war **"drove the Russo-American relations to its lowest scale after the toughest days of the cold war"**.¹² Real and in-depth discussions concerned these Russo-American relations. Geopolitical complications and the possible expansion of the conflict that emerged in the Caucasus Mountains became the subject of disquiet and concern of the world, which made the European leaders visit Tbilisi one by one, whereas the conflict itself, the human tragedy and devastated villages, turned into a second-rank problem or a necessary damage accompanying the war. On 14 August 2008 *"Times"* magazine wrote - **"From the day that the Russian tank brigade raced through the tunnel into South Ossetia, Russia has not made one wrong move. ... The attack was short, sharp and deadly - enough to send the Georgians fleeing in humiliating panic, their rout captured by global television. The destruction was enough to hurt, but not so much that the world would be roused in fury. The timing of the ceasefire was precise: just hours before President Sarkozy could voice Western anger."**¹³ This perspective was typical of the reporting and international perspective.

According to Georgian wisdom, "one can see the road only when the cart flips over", and unfortunately, the unfolding conflict in the territory of the former South Ossetian District appeared at the heart of attention of world media and big politics after the tragic flip of the cart. "Interest in these so-called frozen conflicts remained minimal. The territorial woes of post-Soviet Eurasia did not raise eyebrows, except among a small set of midlevel policy specialists inside government and in academia. The region's unrecognized republics were places the world could conveniently ignore so long as no one was being killed to defeat or defend them"¹⁴, says Charles King in article "The Five-Day War".

It is hard for the objective and more or less informed person about the conflicts in South Caucasus not to agree with such an assessment. It was possibly during the very hot August days that many in the West discovered that in very close proximity to them there were somnolent but exposed spots, which due to constant ignorance, the postponement of a search for solutions (leaving it to local players only), would surely become active as the result of even the smallest stimulus. The attitude did not change after the events of 2004 summer either when the situation became tense in the territory of South Ossetia, followed by first casualties. An improper assessment of the threat, ignorance of the problem, and groundless reassurance of the in-

12 The Five-Day War, managing Moscow after the Georgia Crisis, by Charles King; at *Foreign Policy*, November/December, 2008.

13 *"Vladimir Putin's mastery checkmates the West. Russia has been biding its time, but its victory in Georgia has been brutal - and brilliant"* by Michael Binyon at *Time*, August 14, 2008.

14 The Five-Day War, managing Moscow after the Georgia Crisis, by Charles King; *Foreign Policy*, November/December, 2008.

ternational community that small casualties taught all major players a bitter lesson led the civilized world in 2008 to the verge of a cold war.

1.2. POSITIVE DYNAMICS - MAIN BAIT

The conflict in the former South Ossetian Autonomous District should have been one of the most engaging in terms of studying and analyzing due to its dynamics. During 15 years after the end of hostilities in 1991, progress and recession, tensions and ostentatious peace interchanged, but the most significant difference between the situation in Georgia and similar conflicts was probably the fact that prior to the events of summer 2004, the war, blood, confrontation, hatred and resentments receded for the local population in their everyday life, and the tendencies of co-living, mutual understanding, and mutual need were dominant.

Georgians and Ossetians, like children who just stood on their feet, tried to co-live; they returned to one classroom, they underwent treatment in one hospital (be it in Gori or Tskhinvali), they traded together, in many villages mixed ethnic composition was restoring, and traveling in both directions across administrative borders was mainly safe. Consistent peaceful politics pursued by Georgian authorities and appropriate attempts of the international community could have yielded efficient and effective results. Yet, the very warm human relations, confidence-building, and intense attempt of Georgian and Ossetian peasants to co-live peacefully turned out to be the bait, which distracted everyone's attention and shifted more emphasis towards a more complex conflict in Abkhazia.

International organizations, academic and analytical centers paid less attention to the problems in Tskhinvali. The same can be said of their Georgian colleagues. We could say that the positive dynamics of the everyday life became a tempting bait for the Georgian authorities as well, which led us to the edge of war first in the summer of 2004 and in 2006, and later in August 2008 to the full-scale war affair.

The current situation is different in principle and the conflict has entered a new phase. In August 2008, the frozen conflict entered an active military phase just in few days and then turned into the occupation of a sovereign state by Russia. Result of 15 years of work for the resolution of the conflict in South Ossetia was brought by combination of various factors: ignorance of the difficulty of a political content of the conflict; inconsistent actions of the Georgian government; non-existence of long-term plans; insufficient attention to the conflict from the "friends of Georgia" internationally; arbitrary actions of the Russian "peace-keepers"; Russian imperialistic politics and actions in South Ossetia and finally, lawlessness on the side of South Ossetian irregulars throughout the frozen phase of the conflict.

Despite the end of hostilities, past experience prompts us that the authorities and the international community and society need to undertake huge efforts in order to keep the situation under control and avoid even graver outcomes.

1.3. STATUS OF SOUTH OSSETIAN AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT WITHIN THE STATE OF GEORGIA

This present work does not aim to draw a detailed analysis of the Georgian-Ossetian centuries-old relations. Nevertheless, in order to achieve a complete understanding of the 2008 August events, its results, and legal structure, it is important to outline which preconditions existed in the Soviet Georgia, how we ended up with the conflict and how it has developed in the South Ossetian Autonomous District, the dynamics of the conflict after the end of the first war of 90ies, the events of and post 2004 summer, and the period directly preceding the five-day war in August 2008.

a) Geography

The South Ossetian Autonomous District was set up within Georgia in 1922. Defined in detail at the time were the frontiers of the Autonomous District, the bodies of the authorities, their competences, and its relations with Tbilisi (See *Annex 2*).

The South Ossetian Autonomous District is located at the northern border of Georgia, on 3,700 thousand sq.m, of the southern slope of the Caucasian Range, and borders Russia, specifically Autonomous Republic of North Ossetia to the North. South Ossetia is connected with Russia through Roki Channel, which was built 1985 by the Soviets. Population is located mainly along the rivers and prior to the conflict density was high, as the most of the territory is mountainous.

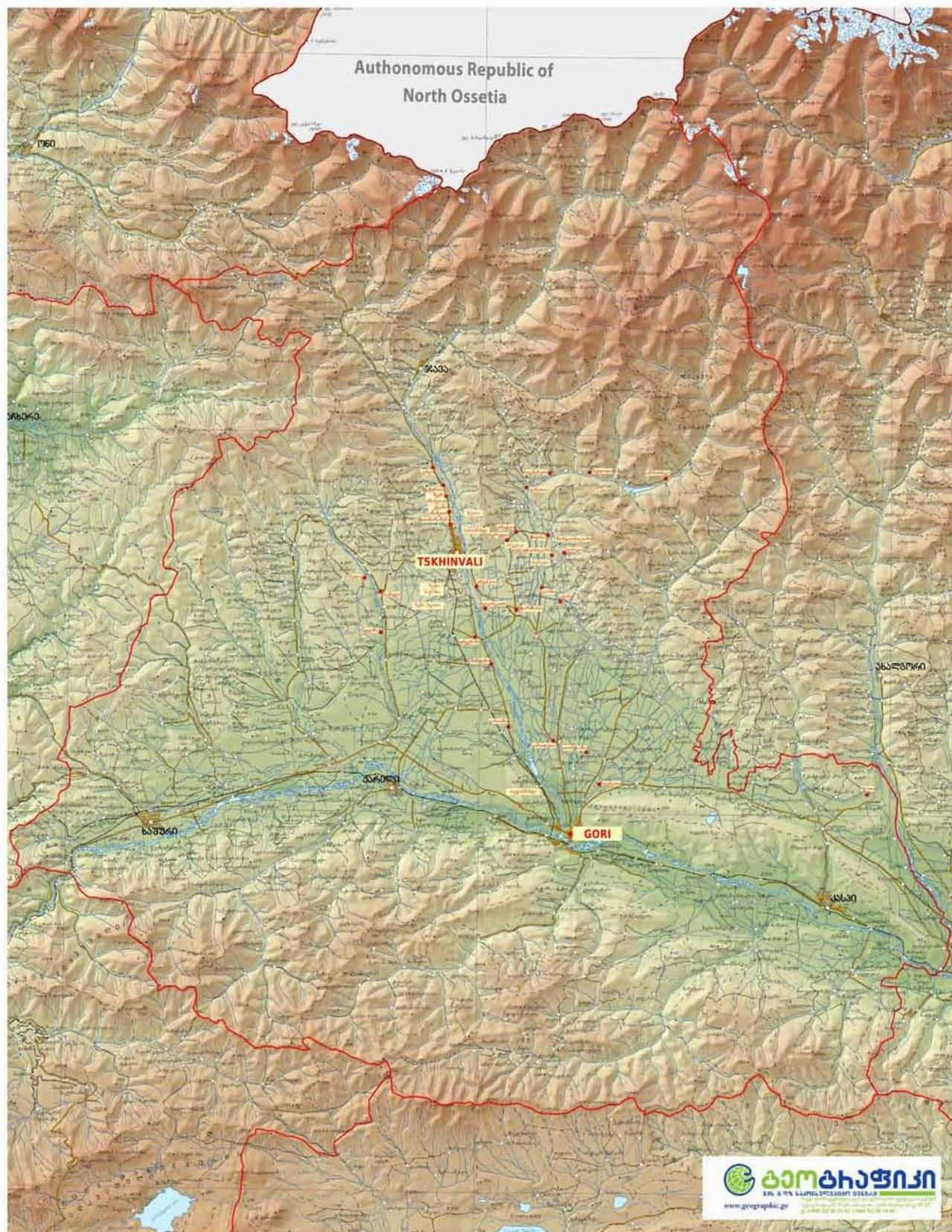
The capital city of the former Autonomous District of South Ossetia is Tskhinvali. It stands as the most important city today as well. Ethnic composition of the city was mixed and most importantly, it was surrounded by the ethnically Georgian villages from all sides.

Prior to the conflict in 1990s, approximately two-thirds of the District population was ethnically Ossetian. Georgians, who made up 30 percent of the population, resided mainly in the eastern part of the District, in the Akhalkgori District and its adjacent territories, around Tskhinvali and in the villages adjacent to Gori District, at the Southern part of South Ossetia. The Ossetians lived in the central and western territories. North of the District, mountainous territories were less populated. Yet, this division was still conditional, as here, just like in Georgia as a whole, Ossetians and Georgians lived together in the same villages and same neighborhoods and often in mixed families.

During the last full-scale census conducted in Georgia in 2002, due to the obvious reasons it was impossible to cover fully the territories of former South Ossetian Autonomy, and therefore various researchers, when discussing the statistics and demography, often use the data of the last Soviet census in 1989.

However, the same 2002 census provides important information about some territories of a former District, which was under the control of Georgian

Shida Kartli, Georgia (including South Ossetia)



authorities, including the Akhagori District almost entirely. The latter, was fully integrated in Georgia proper and administratively was attached to the Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region by 2002. Pursuant to the data of the same census, villages under Georgian control around Tskhinvali and elsewhere in South Ossetia were allocated administratively to the Gori and Kareli Districts.

Statistical data on population, which we use in the present materials, are based on the results of these two censuses (1989 and 2002). On one hand we tried to compare these two statistical bases, while on the other hand, as a complementary tool to demonstrate the dynamics of demographic changes, we used in addition the data of various national elections held after 2002.

Table 6: Data of population census conducted in the South Ossetian Autonomous District of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic by years and ethnic belonging¹⁵

Nationality	1926 Census	1939 Census	1959 Census	1970 Census	1979 Census	1989 Census
Ossetian	60,351 (69.1%)	72,266 (68.1%)	63,698 (65.8%)	66,073 (66.5%)	65,077 (66.4%)	65,200 (66.2%)
Georgian	23,538 (26.9%)	27,525 (25.9%)	26,584 (27.5%)	28,125 (28.3%)	28,187 (28.8%)	28,700 (29.0%)
Russian	157 (0.2%)	2,111 (2.0%)	2,380 (2.5%)	1,574 (1.6%)	2,046 (2.1%)	2,128 (2.1%)
Armenian	1,374 (1.6%)	1,537 (1.4%)	1,555 (1.6%)	1,254 (1.3%)	953 (1.0%)	871 (1.21%)
Jew	1,739 (2.0%)	1,979 (1.9%)	1,723 (1.8%)	1,485 (1.5%)	654 (0.7%)	648 (0.9%)
Other	216 (0.2%)	700 (0.7%)	867 (0.9%)	910 (0.9%)	1,071 (1.1%)	1,400 (1.4%)
Total	87,375	106,118	96,807	99,421	97,988	99,000

Comparison of the outcomes of last three censuses provides interesting information on various ethnic groups, including the Ossetians, living overall in Georgia. As the second table demonstrates, only 40 percent of Ossetians residing in Georgia lived on the territory of a former Autonomous District. The rest was spread all over the country, including in the capital city Tbilisi.

15 Yearly Journal of the Department of Statistics: 1989 "Data of population census conducted in the South Ossetian Autonomous District of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic by years and ethnic belonging"

Table 7: Ethnic composition of the population of Georgia under the data of population censuses¹⁶

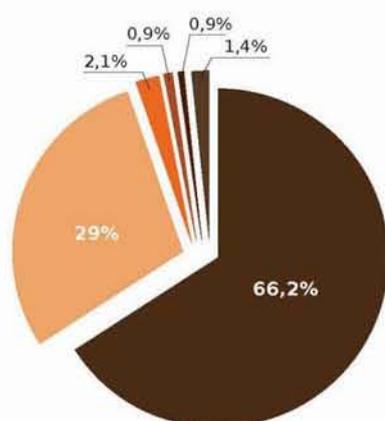
	Thousand persons				Percent in respect of total population			
	1959	1979	1989	2002	1959	1979	1989	2002
Total population	4044,0	4993,2	5400,8	4371,5	100	100	100	100
Georgian	2600,6	3433,0	3787,4	3661,2	64,3	68,8	70,1	83,8
Abkhazian	62,9	85,3	95,9	3,5	1,6	1,7	1,8	0,1
Ossetian	141,2	160,5	164,1	38,0	3,5	3,2	3,0	0,9
Russian	407,9	371,6	341,2	67,7	10,1	7,4	6,3	1,5
Ukrainian	52,2	45,0	52,4	7,0	1,8	0,9	1,0	0,2
Azerbaijani	153,6	255,7	307,6	284,8	3,8	5,1	5,7	6,5
Armenian	442,9	448,0	437,2	248,9	11,0	9,0	8,1	5,7
Jew	51,6	28,3	24,8	3,8	1,3	0,6	0,5	0,1
Greek	72,9	95,1	100,3	15,2	1,8	1,9	1,9	0,3
Kurd	16,2	25,7	33,3	20,8	0,4	0,5	0,6	0,5

16 Yearly Journal of the Department of Statistics: 2002

b) Population in the Territory of Former Autonomous District – Pre-War Statistics

Demography Before the War

To identify the crimes committed in August 2008, it is absolutely necessary to demonstrate the full picture of ethnic composition. It is important to answer simple questions: what part of the population was ethnically Georgian, what forced them to leave and was their flight from the homeland result of persecution, forceful, illegal actions on ethnic grounds or a revenge for the first war of 90ies only against small part of the population.



Ossetian	65,200
Georgian	28,700
Russian	2,178
Armenian	871
Jew	648
Other	1,400

Pursuant to the last Soviet census in 1989, which at the same time a last full-scale census was conducted in the territory of the South Ossetian Autonomous District,¹⁷ the District population amounted to a total of 99 thousand. Among them, the rural population constituted 49,074 thousand people. The District comprised approximately 478 villages, out of which were 246 villages in the Akhagori District only. According to the data of the same census, 66.2% of population was ethnically Ossetian, while the Georgians constituted 1/3 of the population, i.e. 29%.

Territories under the control of Authorities of South Ossetia

Prior to the 2008 August war, according to various sources, including the Ossetian ones, there is varying information relating to the population composition. According to Ossetian sources, 72 thousand people lived in the part of the District territory controlled by the separatists, among them about 80% were ethnic Ossetians.¹⁸ Comparing various data, we get the following picture prior to the war the whole population of the territory under the control of South Ossetian authorities was approximately 70,000 people, among which the majority, about 47,000, i.e. 67%, are ethnic Ossetians, 17,000, i.e. 25%, are Georgians, and the rest – representatives of other nationalities, Russians, Armenians etc.

Territories under the control of Georgian Authorities

Under the 2002 census data, which partially covered the former District territory, 5,281 people resided in the Akhagori District, which at the time belonged to the Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region.

17 Due to obvious reasons, the 2002 census conducted in Georgia did not cover the territory of the former autonomous district. Exceptions in this respect were almost entire Akhagori (former Leningori) District, which was attached to Mtskheta-Mtianeti and was controlled by the Georgian state, and those Georgian villages, where the Georgian control was exercised also and which were merged with the Gori and Kareli Districts. For example, the Beloti, Berula, Artsevi, Ksuisi, and other Sakrebulo of the Gori District. Further, a small part of the Java District, particularly villages of the Sinaguri village council: Perevi, Sinaguri, Tedeleti, Jalabeti, Khakheti, Zemo and Kvemo Karzmani and Tbeti.

18 see, <http://presidentrso.ru/republic/>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Ossetia; Information about the ethnic composition of South Ossetia is often confusing. According to the information disseminated by "Ria Novosti" in August 2008, 80,000 Russian citizens resided in this territory, a figure that seems exaggerated when compared to other sources. According to the BBC, this population did not exceed 70,000. For more information see <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20080811/115961365.html>; as well as Regions and Territories: South Osetia, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Europe/country_profiles/3797729.stm

in accordance with the information of the Department for Statistics of Georgia, as of 1 January 2009, 7,600 people were already registered in the Akhgori Municipality, and 14,500 people in the Tighvi (Prone Gorge), Kurta (Big Liakhvi Gorge), and Eredvi (Small Liakhvi Gorge) Municipalities.¹⁹ This was the very municipality which was a part of the interim administration.

By the municipalities:

7,100 people lived in the Big Liakhvi Gorge, Georgian villages within the Kurta Municipality – Tamarasheni, Zemo Achabeti, Kvemo Achabeti, Kurta, Kekhvi, Kemerti, Dzarsemi, Kheiti, Sveri. Slightly less, 5,900 lived in the Small Liakhvi Gorge, Georgian villages of the Eredvi community – Eredvi, Berula, Disevi, Ksuisi, Vanati, Beloti, Ergnet-Mamissant District, Zemo Artsevi, Charebi, Satskheneti. The smallest number of the population – total of 1,500 people – resided in the Prone Gorge, i.e. Georgian villages of the Tighva Municipality – Avnevi, Nuli, Arketi, Mtiliana, Akhalsheni, Khunda District, Kvemo Okoni, Lopani.

As a result of the August war, 13,260 IDPs were registered in the Civil Registry Agency out of these three municipalities, which means that a vast majority of Georgians left their homes.

State of Georgian Population during Hostilities and in Coming Days and Months

Oppression, ousting from homes and persecution of Georgians continued even after the official cease fire and completion of the hot phase of the conflict. This fact is affirmed in the report of the International Fact-Finding Mission on the conflict in Georgia. Satellite imagery used in our report, coupled with the interviews of the IDP population and the photo-video material obtained in September-November, is convincing evidence of this conclusion.

Russian military forces, separatist militia and representatives of various formations forcefully put hundreds of Georgians – especially the elderly who refused to leave native hearth and villages – into trucks and left them on the other side of the control check points, or, under a worse scenario, took them to Tskhinvali as hostages to exchange with the war prisoners.

The information on 26 August of the “Reports of Lawlessness, Creating New Forcible Displacement in Georgia” of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reads:

“Approximately 400 people gathered in the center of Gori throughout the day, who were forced to leave their homes today (August 26, 2008. Author). The newly displaced said that some had been beaten, harassed and robbed, and that three persons had reportedly been killed. The marauders were re-

¹⁹ “Population size in Georgia according to self-governing units (by January 1,2009)”, Information bulletin of Statistics Department of Georgia, 2009

portedly operating in the so called buffer zone established along the boundary line with South Ossetia.²⁰

The BBC channel informed us of a similar story, but on 25 August. Finnish Foreign Minister and Chairman in office of the OSCE **Alexander Stubb** stated:

“Russian emergency troops brought in two lorries full of elderly people’ from ‘southern Ossetia who had been torn away from their homes. They are clearly trying to empty southern Ossetia of Georgians.”²¹

Chairman-in -Office of the European Union and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France **Bernard Kouchner** has stated the following in his interview with EuroNews:

“I just want to say, here’s the map of South Ossetia, and here’s a town called Akhagori, and I’ve been told that tonight Russian troops are sweeping through it pushing Georgians out and over the border. It’s ethnic cleansing, creating a homogeneous South Ossetia. That is unacceptable, we can’t accept everything.”²²

Even one year after the conflict, when a part of Georgian population still remains in the Gali and Akhagori Districts, a constant fear persists that even under the slightest tensions these people may be subject to violence similar to the one in August-September 2008. The reports of various International organizations make our, as well as the population’s assumptions, more reasonable.

The report of Amnesty International reads as follows:

“All who remain in South Ossetia ... in parts where fighting has taken place, are vulnerable to ethnically motivated attacks”.²³

The **International Fact-Finding European Mission on conflicts in Georgia** points to the same hazard:

“The situation is tense and dangerously explosive and many people fear the resumption of hostility... in the Gali district of Abkhazia and the upper Kodori Valley, rights [of ethnic Georgians] as a minority seem to be endangered”.²⁴

20 See, UNHCR, Georgia Crisis: “Reports of lawlessness creating new forcible displacement in Georgia”, 26 August 2008.

21 See, BBC news, “South Ossetia emptied of Georgians”, 25 August, 2008; at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7581282.stm>

22 See, „Kouchner claims ethnic cleansing in Georgia”, 27 August, 2008. EURONEWS, <http://www.euronews.net/2008/08/27/kouchner-claims-ethnic-cleansing-in-georgia/>

23 See, Amnesty International, ‘Continuing Concern for civilians after Hostilities in Georgia’, 22 August 2008

24 See, Report of the International Fact-Finding mission on the conflict in Georgia, volume I, p. 26, September 2009



Foreign Minister of Finland Alexander Stubb and the Foreign Minister of France Bernard Kushner, Gori 11 August 2008.

The report of the Mission has been published one year after the end of open hostilities. Although in September 2009 it was still informing the world about the ongoing dangers:

“Even at the time of the writing of this Report, the situation in the Akhagori district at the southeast end of South Ossetia continues to be a matter of concern, as ethnic Georgians are still leaving the region.”²⁵

In the report on November 2008, the **OSCE** also points to the hazards taking place in the territory of the conflict zone:

“Clearly, the *de facto* authorities in South Ossetia and Abkhazia have not created the conditions necessary to enable and encourage displaced persons to return to their former places of residence. Worse, as set out in the sections below, the *de facto* authorities in South Ossetia have made statements and taken steps that indicate they do not intend to let displaced persons return.”²⁶

The same report states:

“In Akhagori region, which has been recently submitted to the de-facto government of South Ossetia, people live in permanent fear”.

²⁵ See, Report of the International Fact-Finding mission on the conflict in Georgia, volume I, p. 28, September 2009

²⁶ See, Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the conflict in Georgia, OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, p. 17-18

1.4. LEGAL OVERVIEW

Officially, the South Ossetian Autonomous District was set up within Georgia under the 20 April 1922 Decree²⁷ of the Central Executive Committee of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Council of National Commissars. However, the term "South Ossetian autonomy" appears in political documents earlier, by the end of 1917. At the time the "congress of South Ossetian delegates" elected the "South Ossetian National Council" and demanded from the effective Georgian authorities to set up a respective district ("mazra")-administrative unit.

On 28 March 1920 the South Ossetian National Council established the "South Ossetian Revolutionary Committee". In October of the same year the "Revolutionary Committee" demanded from the Caucasus Bureau of Russia's Communist (Bolshevik) Party to grant the autonomy status to South Ossetia.²⁸ This issue was on the agenda of the new, Bolshevik authorities after the forceful Sovietization of Georgia (in February 1921).

On 31 October 1921 the Caucasus Bureau adopted the resolution, which "granted the rights of the autonomous district to South Ossetia" and "requested the Revolutionary Committee of Georgia to define the borders of the District together with the South Ossetian Executive Committee".²⁹

Unlike Abkhazia and Adjara, whose autonomy was based on political-historical grounds and traditions and was recognized by the independent democratic republic of Georgia, the Ossetians at the time in Georgia were considered as a national minority with constitutionally guaranteed rights, but without the right to territorial or any other type of autonomy.³⁰ For instance, under the 13 September 1918 Law on Representation of National Minorities in the National Council of Georgia, 26 seats were allocated to the minorities in the Council: 10 to Armenians, 4 - Azerbaijanis, 3 - Abkhazians, 2 - Russians, 2 - Ossetians, 1 - Georgian Israeli, 1 - Jew, 1 - Greek, and 1 - German.³¹

Many researchers see the establishment of the South Ossetian Autonomous District as a kind of gratitude towards the Ossetian Bolsheviks, who fought³²

27 See the 20 April 1922 Decree #2 of the Soviet Central Executive Committee of Georgia and the Council of National Commissars of Georgia "On Arrangement of the South Ossetian Autonomous District". See the status of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian autonomous regions within Georgia (1917-1988). Collection of political-legal acts; Regionalism Research Center, 2004. See Annex #1 for the full text.

28 Source (book): Ossetian issue, collection of articles, Tbilisi, publishing house "Kera-XXI", 1994, pp. 244-246.

29 *ibid*, p. 301.

30 Chapter 11, the 21 February 1921 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Georgia. In addition, such approach was preconditioned by the fact that ethnic Ossetians lived not only in Shida Kartli, but in entire Georgia, including Tbilisi, Kakheti, Racha, etc.

31 Collection of legal acts of Democratic Republic of Georgia of 1918-1921, Tbilisi, 1990.

32 Most dramatic of these battles was the 1920 revolt. To crush it, Georgian authorities used the units of the regular army and the national guard, which, after quashing the revolt, carried out a punitive operation in the Ossetian villages. According to the Ossetian sources, 5,000 Ossetians died in this battle, while 13,000 passed away as a result of famine and epidemics. See Danish Association for Research on the Caucasus, Nikola Svetkovsky, "The Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict".

against the government of the Democratic Republic of Georgia and even declared independence from Georgia.³³

The issue of Tskhinvali was given a special importance in the formation of the South Ossetian Autonomous District. On 12 December 1921 the Central Executive Committee of Georgia gave a special order for transforming the attitude of the Georgian population of the Tskhinvali Region. In 1922 the ethnic balance there was significantly in favor of Georgians. In particular, 1,436 Georgians, 613 Ossetians, 765 Armenians, 64 Russians, and 1,651 Jews lived in Tskhinvali.

The 1922 Constitution of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic already mentions the South Ossetian Autonomous District within Georgia.³⁴

Another essential issue that deserves special attention is the idea of unification of South Ossetia and North Ossetia, which in parallel to the formation of the South Ossetian autonomy was considered by the Soviet authorities at various levels in 1925-1927. In 1925 the assembly of the South Ossetian Councils demanded the unification. The decision was welcomed by the assembly of South Ossetian Councils. The decision of the latter noted that such unification should have taken place within Georgia. In the same year this idea was approved by the Central Executive Committee of Georgia, consented to in addition by the Central Executive Committee of Transcaucasia. On 12-16 March 1927 the seventh assembly of the South Ossetian Councils raised this issue once again and having approved the steps undertaken towards unification, urged the Central Executive Committee of South Ossetia to work more vigorously in this direction. Yet, the history ends here. Obviously the Kremlin was not in favor of unification of South Ossetia and North Ossetia within the state of Georgia.³⁵

1.5. CHRONOLOGY OF CONFLICT DEVELOPMENT

Dissolution of an empire is usually controversial and the Soviet Empire has been no exception. The break-up of the USSR was accompanied by numerous ethnic conflicts and unfortunately Georgia was among the victims. Mines laid down by the Soviet authorities from the first days of the Sovietization of Georgia became active immediately after the proclaiming of independence. At the end of 1980s, conflicting national interests of various nations appeared in equal setting over the entire Soviet domain, and military hostilities were avoided in exceptional cases only. From the end of 1980s Moldova, all three republics of the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and Russia itself were involved in endless conflicts, which

33 CRS report for Congress: Russia-Georgia Conflict in South Ossetia: Context and Implications for US interests, by Jim Nichol, updated October 24, 2008.

34 In terms of administrative arrangement of South Ossetia and determination of competence of its bodies, the 12 November 1980 Law of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic on the Autonomous District of South Ossetia is one of the last and the most detailed documents.

35 See the 1925-1927 decrees, session shorthand records, and other materials in the collection of political-legal acts, status of autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the state of Georgia (1917-1988), published in Tbilisi in 2004 by the Regionalism Research Center.

brought the death, mass involuntary displacement of population, breakdown of infrastructure, stagnation of state institutions, and minimization of developing potential.

a) 1989 - 1990: War of Laws

It has been established that abolition of the status of the South Ossetian Autonomous District by the Supreme Council of Georgia on 11 December 1990 triggered the launch of conflict in the South Ossetian territory. Accordingly, 11 December 1990 is identified in the works of many researchers as a starting point of confrontation. Nevertheless, historical facts do not prove the veracity of such judgment. Even in light of the significance of this decision, in the following several sub-chapters we will try to remind the reader and the society briefly about the "war of laws", which was underway on one hand between Tbilisi and Tskhinvali, and on the other hand between Moscow and Tbilisi during 1989-1990, one of the central issues of which was the topic of the very autonomies.

b) Issue of State Language

Resolutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, Presidium of the Supreme Council of Georgian SSR, and the Council of Ministers of Georgian SSR were published on 15 August 1989 "Concerning the State Program of the Georgian Language".³⁶ The program defined the constitutional status of the Georgian language as the only state language of application in all kinds of party-related, Soviet, administrative, scientific-scholarly, cultural, economic institutions and enterprises, and public organizations of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Further, special provisions regulated the introduction of mandatory teaching of Georgian language in non-Georgian schools of the republic and ensured universal application of Georgian language in everyday and information spheres.

A remarkable wave of tensions in the South Ossetian Autonomous District followed the very document of 15 August 1989. It was used by "Adamon Nikhas", a newly established separatist movement in the South Ossetian Autonomous District, as a cause of its further actions. First rallies were organized.

In response to the 15 August document, on 4 September 1989 the South Ossetian District Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia and the Executive Committee of the District Council of National Deputies adopted the resolution on the "State Program for the Development of the Ossetian Language". The resolution stipulated that the State Program of the Ossetian Language was developed and approved by the broad public. The resolution was sent to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, and the Presidium of the Supreme Council and the Council of Ministers of Georgian SSR. The Ossetian side demanded to reflect the respective provisions of the Program for Development of the Ossetian Language in the South Ossetian Autonomous District in Paragraph 1 of the State Program of the Georgian Language. The main demand of the

³⁶ Newspaper "Communist", #196, 25 August 1989.

“State Program for the Development of the Ossetian Language” was to grant the constitutional status to the Ossetian language in the District territory. Ossetian, Georgian, and Russian languages were declared as the state languages in the South Ossetian Autonomous District.³⁷

On 26 September 1989 the eleventh assembly of the District Council of National Deputies of South Ossetia made a decision on bringing amendments to the Constitution of Georgia, pursuant to which the following paragraph should have been added to Article 75 of the effective Constitution of Georgia: “Ossetian language shall be the state language in the South Ossetian Autonomous District”.³⁸

By the end of September 1989 the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia Givi Gumbaridze and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers Otar Chitanava visited Tskhinvali and met with the District population and party nomenclature. However, the Communist leadership of Georgia did not have counter proposals and the agreement did not occur.

On 10 November 1989 the XII special assembly of the Council of National Deputies of twentieth calling of the South Ossetian Autonomous District adopted already a second decision “on the State Program for Development of the Ossetian Language” and declared the Ossetian language as the state language in the territory of the South Ossetian Autonomous District; yet, application of Georgian language was not prohibited and its “free and equal functioning” was determined pursuant to the rules of the language policy of the USSR.³⁹

c) Status of Autonomy

A big wave of rallies launched in the South Ossetian Autonomous District since October 1989, when Tskhinvali and Tbilisi engaged with each other in the so-called war of laws. This was the time when the first large-scale rallies were held, followed by the sending in of additional troops of Georgian militia in the town.

Formalization of the “war of laws” took place at the 12th special assembly of the Councils of National Deputies of South Ossetia, when on 10 November 1989 the assembly adopted the decision on:

- Abolition of the South Ossetian Autonomous District;
- Raising the status of South Ossetia; and
- Establishment of the South Ossetian Autonomous Republic.

The assembly called for the Supreme Council of the Georgian SSR and the Supreme Council of USSR to examine the issue of granting the status of the autonomous republic to the South Ossetian Autonomous District.

37 Newspaper “Soviet Ossetia”, #170, 5 September 1989.

38 Newspaper “Soviet Ossetia”, #188, 28 September 1989.

39 “Central state archive of newest history of Georgia”, 1165, reg. 8, case 2852, pp. 62-54.

Against the background of expanding separatist movement and tensions, the central authorities of Georgia, by the resolution of the Presidium of the Supreme Council dated 16 November 1989, "owing to the fact that the procedure of convening and holding the assembly was grossly violated and the issues beyond the competence of the District Council were examined", decisions of the assembly of the Council of National Deputies of the South Ossetian Autonomous District were declared null and void, as inconsistent with the law.⁴⁰

The party comrades of the Georgian SSR concluded that on 10 November the Executive Committee of the District Council of South Ossetia made the decision to convene the assembly under the threat and influence of representatives of "Adamon Nikhas" and therefore, it examined only procedural, i.e. formal issues and did not touch upon the substantial side of the problem. Tbilisi did not find it necessary to explain and justify its position and to respond to the fear and interests that triggered the adoption of such a decision in the autonomous district. Georgian authorities did not even consider the proposals of Ossetians and did not take their actions and statements seriously. In the case of each tension they sent additional police troops to Tskhinvali and based on formal grounds, without examining the matter and due comprehension of the problem, declared their every resolution or decision null and void. During the entire year Tbilisi and Tskhinvali acted against each other as if on spite, like incited children. Blood has already been shed by this time. The first internally displaced persons appeared on both sides.

Instead of identifying the allies, Tbilisi was losing its last backing in South Ossetia. Since 1990 the superior party nomenclature of the South Ossetian Autonomous District joined the positions of "Adamon Nikhas" also and became the mouthpiece of radical demands of this organization,⁴¹ when several months earlier the demands and assessments of "Adamon Nikhas" itself and its leader Alan Chochiev personally were still moderate. For instance he stated: "We understand that in a given moment raising the issue of restoration of Ossetia's status is premature and ill-considered".⁴²

d) Moscow's Reaction to the War of Laws

Parallel to these tensions Moscow was setting up a legal basis for fostering ongoing ethnic confrontations in the republics even further. On 3 April 1990, a new law was adopted in Moscow on the procedure for leaving the USSR by the member republic, which enhanced further development of separatist attitudes in the autonomous units. The USSR law determined the procedure related to secession by the member republic in the following manner:

"Article 3: In a member republic, in whose structure there are autonomous republics, autonomous districts, or autonomous divisions ("okrugs"), a referendum shall be held in each autonomy separately.

40 The Gazette of Supreme Council of Georgian SSR, 1989, #11, pp. 7-8.

41 Aleko Aslanishvili's publication, "7 Days", 2 November 1990.

42 Newspaper "Literary Georgia", 20 October 1989.

Peoples of the autonomous republics and autonomous formations shall enjoy the right to independently decide on the issue of affiliation with the USSR or a seceding member republic, as well as to raise the issue of its state-legal status..."

The reaction in Tbilisi and Tskhinvali did not make itself wait long, and in July, the Supreme Council of Georgian SSR adopted the resolution "on the Guarantees of Protecting the State Sovereignty of Georgia", while on 20 September 1990 the District Council of National Deputies of the South Ossetian Autonomous District adopted the declaration "on the Sovereignty of South Ossetia", which proclaimed the right of the Ossetian people to self-determination. The Declaration stipulated that "the full independence was the obvious and crucial condition for further development" of the Ossetian people; that "South Ossetia was proclaimed to be the subject of international law and the USSR treaty". In particular, the assembly determined:

1. The South Ossetian Autonomous District was transformed into the South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic;
2. The Supreme Council of the USSR was asked to recognize South Ossetia as an independent subject of the Federation within USSR; and
3. USSR republics were asked to enter into the agreements of friendship, mutual cooperation, and mutual assistance with South Ossetia.

Thus, the Council of National Deputies of South Ossetia unilaterally (in absence of due competence within the constitutional framework) adopted the decision on factual secession from Georgia. On 21 September 1990 the Presidium of the Supreme Council of Georgian SSR declared this resolution null and void.

e) Elections and Abolition of District

The Supreme Council elections were held in Georgia on 28 October 1990. A majority of ethnically Ossetian citizens of the South Ossetian Autonomous District boycotted these elections.

On 22 November 1990 the newly elected Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia annulled the 20 September 1990 decision of the Council of National Deputies of the South Ossetian Autonomous District on transformation of the autonomous district into the so-called "South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic" and respectively, all of its decisions, including on the appointment and conduct of elections.⁴³

On 28 November 1990 the so-called 16(2) assembly of the Council of National Deputies of South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic appointed the elections of the Supreme Council of South Ossetian Soviet Republic for 9 December.⁴⁴ According to the official sources, 72% of population voted in the elections.

⁴³ On 16 October 1990, the 15th assembly of the Council of Autonomous District in Tskhinvali adopted the interim regulation "on the Elections of the Supreme Council of South Ossetian Soviet Democratic Republic and the Local Councils of South Ossetia".

⁴⁴ Newspaper "Soviet Ossetia", #226, 1 December 1990.

By the end of 1990, the war of resolutions, which gradually was accompanied by the increasing signs of the "hot war", was culminated on 11 December 1990 by the law adopted by the Supreme Council of Georgia, which abolished the South Ossetian Autonomous District⁴⁵ and relevant state structures. In addition, the 9 December 1990 elections of the Supreme Council of the so-called "South Ossetian Soviet Republic" and its results were annulled.⁴⁶

The following arguments were listed as leading to the abolition of the South Ossetian autonomy: (1) in 1922 the South Ossetian autonomy was established contrary to the will of the indigenous Georgian population and to the prejudice of Georgia's interests; (2) Ossetian people enjoy their own statehood in the territory of USSR; and (3) only a small portion of Ossetians living in Georgia reside in South Ossetia.

On the same day, the Supreme Council of Georgia declared a state of emergency on the territory of the former autonomous district and adopted the "Law on the Emergency Rules".⁴⁷

Deletion of the South Ossetian autonomy from the political map of Georgia reflected the dominant attitude in Georgia at the time. The Supreme Council Law itself was marred with emotional nationalism, rather than rational vision and legal correctness.

Obviously, the decisions of the South Ossetian leaders were inadequate and legally flawed, but the response of Tbilisi was totally disproportional as well. Tbilisi failed to estimate the gravity of circumstances and engaged in the race of escalating events instead of searching for compromises, and the escalation of events distanced the parties from a common starting point consistently and purposefully, which could not have resulted in anything else than further escalation of the conflict.

f) 1991 - 1992: Active Conflict Phase

In light of the increasing tensions and after declaring a state of emergency, Georgian authorities tried to subdue the insurgent autonomy under a force and accordingly, in January 1991, Georgian armed forces entered the territory of South Ossetia, followed by a year of bloodshed and chaos. War raged mainly in Tskhinvali, its surroundings, and along the main motorway. Fighting was totally chaotic, as neither Georgia nor the South Ossetian autonomy was in control of any kind of well-organized regular army. Confronting each other in South Ossetia were the armed formations of various past and political orientations and goals, a majority of which were linked by criminal ties. Accordingly, there was absence of any coherent plan, strategy or tactics of fighting. During the war, brutalities and crimes

45 Republican David Berdzenishvili was the only Deputy of the Supreme Council of Georgia, who did not vote for this decision, which in itself demonstrates the dominant standing and attitude at the time in Georgia towards increasing tensions and unawareness on conflict results.

46 The Gazette of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia, 1990, #12, pp. 10-12.

47 Newspaper "Sakartvelos Respublika", 12 December 1990.

became the object of critique of many international organizations and human rights activists.⁴⁸ Yet, no one has been ever punished because of this war.

There were several attempts at regulation of the conflict in the course of the war. A notable effort was the 23 March 1991 meeting between the Chairman of the Supreme Council of Republic of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic Boris Yeltsin in borough Kazbegi. Back then, a jointly signed protocol stipulated:

"As a result of agreeing the joint steps for stabilizing the situation in the region of former South Ossetian Autonomous District, the parties declare the following: ... prior to 10 April, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian SFSR and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia shall set up a joint militia troop which shall disarm all illegal armed formations in the territory of former South Ossetian Autonomous District".⁴⁹

However, several days later the assembly of National Deputies of the Russian Federation demanded from the Georgian authorities to restore the South Ossetian autonomy. In addition, the assembly addressed the Supreme Council of the USSR to undertake measures to restore a normal situation in the "South Ossetian" territory. This document was also signed by the Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic Boris Yeltsin.

Conflict was still unfolding. It was accompanied by the overthrow of Gamsakhurdia's government, but this had less impact on the Georgian-Ossetian relations. Interestingly, the military council annulled many decisions adopted during Gamsakhurdia's rule, but maintained the same position in respect of "South Ossetia".

The so-called hot phase of armed conflict ended in June 1992. By that time neither the Soviet Union nor the Gamsakhurdia's government existed, and the effective State Council in Georgia was headed by Eduard Shevardnadze. On 14 June 1992, in Sochi Shevardnadze and Yeltsin signed the agreement on principles of regulation of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. Extremely significant outcome of the agreement was:

- Cease-fire in the conflict zone;
- Division of the conflict zone into Georgian and "South Ossetian" control zones;
- Creation of the Joint Control Commission (JCC), a quadripartite body with participation of Georgia, "South Ossetia", Russia, North Ossetia and patronage of the OSCE;
- Determination of a format of the Control Commission. This was a universal format and included all aspects of conflict resolution.

48 See "Bloodshed in the Caucasus; violation of Humanitarian Law and Human Rights in the Georgia-South Ossetia Conflict", Human Rights Watch report, 1998.

49 Newspaper "Sakartvelos Respublika", #58, 27 March 1991.

- A tripartite contingent of united peacekeeping forces - with participation of Georgia, Russia, and South Ossetia - was set up under the same document.

g) Conflict Prior to the Rose Revolution

After termination of hostilities and the implementation of the cease-fire the struggle continued at the diplomatic table, followed by numerous agreements and protocols of mutual understanding. In parallel, the population started returning gradually and economic and trade relations were restored. In 1996 a hope of full-scale conflict resolution had emerged when on 17 April the parties initialed the draft memorandum on full-scale resolution of the conflict.

The history of the conflict in 1996-2002 recorded many documents and meetings. Throughout these years the positions of the various parties came close numerous times and according to the experts' assessments, fundamental breakthroughs should have been possible as well.⁵⁰

Frequent meetings between Shevardnadze and Chibirov were especially promising - in Vladikavkaz in 1996, in Java in 1997, and in Borjomi in 1998. These very meetings gave rise to the political dynamics, as the parties discussed all topics, including the return of IDPs, economic development of the region, joint protection of security of the population in the conflict zone, etc.

It was in 1996 that the Ergneti Market was opened up, which at the initial stage was perceived as a significant function and tool for rapprochement of people and confidence-building from the Georgian side.

The election of Eduard Kokoity as President in South Ossetia and Georgia's official statement on affiliation in NATO gave raise to negative reversion. Right after the delivery of the official statement by Georgia at the NATO Prague Summit in 2002 on membership in the alliance, Russia started putting special stamps in the Soviet passports of the population in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while since 2003 Russian foreign passports have been massively distributed under simplified procedures.

Along with political considerations, a majority of experts linked the logics of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict to the phenomenon of "economy of war", when tensions and confrontation become a fecund ground for illegal business (illegal weapons, human trafficking, drugs, smuggling).⁵¹ When the economic interests intertwine with the conflict and occupy a dominant position in the relations of the parties, then will appear the groups benefiting from the continuation of conflict. This widespread opinion on the economy of war was a significant factor nourishing both conflicts in the territory of Georgia throughout the years. However, an

50 For a complete overview of conflict dynamics in 1996-2002 see Zakareishvili, Darchiashvili, Khaindrava, Khidasheili, Kublashvili, Gogia, Jorbenadze, Shergelashvili, Mirziashvili, Toklikishvili, Maisashvili: "On the Causes, Dynamics, Searching Ways of Solution, and Potential Trends of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict", Tbilisi, 2005.

51 See International IDEA, "Democracy Building in Georgia", Discussion materials #9, Darchiashvili, Tevzadze, "Ethnic Conflict and Reclusive Regions in Georgia", May, 2003.

inadequate and exaggerated assessment of the significance of this very factor led the country to the tragedy in summer of 2004.

1.6. AFTER THE ROSE REVOLUTION

a) Ergneti Market and the Summer of 2004

After the success of the Rose and Adjara Revolutions, in the conditions when the conflict seemed to be exhausted at the level of everyday life, Kokoity's regime remained the only problem, which survived mainly through smuggling and did not enjoy much authority among the local population. This was basically the attitude of a majority of the political and public elite in Georgia towards the conflict resolution in South Ossetia.

According to the research conducted by Georgian experts in 2004, the situation around the Ergneti Market was extremely alarming and, in the authors' assertion, contained high risks to the security of Georgia. Apart from the fact that the Georgian economy was incurring huge financial losses due to the illegal transportation of various types of goods (the range of various estimates fluctuates between 200 million and one billion GEL), weapons, drugs, and other prohibited items reached the country through the very Ergneti Market.⁵² Pursuant to the research, 150 vehicles crossed the conditional border and moved on the remaining territory of Georgia on a daily basis. Each vehicle must have paid an unofficial "tariff", i.e. bribe, to the regulators on both sides in proportion to its size and cargo.

The authorities pursued clear-cut tactics. On the one hand, they would not put up with such a huge gap in the Georgian economy. When the reorganization of the tax system in Georgia was underway and the budget was growing, it is obvious that the authorities could not tolerate almost legalized smuggling of goods in the country. On the other hand, by closing down the Ergneti Market, i.e. eradicating the major source of income for Kokoity's regime, and at the same time by means of the "humanitarian storm," Tbilisi tried to win the hearts of the population in the Tskhinvali region and gain their loyalty. The government reported proudly to the people and Parliament on the measures undertaken successfully:

"Georgian law-enforcers started undertaking effective measures to prevent the flow of smuggled goods. They closed down all roads and paths used by the criminals. As a result of these undertaken measures, the Ergneti Market was closed down, which eradicated the main source of nourishing the smugglers and their protégés".⁵³

52 Alexandre Kukhianidze, Alexandre Kupatadze, Roman Gotsiridze "Smuggling through Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region of Georgia", published by American University, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) Georgia Office, Tbilisi, 2004; further, see the Report of the Government of Georgia on Full-scale Aggression of Russian Federation against Georgia, Tbilisi, August, 2009, p. 27.

53 Report of the Government of Georgia on Full-scale Aggression of Russian Federation against Georgia, Tbilisi, August, 2009, p. 26.

A simple tactic at first glance turned out to be fundamentally wrong, as the "economy of war", despite of its important presence in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, still was not a decisive factor.

Unlike the Adjarian population, where in parallel to the confrontation between the local population and the regime, a full integration with Georgia was present, the Ossetians living in the former District territory, regardless of how opposing they should have been to Kokoity and his politics, and regardless of on how great terms they should have been with their Georgian co-villagers, did not and should not have trusted Tbilisi due to absolutely explainable and obvious reasons. The gaining of trust is a durable process and maybe Tbilisi's efforts should have been fruitful, but Saakashvili and his government were in a hurry. Impatience on the one hand and underestimation of a Russian factor on the other led us to the crisis and bloodshed in the summer of 2004. One can read in the Report of the Government of Georgia:

"Russia actively engaged in the **renewed conflict**, and Russian media launched a propaganda war. North Caucasian volunteers were hastily brought into the region."

At the same time, if Georgian law-enforcers were undertaking anti-smuggling measures for closing down the Market, it is unclear why the Georgian police occupied strategic heights which, according to the Government Report, the Georgian side had to leave immediately:

„To avoid escalation, the Georgian side transferred the strategically important positions occupied by the Georgian police to the „peacekeepers“ and withdrew additional troops of MIA from the region”.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, this unsuccessful campaign led to a positive outcome in terms of a reappraisal of chosen tactics and an acknowledgement that peaceful resolution of the conflict requires a durable and consistent approach. In any case, statements of Georgian authorities made in the fall of 2004 provided grounds for such optimism, while these statements were made from the highest tribunes.

b) Peace Initiatives of Georgian Authorities

During the speech in front of the 59th session of the UN General Assembly on 22 September 2004, President Saakashvili raised the issue of the need of step by step resolution of the conflicts. This was a stage-by-stage plan and, in parallel to confidence-building, included the broad guarantees of decriminalization, demilitarization, and security.

This was followed by the meeting of Prime-Minister of Georgia Zurab Zhvania and the de-facto President of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity in Sochi in November 2004, where the agreement on demilitarization was signed. The parties agreed also on the need to implement joint economic projects.

⁵⁴ Report of the Government of Georgia on Full-scale Aggression of Russian Federation against Georgia, Tbilisi, August, 2009, p. 27.

In January 2005, Saakashvili gave publicity to the peace initiatives of the Government of Georgia on peaceful regulation of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict from the tribune of the Parliamentary Assembly of CoE in Strasbourg, which aimed at unifying Georgia peacefully. The plan talked about broad autonomy, constitutional guarantees, official status of the Ossetian language, and allocation of special funds for the rehabilitation, as well as for the education and cultural heritage of the region. Further, the plan discussed the restitution of property lost as a result of the conflict. Finally, the plan envisaged the creation of a joint, mixed Georgian-Ossetian police, which would secure the safety of population.

At the international conference in July 2005 in Batumi, the President stated that Tbilisi was ready to provide South Ossetia with the broadest autonomy and safeguard a high degree of its self-governance and privileged tax and economic regimes.⁵⁵

A broader and more concrete version of the peace plan of Georgian authorities was announced at the OSCE Ljubljana Ministerial in December 2005, where the Prime-Minister of the country Zurab Noghaideli presented the conflict resolution action plan set out in specific time-frames.⁵⁶ Three stages of measures were identified under this plan: demilitarization of the conflict zone, socio-economic rehabilitation, and final determination of the status of South Ossetia.

Offering peace plans to the international community by Georgia made the response of the Ossetian side inevitable, and especially in light of the fact that the plan at the OSCE Ministerial was adopted unanimously, inclusive of Russia's consent. The response followed shortly after. A letter of the de-facto President of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity sent to Presidents Putin and Saakashvili, as well as heads of the OSCE member states, was quite promising, where he stressed the need to develop a joint peace plan. Kokoity's counter proposals backed the same three-stage approach to conflict resolution and put forth the initiative to develop the joint plan of actions within the framework of the Joint Control Commission. Kokoity's letter was so analogous of Georgian initiatives that the Prime-Minister of Georgia Zurab Noghaideli told Georgian media that "[Kokoity] had copied it from us".

Nevertheless, all of these peace initiatives and plans had one serious problem. Georgian authorities were in a hurry and realization of each of these initiatives was confined under too restricted time-frames. For instance, all three stages of the plan announced at the Ljubljana Ministerial should have been completed until September 2006, which undermined its actual implementation.

55 See, "Tbilisi Pushes South Ossetia Peace Initiative at Batumi Conference", Tbilisi, July 10, 2005. at <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=10192>; also, "Tskhinvali Comments on Batumi Conference", Tbilisi, July 12, 2005. at <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=10205&search=>

56 See, „PM Urges Cabinet to Follow South Ossetia Peace Plan“, Tbilisi, July 13, 2005. at <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=10210&search=>; GEORGIA'S ACTION PLAN ON SOUTH OSSETIA: A TEST FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 2 Issue: 219, November 22, 2005, at [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=31149](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=31149); REMARKS OF H.E. MR. ZURAB NOGAIDELI, PRIME MINISTER OF GEORGIA, OSCE Permanent Council, VIENNA - 27 OCTOBER, 2006, OSCE Permanent

Despite such tight deadlines, Tbilisi delayed undertaking effective steps which would turn the initiatives declared in peace plans into reality. After Kokoity's mentioned response, the Parliament of Georgia could have acted and initiated the legislation supporting the respective peace initiatives. One of such laws could have concerned the status of the Ossetian language, as a late response to the demand of the Ossetian people and effort to reinvigorate relations from the point of its termination. Obviously, at the beginning such an act would have carried a symbolic meaning only, but conflicts and confidence-building are the collection of such symbolic acts and gestures, a multitude of which produce over time a qualitative difference. Secondly, such a law should have concerned the restitution of property, which would have restored the rights of Ossetian victims living in the territory controlled by Georgia immediately after the adoption of such law. Unfortunately, this law was adopted on 29 December 2006, almost two years after the announcement of the peace plan by President on 26 January 2005. Still, any effective steps to implement the Law have not followed its adoption either.

All peace plans were made unconvincing by the statements of officials in Tbilisi, who often talked about South Ossetia with threat or contempt and made promises of rapid restoration of territorial integrity. Such rhetoric culminated in the statement of the former Minister of Defense Irakli Okruashvili, who promised the entire Georgia to celebrate the new 2007 year in Tskhinvali.

c) Interim Administration

In 2007 the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on Establishment of Appropriate Conditions for Conflict Resolution in the Former South Ossetian Autonomous District, based on which the interim administrative territorial unit and its interim administration was set up. Under this Law Georgian authorities created another Ossetia, in the face of the administrative unit loyal to it.⁵⁷ Most interestingly, the Law granted the Interim administration the strongest of the functions during the negotiations - "to hold negotiations on determination of the autonomy status for the former South Ossetian Autonomous District".⁵⁸ This is somewhat paradoxical provision, because it is unclear who should have been the subject and object of negotiations, and who should have negotiated with whom the status of autonomy? Report of the Interim Commission of Parliament of Georgia provides an indirect response to this question: "Dimitry Sanakoev started negotiating with the Georgian authorities with the purpose of peaceful resolution of the

57 Interim administrative unit and its administration were set up pursuant to the two acts issued under the Law: 8 May 2007 Resolution of the Parliament of Georgia on Establishment of Interim Administrative-Territorial Unit and the 10 May 2007 Decree of the President of Georgia #296 on the Procedure and Functioning and Scope of the Administration of Interim Administrative-Territorial Unit on the Territory of Former South Ossetian Autonomous District".

58 Law of Georgia on "Establishment of Appropriate Conditions for Conflict Resolution in the Former South Ossetian Autonomous District", 13 April 2007, Article 4(b). Of interests as well is Sub-paragraph "d" of Article 4 of the same Law, which among the powers of interim administration lists "development of relevant plans and projects aimed at peaceful resolution of the conflict and securing the engagement of local society in the process of their elaboration"; the society and experts perceived this provision as transfer of liability by central authorities to the new entity.

conflict”,⁵⁹ i.e. Dimitry Sanakoev’s administration loyal to the central authorities were identified as a party to the conflict?!

The problem was unmasked in its entirety back during the elections, when 2 elections and 2 referendums were held on the same day on the territory of former autonomous district. In all four cases the results exceeded 90 percent. On one hand, 99 percent of voters voted for the independence of South Ossetia, while on the other side 95 percent of voters voted for federalization of Georgia. Kokoity and Sanakoev were elected on both sides with the same majority of votes.

The electoral battles unfolding on 12 November 2006 clearly demonstrated that the administration elected by the population of Georgian villages in the former District territory was becoming a reason of another confrontation and tensions. One thing that was clear throughout entire history of the conflict is that the central authorities of Georgia never experienced problems with the Georgian villages of the District, and that hostilities have never occurred between ethnic Georgians. Hence, the regulation, negotiations, meetings, and confidence-building measures were required with our mainly ethnically Ossetian fellow citizens remaining on the other side of the conditional border. This mission, in the hands of the interim administration elected by the Georgian villages and of its head, despite his ethnic origin, was surely destined to fail.

1.7. YEAR 2008 - MOUNTING CONFRONTATION

a) Increase of Tension between Russia and Georgia, Spring 2008

A confrontation between Russia and Georgia reached a peak in the early spring of 2008.

On 6 March 2008 Russia has unilaterally denounced the Decision of the Council of the Heads of States of the Commonwealth of Independent States on “Measures for Settlement of the Conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia”, which practically implied lifting of economic sanctions imposed on Abkhazia following the conflict. Humanitarian interests of the population living in the territory of Abkhazia were put forth by Russia as a main argument in justification of this denunciation, in light of the fact that by the spring of 2008 majority of Abkhazia’s population were Russian nationals already.

Georgia assessed Russia’s action extremely negatively and declared it as a launch of Abkhazia’s complete militarization. Majority of politicians and experts in Georgia stated that prior to the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Russia had sent a clear-cut signal to the entire world.

⁵⁹ See the Report of the Interim Commission of the Parliament of Georgia on Study of Military Aggression and Other Acts of Russian Federation against the Territorial Integrity of Georgia, 2009.

After the 6 March 2008 decision Russia started taking proactive steps and in the coming months Russo-Georgian relations transformed into the war of laws and information statements of mutual accusations.

On 21 March 2008 the Russian Duma adopted a resolution, which recommended the executive authorities of Russia to recognize the independence of the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.⁶⁰

On 16 April 2008 President Putin signed a Decree on direct legal ties and relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Pursuant to the same Decree, representative missions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia were opened up in Tskhinvali and Sokhumi. South Ossetian de facto authorities apprehended the 16 April Decree as an indirect confirmation of its independence. The decision was condemned by the international community, including the EU, OSCE, NATO, the United States of America, Great Britain, France, and Germany. International community demanded from Russia to revoke this Decree and normalize the relations, however, in vain.⁶¹

On 31 May 2008 the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation deployed in Abkhazia #76 Unit of the Volgograd Railway Forces consisting of 400 soldiers.⁶² Motivation was humanitarian once again - to rehabilitate railway destructed from the war from Sokhumi to Ochamchire. This project has not been agreed on with Georgia. Moreover, the Georgian side consistently expressed its concerns due to the rehabilitation of the railway and opposed it, as the rehabilitation of the railway was always associated with the increased capacity of transportation of military equipment from Russia to Ochamchire, and, consequently, the increase of Abkhazia's military potential and simplified movement of Russian troops "upon necessity".

Along with the laws, resolutions, and statements, situation in the conflict zones was becoming more and more tense, peacekeepers, policemen, and civilians were dying, and the property of dozens of people was being destroyed.

b) 20 April 2008, Destruction of the Georgian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle over the territory of Abkhazia

At 10:00 am on 20 April 2008 the fighter-plane that flew from the territory of the Russian Federation downed the Georgian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) "Hermes-450" over village Gagidi of the Gali District, the Georgian authorities were informing.

The UN Mission, which started investigating this incident upon the request of the sides, has clearly indicated in the Report concerning the 20 April 2008 in-

60 "Georgia Condemns Duma's Call for S.Ossetia, Abkhaz Recognition", 24 March, 2008, Civil Georgia, at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17433>; *Russia Moves to Legalize Ties with Abkhazia, S.Ossetia, 16 April, 2008, Civil Georgia*; at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17638>

61 *Reports: Russia will not Revoke April 16 Decision, 11 July, 2008, Civil Georgia*, at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18753>

62 *Increase in Troops by Russia in Abkhazia 'not Wise' - Solana 29 April, 2008, Civil Georgia*, at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=17724>

cident that pursuant to the Moscow Agreement on the Separation of Forces and Cease-Fire in the Georgia-Abkhazia Conflict, "the CIS PKF and no one else is to perform the separation of forces. From a strict peacekeeping perspective, therefore, the Mission considers that enforcement action by third parties - in this case the Russian Federation - in the zone of conflict is fundamentally inconsistent with the Moscow Agreement and undercuts the ceasefire and separation of forces regime".⁶³

In the same Report the UN Observer Mission pointed the Georgian side at the breach of Agreement as well: "However legitimate this purpose may seem to the Georgian side, it stands to reason that this kind of military intelligence-gathering is bound to be interpreted by the Abkhaz side as a precursor to a military operation, particularly in a period of tense relations between the sides. A ceasefire regime has a major advantage – preventing war. It does however impose, in return, limitations on the freedom of the sides, including the undertaking by one side of measures that can and will be perceived as threats by the other side".⁶⁴

It is noteworthy that in the same Report UNOMIG reminded the Georgian authorities of the letter sent to the Minister of Defense of Georgia on 7 April 2008, in which in connection with the similar occasion⁶⁵ of 18 March 2008 the Mission had stated that Georgia's reconnaissance mission by a drone in the conflict zone might have been considered as a military operation for the purposes of international law, which contravenes the principles of the Agreement in effect between the parties.⁶⁶

c) Increase of Tension in the Tskhinvali Region - Spring 2008

In July the situation in the Tskhinvali Region strained even further.

On 3 July 2008 the Georgian media informed that the attack had taken place on the Eredvi-Kheiti by-pass road: "A car of the Head of South Ossetian provisional administration Dimitry Sanakoev hit a remote controlled mine, followed by a gun fire at his convoy, as a result of which three body-guards had been injured".⁶⁷ Sana-



The car of Dimitri Sanakoev damaged by an explosion, 3 July 2009.

63 Report of UNOMIG on the Incident of 20 April involving the downing of a Georgian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle over the Zone of Conflict, *para 35*.

64 Report of UNOMIG on the Incident of 20 April involving the downing of a Georgian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle over the Zone of Conflict, *para 36*.

65 Remarkably, the Georgian side does not confirm the downing of a Georgian drone by the Abkhazians at the Ochamchire coast on 18 March 2008. Nevertheless, as a result of the examination conducted with the experts invited specially for this purpose, the UN Mission established that the debris of the downed drone belonged to a reconnaissance plane of the very Georgian armed forces.

66 Report of UNOMIG on the Incident of 20 April involving the downing of a Georgian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle over the Zone of Conflict, *para 3*.

67 "Dimitry Sanakoev's Convoy Was Attacked", 3 July 2008, News Agency "Civil Georgia"; <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=18692>

koev himself escaped safely. Georgian side assessed this fact as an attempted terrorist act.

In the morning of 3 July as well, attack on Sanakoev was preceded by the blowing up of **Nodar Bibilov**, the Police Chief of the Ossetian village Dmenisi. Nodar Bibilov had died on the spot. South Ossetian de facto authorities accused Tbilisi⁶⁸ of masterminding the 3 July morning blast and assessed it as a terrorist act.

Another blast took place in the conflict zone on 4 July. "One policeman died and one civilian was injured during the night shoot-out, and in particular as a result of attack on the militia post of village Ubiati", - representative of the de facto authorities has stated in an interview with Georgian media means.⁶⁹

The 3 and 4 July incidents were only a beginning of escalation, and during one month Georgian and Russian media spheres broadcasted, on one hand, mutual accusations and stories of the victims, and on the other hand, numerous concerns expressed on behalf of the world community.

On 8 July 2008, during the visit of the Secretary of State of the United States of America, Condoleezza Rice to Georgia, four Russian military jets violated the Georgian airspace once again. In recent years Georgia has often expressed concerns in connection with illegal violation of its airspace and the 9 July incident should have become another object of accusations on this long list, but this time the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation has confirmed this fact.⁷⁰ "This action was aimed at cooling the hot heads in Tbilisi", - the 10 July 2008 official statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia reads.⁷¹

Russia's behavior was more than strange. Many analysts expressed opinion at the time that acknowledgement of violation of airspace of a sovereign state during the visit of the US State Secretary was sort of a test of international community by the Russian Federation, including of the reaction of the EU and the United States.

Today one can boldly state that statements of concern expressed from various tribunes fell short to stop Russia. Along with such statements, international community spared no efforts to bring the sides to the table for a dialogue, but these efforts were futile.⁷²

68 "Dimitry Sanakoev's Convoy Was Attacked", 3 July 2008, News Agency "Civil Georgia"; <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=18692>

69 "Two Killed in Shooting in the Tskhinvali Region", 4 July 2008, News Agency "Civil Georgia"; <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=18695>

70 "Russia Confirms its Aircraft Intruded into Georgia", 10 July 2008, Civil Georgia, at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18748>

71 "Russia Admits Violating Airspace in the Tskhinvali Region", 10 July 2008, News Agency "Civil Georgia"; <http://www.civil.ge/geo/article.php?id=18768&search=>

72 Separatists reject the peace plan on Abkhazia developed with the mediation of Germany and refuse to participate in the talks planned in Berlin, see "Sokhumi Refuses to Meet the Group of Friends", 4 August 2008, News Agency *civil.ge*; EU tries to organize peace talks, which the separatists do not attend (22-24 July 2008): EU tries to hold talks in Brussels with participation of representatives of the South Ossetian Region, Government of Georgia, separatist regime of Tskhinvali and the Russian Federation. Representatives of de facto authorities refuse to participate. Originally they justified this by pointing at the position of the State Minister of Reintegration Issues Temur Iakobashvili. To neutralize this cause, Mr. Iakobashvili was granted the authority of President's special representative. Separatists refuse to participate in the talks once again, this time without stating any justifications.

d) Military Exercises

Large-scale military exercises "Caucasus-2008" were underway in the North Caucasian Military District from 15 July to 3 August 2008.⁷³ Exercises unfolded by the Roki and Mamisoni Passes, directly at the Russian-Georgian border.

8,000 soldiers and 700 armored vehicles were involved in these exercises mainly from the North Caucasian Military District,⁷⁴ including the landing troops, air forces, antiaircraft units, Black Sea and Caspian Sea fleets, Federal Security Service (FSB), and the internal troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

In parallel with the exercises, the brochures were disseminated in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region saying "Know Your Enemy", obviously implying Georgia. According to the Government of Georgia, after the completion of military exercises, participating military units had not returned to the places of dislocation.

Joint Georgian-American military exercises "Immediate Response - 2008" launched on 15 July 2008 in Georgia as well, which lasted three weeks. 1,650 servicemen participated in these exercises. These were mixed exercises with the contribution of 1,000 American, 620 Georgian, 10 Ukrainian, 10 Azerbaijani, and 10 Armenian officers.⁷⁵

Later, these exercises became a subject of accusations and speculations on behalf of the Russian information services and politicians concerning the direct involvement of the United States of America in the conflict.

1.8. GEORGIA - AUGUST 2008

Against the background of political tensions, starting from 1st of August, according to numerous sources casualties were increasing on both sides among the civilian population. Georgian media intensely covered the conflict zone and showed the blown up cars, wounded peacekeepers, and the victims almost on a daily basis.

Incidents have been widely covered on 1, 2, and 3 August.

On 2 August 2008 the News Agency "Civil Georgia" informed that 6 people died as a result of shoot-out in the territory controlled by the de facto authorities

This was followed by the OSCE peace talks initiative. De facto authorities reject this initiative as well (end of July 2008): in the beginning of August 2008, then the OSCE Chairman, Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Stubb puts forth another initiative on holding talks between the separatists and the Government of Georgia this time in Helsinki. Yet, the de facto authorities reject this proposal also. See the chronology of Russian aggression in Georgia, document of the Government of Georgia, 21 September 2008, Tbilisi; Further, for chronological information see the 2008 archive of the Georgian News Agency www.civil.ge

73 *Russian Military Practices Peace Enforcement in Conflict Zones*, 15 July 2008, Civil Georgia, at <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=18782>

74 "Chronology of Russian Aggression in Georgia", document of the Government of Georgia, 21 September 2008, Tbilisi; further, http://www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=GEO&sec_id=461&info_id=7097&date=2008-07-23&new_month=07&new_year=2008

75 "President of Georgia Attended Georgian-American Military Exercises", 21 July 2008, News Agency "News-Georgia", <http://newsgeorgia.ge/geo1/20080721/42279663.html>

and 7 Georgians were wounded. However, Georgian national information means remained silent on the losses of the Ossetian side.

According to the South Ossetian de facto authorities, "6 people died and fifteen were wounded after the Georgian side opened fire at Tskhinvali and nearby Ossetian villages late night on 1st of August and at the dawn of 2nd of August. Georgian side stated that seven people were wounded, including one policeman, as a result of shelling of Georgian villages".⁷⁶

On 4 August 2008 the Russian newspaper "Rossiyskaya Gazeta" constantly reported about the escalations in the conflict zone in the first days of August.⁷⁷ The newspaper confirmed the killing of 6 people and wounding of 13 in the South Ossetian territories not controlled by Georgia. Importantly enough in respect of the 1-3 August 2008 incidents, numerous reports and publications of the Georgian authorities concerning the prerequisites of the August 2008 conflict are completely silent on the casualties among the Ossetian side and, accordingly, on opening of fire (even if in return) by the Georgian side.

For instance, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia,⁷⁸ at the request of the Interim Parliamentary Commission, has prepared a detailed information package on the escalation of situation in the conflict zones after 6 March 2008. Paragraphs #31 and #32 "Attacks in the Tskhinvali Region" of the information materials concern the very events of 1-3 August. The document states that Georgian villages Avnevi and Nuli, as well as Ergneti and Nikozi had been fired at from Tskhinvali. Document states also that six civilians had been wounded and it ends there.

a) 6th of August

On 6 August 2008 South Ossetian de facto authorities and the Russian peacekeepers informed about heavy shoot-outs. Statements were made that the "Georgian forces attempted to occupy the heights near village Nuli, which overlook the Ossetian villages".⁷⁹ Georgian side denied this information. Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Eka Zghuladze stated: "It is quiet in the region and none of the incidents is being reported".⁸⁰

In few hours from the statement made by Ms. Zghuladze, the Georgian side "confirmed the fact of shoot-out, but noted that the incident had been resolved already".⁸¹ At the same time, the assistant to the Commander of Peacekeeping Forces Vladimir Ivanov disseminated the information. He told "InterFax" that

76 "Kokoity Talks about General Mobilization", 2 August 2008, News Agency www.civil.ge

77 See "Is Tbilisi Able to Carry the Ossetian Burden?", *Rossiyskaya Gazeta - Central Issue #4720*, 4 August 2008, at <http://www.rg.ru/2008/08/04/gruz.html>

78 See "Russian Aggression in Georgia - 2008", Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, prepared specially for the Interim Parliamentary Commission, Tbilisi, October 2008.

79 "MIA Denies Information on Shoot-out in the Tskhinvali Region", 6 August 2008, 16:38, News Agency www.civil.ge

80 "MIA Denies Information on Shoot-out in the Tskhinvali Region", 6 August 2008, 16:38, News Agency www.civil.ge

81 "Tskhinvali and Russian Peacekeepers Report "Heavy Shootings", 6 August 2008, 18:19, News Agency www.civil.ge

"heavy clashes were taking place between the Georgian and Ossetian sides in the outskirts of villages Avnevi and Khetagurovo".

Georgian IDPs also confirm intense shoot-outs on 6 August. IDP from village Avnevi **Tania Tosieva-Durglishvili**⁸² recalls: "On 6 August the Ossetians opened gun fire at the Georgian peacekeepers located in Avnevi. They fired from the Ossetian village Tsunari directly towards the mast. Tsunari is the same as Khetagurovo. Two Georgian peacekeeper soldiers died and two others were wounded as a result of the shoot-out. Georgian soldiers left the mast and ran immediately. I saw how they brought the dead out. They wheeled the dead in a barrow by my garden. They were approximately 19-year old guys". **Gurgen Durglishvili** from Avnevi also confirms the shoot-out on 6 August.

IDPs from village Nuli remember that morning as well. "At the dawn on 6 August 2008 the Ossetian side started firing the heavy caliber shells towards villages Nuli and Avnevi. That day the police units and houses of the policemen located in the village were bombarded. Apart from the police buildings, a shell hit the house of resident of Nuli Simon Zhamerashvili as well. Bombardment was carried out from the village Ghvertevi, controlled by the Ossetians, which is located in approximately kilometer and a half north of village Nuli. The police units present in the village resisted the attack of the Ossetian side. On 6 August there was no Georgian army in village Nuli", - told us **Ramaz Tsertsvadze**.⁸³ The situation was so complicated that according to Mr. Ramaz, on 6 August the majority of women and children has left the village. Children and grandchildren of Mr. Ramaz himself left for Tbilisi on 6 August.

Residents of other Georgian villages also relate about extreme deterioration of situation at the dawn on 6 August. Ramaz Tsitsiloshvili from Vanati told us that "they started firing in the gorge at night on 5 August 2008. That night bullets were fired towards village Vanati as well, but a major attack was unfolding on village Eredvi. On the 6th they shot from gun-fire gadgets from the Ossetian village Dmenisi, where a vast amount of military equipment had been brought in, as well as from the Ossetian villages Sarabuki and Ortevi. A house was hit by a shell and it was demolished entirely".⁸⁴ Inhabitant of village Kvemo Achabeti Giorgi Sherazadishvili told us a similar story: "There was such a heavy shoot-out that starting from 6 August we spent three entire days in a neighbor's basement. We were unable to get outside during the day. Georgian army has entered on 6 August".

In light of these circumstances the assertion of Georgian side that nothing special was going on in the region seems more than strange.⁸⁵ Head of the Analytical Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia Shota Utiashvili persistently repeated in the evening on 6 August that it was relatively quiet in

82 Interview with Tania Tosieva was recorded by the GYLA on 29 May 2009 in Tbilisi.

83 Interview with Ramaz Tsertsvadze was recorded by the GYLA on 11 December 2008 in the IDP Compact Settlement Center in borough Surami, in the building of a former professional-technical school.

84 Interview with resident of Vanati Ramaz Tsitsiloshvili was recorded by the GYLA.

85 "Tbilisi Denies APC Destroyed by the Ossetian Side", 6 August 2008, 17:27, News Agency www.civil.ge

the region: "There have been no significant clashes in the region since 2 August. There were small shoot-outs, but no major clashes. As it seems, Russian media and the separatist authorities try to create a virtual reality and illusion of the war, as if something major is underway there", - told Utiashvili to "Civil Georgia".⁸⁶

In view of such statements, the statements made by high public officials during the next days are even more confusing today.

In the morning on 7 August the Georgian side already confirmed the attacks on villages Eredvi, Prisi, Avnevi, Dvani, and Nuli. According to the same information, two Georgian peacekeepers had been wounded. At the same time, according to the statement of the South Ossetian de facto authorities, 18 people had been wounded during the bombardments of Ossetian villages Khetagurovo, Dmenisi, Sarabuki, Ubiati, and the outskirts of Tskhinvali. Media means disseminated this news from the morning on 7 August.⁸⁷

Another news was disseminated on 7 August also about blowing up of Georgian armored personnel carrier (APC). We bring to your attention the original news disseminated by the Agency "Civil Georgia" at 15:56 on 7 August 2008.

"Three Georgian soldiers were wounded after the Ossetian separatists blew up the APC belonging to the Georgian Peacekeeping Battalion", - the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has stated on 7 August. "The incident had taken place in village Avnevi", - told the Head of the Analytical Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia Shota Utiashvili to "Civil Georgia". "Georgian APC was hit by a rocket-powered shell fired by the Ossetian separatists". On 6 August the South Ossetian de facto authorities were informing that the South Ossetian forces destructed the APC belonging to the Georgian side during the clash near village Nuli. However, this information was denied as by the Georgian side, as well as by the Russian peacekeeping forces".

There were numerous mutually exclusive news disseminated on the situation in the Tskhinvali Region on 6 August 2008, and there were frequent contradicting statements made by the representatives of authorities also.

b) 7th of August

On 7 August the war broke out in the Tskhinvali Region.

South Ossetian de facto authorities stated on 7 August that "Georgia launched a large-scale aggression against South Ossetia".⁸⁸

On 7 August Georgia talked about mass bombardments of Georgian villages and denied additional deployment of forces in the conflict zone.

86 "10 People Injured in the Tskhinvali Region Shooting", 7 August 2008, 10:58, News Agency www.civil.ge

87 "Tskhinvali Reports Intense Clashes", 7 August 2008, 17:36, News Agency www.civil.ge published the statement of the Secretary of the National Security Council of the South Ossetian de facto authorities, Anatoly Barankevich.

88 Full text of the 7 August 19:10 pm appeal of President Saakashvili is available on the web site of News Agency www.civil.ge

In the same evening, at 19:10 Tbilisi time, President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili issued the order on cease-fire. "Several hours ago, in my capacity as Commander in Chief of Georgia, I issued a very painful order directing all Georgian police forces and other units under our control not to return fire, even if they face intensive bombing. Please, stop the fire immediately. We do not have the will to respond. We have been tolerating this and have not been responding for so many years. Do not test the Georgian state's patience. Let us stop the spiral of violence. Let us give peace and dialogue a chance".⁸⁹

In the same address Mikheil Saakashvili stated in respect of Russia: "We are in constant contact with the leadership of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry tells us Russia is trying to stop the separatists from engaging in armed action, but without any success".

However, the same night shoot-out from both sides resumed and it was when the well-known statements on "restoration of constitutional order" have been made.⁹⁰

In the morning on 8 August the Prime-Minister of Georgia stated that the "Georgian forces are carrying out measures to establish guaranteed peace in South Ossetia. Currently governmental forces are undertaking actions for restoring and establishing guaranteed peaceful resolution, where the peaceful population of the region will no longer face threat".⁹¹ It was more remarkable in this statement that Prime-Minister Gurgenzidze talked about the entry of the volunteers through the Roki Tunnel on 8 August.

- On 9 August 2008, 2 days after the outbreak of hostilities, first the President of the country and then the Parliament declared the state of war. Major reasons for declaring the state of war were formulated as follows: Mass violations of human rights and freedoms and armed attacks and facts of violence on peaceful population take place on behalf of the separatists. These actions result in casualties among the civilian population and the peacekeepers;
- Actions undertaken by the separatists in the territory of Georgia have been actively supported by the Russian Federation. In particular, hundreds of servicemen and military equipment have entered Georgia from the Russian Federation through the Roki Tunnel on 8 August;
- Throughout the day on 8 August military aircrafts of the Russian Federation have numerously violated Georgia's airspace and carried out the bombardments;
- **Therefore, there is a need to use force, which will be proportionate to attacks carried out on Georgia and which will be di-**

89 "Kurashvili: "Restoration of Constitutional Order" is Underway in the Tskhinvali Region", 8 August 2008, 01:04, News Agency www.civil.ge. Statement made by Mamuka Kurashvili, Chief of the Georgian Peacekeeping Battalion, is meant: "Late night on 7 August we made a decision to restore constitutional order in the entire region".

90 "Peace Enforcement Measures are Carried Out in South Ossetia" - Gurgenzidze, 8 August 2008, 10:41, News Agency www.civil.ge

91 See the Order #402 of the President of Georgia on Declaration of Military Activities and General Mobilization in the Entire Territory of Georgia, 9 August 2008, Tbilisi.

rected at halting the armed attack and avoiding the escalation of situation.

Later, by the end of November 2008, **Mikheil Saakashvili** stated in front of the Parliamentary Interim Commission: "Yes, we made the decision to carry out military operations in the Tskhinvali Region to defend our homeland and protect the security of our citizens".⁹²

On 9 August Georgian armed forces started withdrawing and on 12 August, with the mediation of the President of France Nikola Sarkozy, after the signature of the parties the war has formally ended.

Subject of our study has not been to analyze who started the war and in what circumstances, however, we believe that the overview of events unfolding in this region of Georgia during last two decades is of utmost importance for understanding and better familiarizing with the August 2008 events.

92 President Saakashvili's testimony to the Interim Parliamentary Commission, 29 November 2008, Tbilisi, www.parliament.ge

**Infringement of Fundamental
Human Rights and Freedoms**

**Breach of Fundamental Norms of
the Humanitarian Law and Laws of War**

During 2008 August War



DEPRIVATION OF LIFE
ETHNIC CLEANSING
TORCHING • DEMOLISHING ETHNIC GEORGIAN VILLAGES
CAPTIVITY

Georgia is a small country, with the small territory and small population. Shida Kartli is even a smaller spot on the Earth. Accordingly, the scale of our tragedy will never equate with the genocide in Rwanda, ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia, and the tragedy of Darfur and Cambodia. Yet, it is unjust to legitimize release from responsibility due to the size of the territory or population.

If the crime has been committed, issues of liability have to be addressed. International law and the protection mechanisms set up by the democratic world have to be applied equally in all instances and regardless of the size and influence of this or that state.

Summary of Crimes

Present report enables us to demonstrate to the world numerous stories, facts, and various documentary materials on cruel and inhuman actions committed massively in the territory of Georgia, which turned Georgian villages into rubble, deprived hundreds of persons of life, left tens of thousands of families without history and past, and burned the prospect of neighborly relations between Georgians and Ossetians down to ashes for a long period of time.

Pursuant to the assessment of numerous international organizations and commentators, as well as prominent experts of international law, ethnic cleansing was carried out in the territory of Georgia in August 2008. Stories collected in our report represent documentary evidence of forceful ousting of Georgians from their villages. It has to be emphasized that all illegal actions carried out in the territory of former South Ossetian Autonomous District and its outskirts, as well as in the Kodori Gorge in August-September, aimed at driving out population.

We have visited various villages on the territory of Former Autonomous district and so-called buffer zone several times while collecting materials and interviews for the report.

There is a statement we can make with the full confidence after all the visits we have carried out, reading and analyzing statements made by the representatives of de facto authorities, videos and pictures made available to us by the witnesses, reports and statements of independent international organizations and international reporters who have visited conflict zone during the war or write after it has ended:

The goal of the so-called “peace enforcement operation” carried out jointly by the Russian and South Ossetian authorities was to clean Georgian villages on the territories of South Ossetia from ethnically Georgian population.

Ethnic cleansing we have witnessed in August 2008 was carried out in a well planned manner, systematically and successfully. It did achieve the planned result.

From start we can also state, that all other crimes committed on those territories against Georgians wether during the active phase of the conflict or afterwards: murders, pillage and looting, destruction of residential areas, bulldozing villages, served the same purpose of ethnic cleansing.

- People in villages were executed in the presence of their neighbors for raising fear and forcing them to escape as if unavoidable death;
- Old man staying in the villages were beaten up, abused, even tortured. Nothing was hided. All served the same purpose – to scare so much that people would escape and never return;
- Detention of mainly elderly man and woman of Georgian nationality, who carried no threat to either Russians or Ossetians served the same purpose as well. They were found in the basements of their houses, detained, some held under hostage, later packed in trucks and than transported to Gori or other cities of Georgia proper. They were not given an option of return to their villages and their homes;

As Georgian IDPs recall the main message against elderly staying in villages was sharp and straight forward:

“None of the Georgians should stay here. If elderly stay, youngsters will come back as well and this is why you shall leave”

- Massive bombardment of residential houses, agricultural lands and orchards, schools and entire city/village civilian infrastructure by the Russian army aviation, followed by burning of houses and annihilation of the entire villages was another prove of ethnic cleansing operation.

We would easily rely here on the conclusions of **OSCE-ODIHR HRAM** mission report. It states absolutely correctly:

“The reports presented below are extensive and numerous, but important to show the widespread and systematic nature of the attacks on villages in South Ossetia. The evidence indicates indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing resulting in the deaths of numerous civilians and in some instances the deliberate targeting of civilians. In the context of the conflict, these cases provide prima facie evidence of war crimes and potentially even crimes against humanity. The pattern suggests a deliberate plan, through the commission of various criminal acts against the civilian population, to drive out all civilians of Georgian nationality from the region of South Ossetia. In a short time, this is exactly what was accomplished.”

Looting and torching of houses abandoned by Georgians carried on for long even after the end of hostilities. During the visit in Tskhinvali and

its outskirts, the representatives of the **International Fact-Finding Mission** got personally familiar with the situation and stated in the report published in September 2009:

“North of Tskhinvali, on the road linking Tamarasheni, Achabeti, Kurta and Kekhvi, the IFFMCG experts witnessed that all of these ethnic villages had been burned down and were completely uninhabited”.⁹³

Most importantly, the Mission in its report numerously confirms that arson, looting, persecution of the population and ethnic cleansing intensified especially after the completion of the active hostilities of August 2008. This means that after the official signature of the cease-fire agreement and establishment of effective control over these territories by the Russian Federation, situation has deteriorated even further as in the outskirts of Tskhinvali, as well as in the so-called buffer zone villages. In proof of such inference, the EU Fact-Finding Mission, as well as many other organizations bring the Akhgori District as an example, where the hostilities virtually had not taken place, but the population had been persecuted anyway. It continues even now. Similar was happening in the Kodori Gorge, where no clashes had occurred, but the local population had been expelled from their houses entirely.

The question is why was such a brutality needed?

The answer is pretty simple.

The population on those territories was used to violence, shelling, instability, occasional looting and even the murders. For the last 17 years that was the way people lived on the territories of former Autonomous District. So, forcing Georgians to leave their villages because of fear of war, bombardment or shelling was unrealistic. It was clear that most of the population would have come back immediately as the actual fighting was over, exactly as it happened 17 years ago. Elderly were the first to come followed by their family members.

Thus all the murders, burning, cruelty and eradication of the traces of Georgians existences in those villages was carried out purposefully and carefully in a well planned manner with the goal of artificial change of ethnic composition in South Ossetia.

In the responses sent to the International Fact-Finding Mission, the **public officials of the Russian Federation** stated:

“Georgians abandoned their villages before 8 August 2008 because they possessed the first-hand information concerning their villages, in particular about the launch of military operation by Georgia. This process has

93 Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, September, 2009, Volume II, p. 392.

by no means started due to any specific actions undertaken against ethnic Georgians".⁹⁴

Contrary to these statements of Russia, de facto South Ossetian authorities openly and blatantly talked on a constant basis about the goal of driving out the Georgians. The third chapter of the present work contains numerous statements of the de facto President and various representatives of his administration on the purposful Ethnic Cleansing.

This statement of Russian is not shared by the **International Fact-Finding Mission** either, which has itself recorded many interviews with the Georgian IDPs, and at the same time used the materials of various international and Georgian non-governmental organizations in drawing its own assessments and conclusions. In particular, the Report states:

"Few days before the conflict, ethnically Georgians had left the villages because Georgian villages of South Ossetia, Tamarasheni and Prisi, were subjected to heavy bombardments. Bombardments and gun-fire were heard in Achabeti also and the population left villages due to mounting tension and threat".⁹⁵

Despite increased threat, during permanent shooting and bombardments part of the population, which did not intend to go anywhere, still remained in the Georgian villages. Yet, they were the very target of representatives of military or paramilitary groups, and as the present report demonstrates on numerous occasions, the persecution, beating, insulting, taking in hostage and murder of the elderly had been driven by the purpose of totally clearing the villages from population and cutting all links between the displaced population and the villages. Virtually all people recalled the same in interviews with us that they had been requested to leave the villages. Under the threat of murder elderly remaining in the villages here and there were taken in captivity to the Tskhinvali police building, under the worst scenario they were murdered on spot, whereas at the end the elderly having had escaped death in several other villages were driven out forcefully and brought to Gori by trucks.

Artificial change of demography is the very major characteristic of ethnic cleansing. In case of the former South Ossetian Autonomous District, the Georgian population was driven out from these territories completely.

It should be stressed that burning of houses and destruction of property, despite of its gravity, represents only one fragment in the larger picture of Ethnic Cleansing of 2008 August war.

94 Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia: Russia, Responses to Questions Posited by the IIFFMCG (Humanitarian Aspects); September, 2009, p. 7., p. 385.

95 Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, September, 2009, Volume II, p. 391.

Mass bombardments of villages by the Russian armed forces, which resulted in the killing of hundreds and destruction of many buildings, have become one of the primary reasons of exile of Georgians and search for a safe shelter. It was the very "death coming from air", as one of the IDPs has put in an interview with us, that the inhabitants of Georgian villages have fled from massively.

Bombardments were followed by the armed men, who resorted to all means to force against the locals staying in the villages to force them to abandon their houses and empty the villages.

Respective chapters of the present report describe numerous occasions of violence, murder, disappearance, and degrading treatment and torture in captivity. Yet, it should be stressed once again that intimidation of population and forced displacement have been a major objective. This presumably explains a relatively small number of victims compared to the scale of violence carried out.

Standard stories show that virtually in every case Russian military had been present in the villages not reacting, and moreover, often the loot has been transported by the Russian military vehicles. On numerous occasions Russian soldiers entered the houses together with robbers and patrolled the outer perimeter to avoid possible complications.

Finally, the intensive bombardments that carried on for days and which claimed many lives, represented a most powerful tool in realization of, as already described, the planned ethnic cleansing.



2.1. Deprivation of Life as a Result of Bombing

2.1. Deliberate Killing, Murder

| DEPRIVATION OF LIFE |

**2**

„The material collected describes 16 alleged cases of killings of civilians (excluding deaths resulting from cross fire, bombing and shelling at the time of large scale military operations, and accidents with unexploded ordnance), in areas controlled by Russian forces, many of which seems to be instances of summarily executions.“*

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

* „Georgia-Russia conflict: Ethnic Cleansing Continues in South Ossetian Conflict Zone in Georgia“, by Aage Borchgrevink, The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 24 October, 2008

2.1. DEPRIVATION OF LIFE AS A RESULT OF BOMBING

Along with looting and torching of houses and persecution the population, beating, insulting, intimidating, and threatening of people has become a common occasion in August-September 2008. Moreover, there were numerous cases of deprivation of life. Our witnesses recall with grave pain how they saw the corpses of killed neighbors or relatives when being on the run from the village. Some of them became victims of bombardments, some of them of stray bullets, but there were cases when humans were murdered absolutely deliberately, in front of eyewitnesses to threaten them even more. (See attachment #3: List of the people killed during the August War)

Prior to getting familiar with the present materials, it would be preferable to examine the official position of the Russian Federation in relation to the right to Life of the civilian population in August 2008 in the South Ossetian territory. Pursuant to the official information sent by the Russian authorities to the International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia:

- during the conflict there were NO losses among the civilian population.
- The attitude of the Russian authorities is categorical and excludes bombardments or firing at villages and territories settled with civilians.

Below please find several extracts from the mentioned document.

"Throughout the operations, military units of the Russian Federation ... were firing at ... actually identified targets only, which excluded losses among the civilian population.

During the active phase of the operation, Russian military leadership used a host of effective measures directed at protecting the civilian population and their property from damage. Gunfire and bombardments were planned and carried out in spots significantly distanced from civilian settlements, shot at actually identified targets.

Civilian population and objects have not been fired at. Gunfire would quit after withdrawal of Georgian units from occupied positions. Russian aviation ... would hit places of disposition of Georgian army, weapon emplacements, and columns of military equipment on the move.

Aviation has not attacked targets located within the borders of settlements and nearby.

Applied means have excluded civilian losses."⁹⁶

In the following pages we describe the stories of eyewitnesses, examine photos and video footage, expert examinations of the dead, as well as reports of international organizations in our possession that describe a reality very different from the official position of Russian authorities.

96 See, Report of the International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, September 2009, Volume III, "Views of the sides on the conflict, chronologies and responses to questionnaires", Russia, Response to Question #3, pp. 464-465.

For instance, the 2008 **OSCE/HRAM** report indicates that numerous villages were bombarded. In addition, based on the visit paid to the occupied territories on 7-10 November 2008, the Mission has proved by pieces of factual evidence the damage caused to Georgian villages as a result of air strikes.

"The reports presented below are extensive and numerous, but important to show the widespread and systematic nature of the attacks on villages in South Ossetia. The evidence indicates indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing resulting in the deaths of numerous civilians and in some instances the deliberate targeting of civilians. In the context of the conflict, these cases provide prima facie evidence of war crimes and potentially even crimes against humanity. The pattern suggests a deliberate plan, through the commission of various criminal acts against the civilian population, to drive out all civilians of Georgian nationality from the region of South Ossetia. In a short time, this is exactly what was accomplished."⁹⁷

BOMBARDMENT OF DIDI EREDVI (EREDVI-BERULA-ARGVITSI)

In August 2008 the village Eredvi was heavily bombed. Bombardments were carried out several times during the day. The biggest damage and casualties among the Didi Eredvi population occurred as a result of the 8 August bombardments. These very bombardments emptied the village from the population.

Contrary to the claims of the Russian authorities, Georgians who escaped death from the Liakhvi Gorges relate stories of killings of their neighbors and relatives:

- "A bomb hit neighbor's house",
- "Church fence was bombed",
- "A bomb hit my house",
- "Shell shrapnel hit him in the yard of his own house",

Lots of other phrases of similar content are heard from eyewitnesses.

According to the stories of inhabitants of the villages, approximately **twenty people** were killed in Didi Eredvi as a result of aerial bombardments or direct fire.

"Village Eredvi was heavily bombarded when we drove by. Dead were lying by the road, near



Citizens of Georgia killed as a result of bombardment, 14 August 2008.

97 See, "Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia", OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, pp. 34-35.



Russian Army Vehicles carrying Ossetian Para militaries with white armbands along the road crossing Georgian villages.

the house. Houses were hit by a bomb."⁹⁸

Guliver Tarielashvili remembers well Eredvi bombardment:

"For the first time Eredvi was bombed on 8 August. **Mzia Bortsvadze, Seiran Ozgebishvili, Nino Kristesiashvili, Gogi Zhuzhniashvili, Tsiala Tarielashvili** were killed during this bombardment. Many were wounded, approximately 10 people. 2 jets were bombarding. They were colored in white and greenish. They flew too low."⁹⁹

Mevlud Beriashvili also watched himself how the shell killed his neighbors. Resident of village Berula **Elnar Vakhtangishvili** is another eyewitness to the 8 August bombardment:

"It was around 11am-12pm on 8 August 2008 when a bomb was dropped in 200 meters from my house. A house was shaking. All glasses were broken. Then village Eredvi was bombed also. 8 people were killed."¹⁰⁰

Gela Tsotniashvili's father also became a victim of the 8 August bombardment.

"Village Eredvi was bombed at approximately 2pm or 3pm on 8 August 2008. 2 jets flew over us during half an hour and when it dropped bombs in the gardens, we knew they were Russian jets. They were silver jets. At this time I was in a lower district. Another bomb was dropped before I went up home. A total of 3 bombs were dropped near my house. There was a smoke around when I entered the house. When I went up to a second

floor another bomb was dropped near my house. Pressure threw me from one room to another. I was stupefied for a while. A roof was brought down, and roof slates and veneers broke. When I went down

98 On 8 August 2008, resident of village Achabeti Anzor Babutsidze escaped bombardments from Kvemo Achabeti and watched the unfolding events in other villages on the run. Eredvi was among them. Interview with Anzor Babutsidze was recorded by the GYLA.

99 Interview with Guliver Tarielashvili was recorded by the GYLA, at the temporary settlement of significant part of the Eredvi-based IDPs, Koda, Building #2, Entrance #2, 3rd Floor, Apt. 21.

100 Interview with resident of village Berula Elnar Vakhtangishvili was recorded by the GYLA, Gori, 1 Tkviavi St., at the "sacred spring", Apt. 30.

*to the first floor my father had fallen by the stairs. I couldn't guess then but it turned out he had injured a leg. He was operated on in Hospital #5 in Tbilisi, but died in two weeks after the operation from injuries."*¹⁰¹

Davit Kristesashvili from Eredvi told us about another district damaged from the 8 August bombardment:

*"I stood approximately 30 meters away from the church fence, when a bomb was dropped, and the pressure threw me to the ground. I fainted and I don't know how long I was in such condition for. When I came to senses there was a smoke around. Over the road, where a bomb had hit, was a ravine and I saw how the wounded were taken out of that ravine. These were: Lasha Beruashvili - wounded in the head; Paata Zhuzhniashvili - wounded in the shoulder; Soso Tarielashvili - wounded heavily in a leg; Giorgi Mamisashvili - worked in Sanakoev's guard; Malisha Romelashvili was wounded in liver. **Nino Kristesashvili** and **Gogia Zhuzhniashvili** had been killed. In some 15 minutes second bomb hit the residential houses."*¹⁰²

Amiran Maisuradze and **Valentina Bestavashvili** recall surnames of other Eredvi-based victims of the 8 August bombardment:

*"Air strikes began on 8 August, at approximately 5pm. After the bombardment, **Mishiko Taboshvili**, **Nikoloz Beruashvili**, and **Jumber Maisuradze** were found dead."*¹⁰³

Unfortunately, we could not detect stories of all persons from Eredvi who died during the bombardments. Several names and surnames still remain unknown to us. Nevertheless, we believe the stories of eyewitnesses throw a sufficient light on the August 2008 murders in village Eredvi.

Killing of Mzia Bortsvadze

81 year-old inhabitant of village Eredvi **Bagrat Bortsvadze** told us what he had seen:

*"It was 8 or 9 August, I don't remember exactly. My niece Mzia Bortsvadze has died from the bombardment. **She was hit by a shell splinter and she died in the yard of her house.**"*¹⁰⁴

Vazha Kristesashvili has also eye-witnessed Mzia Bortsvadze's killing, who recalls that he found two dead bodies after the bombardment of church

101 Interview with Gela Tsotniashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Gori. Unfortunately father's name is not discernible in the interview. At the moment of drafting this document Mr. Tsotniashvili could not be contacted.

102 Interview with David Kristesashvili was recorded by the GYLA in the IDP settlement, village Koda, Building #10.

103 Interview with Valentina Bestavashvili and her spouse Amiran Maisuradze was recorded by the GYLA in the IDP settlement, Tbilisi, Moscow Ave. #9/a.

104 Interview with Bagrat Bortsvadze was recorded by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, Nadzaladevi District, 8 Sanerge St., in attendance of his sister-in-law Gulnazi.

fence, those of Mzia Bortsvadze and Nino Romelashvili. **Nodar Tsotniashvili** told this story in detail as well.¹⁰⁵

Killing of Seiran Ozgebishvili

Resident of Eredvi **Spiridon Kristesashvili** recalls that on 8 August they had gathered in the center of village Eredvi together with other villagers.

*"Approximately at 10 a.m. I saw 2 jets flying over the village, following which one jet, belonging to the Russian military forces, stormed the civilian population of village Eredvi. Bombs dropped in 500 meters from us, resulting in destruction of houses and killing of villagers: Seiran Ozgebishvili, Tsiala Tarielashvili and others. I don't know surnames of all of them."*¹⁰⁶

Giorgi Vakhtangishvili, who found Seiran Ozgebishvili **dead in the yard of his house**, recalls the same bombardment: *"the poor man was hit by a bomb splinter"*.¹⁰⁷ **Vazha Kristesashvili** also eye-witnessed the death of Seiran Ozgebishvili and Tsiala Tarielashvili.¹⁰⁸

Neli Ozgebishvili also recollects her father's death.

*"During the first bombardment on 8 August a bomb hit the neighboring house and my mother and father sat on a bench by the house. My father Seiran Ozgebishvili died and mother, Aleksandra (Shura) Khubaeva was wounded. On 9 August I went to Gori to bring my mother and happened to be under bombardment there as well, then the Verkhvebis Ubani (district of asps) was bombarded in Gori. Early morning on the 11th I returned to Tkviavi, as I had learned that my nephew, who was a soldier and served in the army, was in the mortuary. We buried him on the same day."*¹⁰⁹

Killing of Tsiala Tarielashvili

On 8 August, by 4 p.m. in the afternoon, **Tsira Tsotniashvili** had left the house for about 10 minutes when a bomb hit her house and killed her 75 year-old grandmother.

"Two big military planes flew, dark green, I haven't noticed anything on them, neither a flag, nor any signs. They started bombarding. A bomb hit my house. I left the house and went to a neighbor about

105 Interview with Nodar Tsotniashvili was recorded by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, 12 Kandelaki St., building of the Border Defense Department. In addition, during the bombardment Nodar Tsotniashvili saw dead Seiran Ozgebishvili, Nino Kristesashvili, Gogi Zhuzhniashvili, Tsiala Tarielashvili.

106 Interview with Spiridon Kristesashvili was recorded by the representatives of the Public Defender's Office in Tbilisi, Kindergarten #112.

107 Interview with Giorgi Vakhtangishvili was recorded by the GYLA in the IDP settlement, village Koda.

108 Killing of Seiran Ozgebashvili was eye-witnessed also by Durmishkhan Midodashvili, interview with who was recorded by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, kindergarten located on the Ikalto Hill.

109 Interview with Neli Ozgebashvili was recorded by the GYLA in the IDP settlement in Koda, Building #9, 3rd Floor, Apt. 17.

10 minutes ago. Grandmother was alone in the house. I looked out because of the noise and it seemed the house did not stand there anymore. It was all demolished. Grandmother wasn't in the ruins of the house. She was lying in the ditch. It seems the pressure threw her out. I saw her dead together with the neighbors."¹¹⁰

Killings of Niko Beruashvili and Jumber Beruashvili

Mikheil Vakhtangishvili was one of the last to leave the conflict zone. Regardless of danger, the old man walked around in the village on a daily basis and eye-witnessed almost every single tragedy. Entire village burnt down and his neighbors were killed in front of him.

*"I saw dead men. In the mornings I used to go to Eredvi to see the torched houses. I saw the following people dead in the yards of their own torched houses: **Niko Beruashvili, Jumber Beruashvili, Natela Kristesashvili, Tsiala Tarielashvili, Tengiz Tarielashvili.** Dogs were eating Niko and Jumberi as they lay in the road. I couldn't approach the dead bodies. I saw from the road that they were dead in their yards. I saw 5 Georgian dead soldiers by my yard. They wore our military uniforms. Villagers who died were eaten by the dogs, there was no one to bury them."¹¹¹*



The bombed house described by Mikheil Vakhtangishvili.

BOMBARDMENT OF ENTRANCE ROAD TO VILLAGE EREDVI

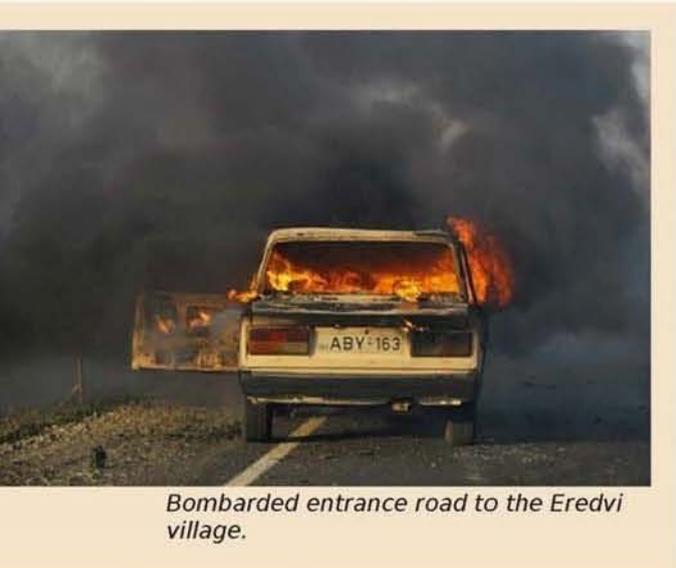
Not only the village was bombed on 8 August, but the entrance road to Eredvi as well, by which Georgians fleeing the village tried to escape. **Robizon Nebieridze** attempted to escape from massive bombardments of the village on 8 August.

*"My cousin Kristo and I left the village by Zhiguli car through the forest. When we entered Eredvi, Russian military jets started bombing. We stopped the car immediately and laid down in the channel along the road. Two ladies, **Marika Kakhniashvili and Tina Avaliani-Kakhniashvili** died behind us in the car. Several others were wounded."¹¹²*

110 Interview with Tsira Tsotniashvili was recorded by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, Building I of the former Russian hospital building.

111 Interview with Mikheil Vakhtangishvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi.

112 Interview with Robinton Nebieridze was recorded on 8 December 2008, by the HRC in Tbilisi, in the hospital located at 22 Budapeshti St.



Bombarded entrance road to the Eredvi village.

Malkhaz Kakhniashvili from Kekhvi confirms this fact also. *"A shell fell on the Tsveriakho mountain and 2 ladies have died. Their husbands were my cousins, Nodar and Mito Kakhniashvili."*¹¹³

Inhabitant of village Kheiti **Otar Gochashvili** recalls the bombardment of the same entrance road to village Eredvi.

*"Village population was on the way, some by cars, and some on feet. Before entering village Eredvi, and suddenly in the open space the column of civilian population was bombarded from the air, three cars blew up in front of me. We tried to leave the place rapidly, there was a smoke and big mess around. Several people died during the bombardment, as they were shooting and our lives were at risk, helping them in any way was impossible."*¹¹⁴

Resident of village Kurta, **Venera Dughadze**, fled the bombardment in her own village and was on the same road:

*"A shell dropped from the jet hit the car behind us, resulting in the death of 2 women sitting in the car, while the driver was wounded heavily. Bombardment started after 7 p.m. on 8 August and I don't remember how long did it last."*¹¹⁵

KILLING DURING THE BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE ZEMO KHVITI, 11 AUGUST

Villages of Didi Eredvi, which were targeted by the Russian aviation and gunfire bombardments, were no exception. Residents of Khviti, Kere and many other villages told us about the bombardment of the village and casualties.

Paata Mchedlidze remembers the entrance of the Russian army and bombardments very well:

"On 10 or 11 August 2008 Russian army entered the village Zemo Khviti by tanks, helicopters, IFVs (infantry fighting vehicles). Immediately upon entering they warned us to leave the village as the Ossetians were about to come. When the Georgian army was leaving the territory, bombardment was carried out, which resulted in the death of 12 people. Only one of them was a soldier, the others were civilians,

113 Interview with Malkhaz Kakhniashvili was recorded by the GYLA.

114 Interview with Otar Gochashvili was recorded by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, kindergarten #90.

115 Interview with Venera Dughadze was recorded by union "21st Century" on 15 August 2008.

*residents of village Zemo Khviti. I buried them in the village. There were 2 old women among the dead."*¹¹⁶

Unfortunately, Paata Mchedlidze could not remember the names and surnames of the dead. Yet, based on inquiries among the population and numerous interviews we managed to revive the stories of not all, but several of the 12 dead.

Killing of Aleksandre Gogishvili

Villager of Zemo Khviti **Manana Gogishvili's** spouse Aleksandre Gogishvili was killed during the August War.

*"My spouse died on 11 August. A house was bombed. He was wounded in the stomach."*¹¹⁷

Amiran Esiashvili eye-witnessed the killing of Aleksandre Gogishvili, he was wounded himself, and would have bled if not aided by the neighbors.

*"On the 11th we were at Ale's family. We hid there. Shells and bombs were dropped. Mass bombardment was launched from 3 p.m. Ale went out in the yard for a minute. He turned around immediately and fell on the ground under the balcony. I saw him fall. He had a perforated wound in the left side of the stomach. I ran out with bloody hands. A shell splinter hit me on the neck, from the right side. I wanted to bring Ale back in the house, but two other pieces of shrapnel hit me in the shoulder and leg."*¹¹⁸

Nineli Dojashvili saw already dead Aleksandre Gogishvili in the house basement:

*"Ale was lying in the cellar on boxes. He had a perforated wound in the stomach. Amiran Esiashvili told me a shell had hit him."*¹¹⁹

Killing of Jemal Gogishvili

"On the 11th I heard the bombardment. My house was destroyed then. When my house was destroyed, my cousin Zaza Gogishvili saw inside my father who was wounded from the bombardment. He brought him out of the destroyed house in the yard and went to look after me. My father, Jemal Gogishvili, was wounded in the stomach and



Georgian civilian detainees Tamaz Gogishvili and Zaza Gogishvili

116 Interview with Paata Mchedlidze was recorded by the representatives of the Public Defender's Office on 16 August 2008 in Tbilisi, 22 Dadiani St.

117 Interview with Manana Gogishvili was recorded by the GYLA in village Zemo Khviti.

118 Interview with Amiran Esiashvili was recorded by the GYLA in village Zemo Khviti.

119 Interview with Nineli Dojashvili was recorded by the GYLA in village Zemo Khviti

head. Neighbor Nineli Doijashvili cleaned his wounds with vodka. Neighbors took him to Zaza's house and he died from wounds in Zaza's basement on the third day. Nineli and Vova Gogishvili found him dead and buried him. Because of the fear no one could look after him and he died."¹²⁰

Tamaz himself was detained on the same day, on 11th. During the search they found the reservist's token on him and beat him brutally. He was taken to the military base, where he was beaten, insulted, and was released only afterwards only by the end of next day.

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE KERE

As the villagers allege, neither the militia, nor the peacekeeping troops were ever present in village Kere after the first conflict. Georgian military units had not entered during the August events either. Therefore, they were relatively quiet and did not leave the village despite tensions and shootings. However, on 9 August a bomb was dropped at the front of the village and the villagers started moving out gradually.

Zhiulon Elikashvili told us:

"On 11 August, around noon, by 12 p.m. I had brought a cow out to pasture. There is a river near the house and I sat there by the channel. There were two of us, my neighbor Arsena Elikashvili and me. I sat under the wall nut tree, and Shota stood by in 3 meters. Suddenly I couldn't understand what happened, something exploded nearby. I saw Arsena's cattle split in two. My cow lied dead on the ground also. I looked down at the leg and couldn't get up anymore. It was torn off. I was wounded in the right eye and the right arm as well. They amputated my left leg in Gori. I lost my right eye and my arm was sutured also."

Zhiulon Elikashvili was not the only victim of this bombardment. **Arsen (Shota) Elikashvili** was injured during the 11 August bombardment as well. After Zhiulon was wounded he went home for medical supplies to help the friend:

*"By the house door something hit me again in the stomach area. It burnt my veins. After the 11 August bombardment I cannot see well. I fall here and then like a giddy hen. I hardly make the legs follow me."*¹²¹

Killing of Robizon Elikashvili

Nazibrola Lomidze left the village together with her family on 10 August, but her spouse Robizon Elikashvili returned back to village Kere to guard the

¹²⁰ Interview with Tamaz Gogishvili was recorded by the GYLA on 30 May 2009.

¹²¹ Interviews with residents of village Kere Arsen Elikashvili, Zhiulon Elikashvili, Nazibrola Lomidze, Guram Bestavashvili, and Gulnara Mchedlidze were recorded by the GYLA

house and assist the neighbors. She has never seen her husband after that again.

"On 11 August a jet bombed village Kere and my husband died from shrapnel."

Eyewitnesses, his neighbors, recall the killing of Robizon Elikashvili. **Gu-ram Bestavashvili** remembers:

"On 11 August I saw my neighbor Robizon Elikashvili standing in the yard of his house and mending the mobile phone, which was connected to the battery. I live in the house next to his. I went over and sat in the car. He had a radio turned on and I listened. It was probably one o'clock. Suddenly something burst and I saw the smoke stood in the direction of the channel. I hid in a car. When I went out of the car Robizon was lying on the back on the ground. He was not alive anymore. There was a blood puddle, his brain was poured out, bomb shrapnel had hit him in the temple."

Gulnara Mchedlidze also saw Robizon Elikashvili who died during the bombardment:

"There was such a smoke that nothing was visible around. I saw Robizon lying on the back on the ground by his car. He had his hands up. He was wounded in the right arm and was bleeding. In addition, bomb shrapnel hit him in the right temple. His head was all smeared with brain, and his face was horribly yellow."

Ivane Dzabakhidze himself barely escaped death:

"I saw with my own eyes how a splinter has hit Robizon Elikashvili in the temple during the aerial bombardment and he died."¹²²

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE KARBI

Bombardment of village Karbi, creates one more dreadful page in the history of murders in August 2008. Eight peaceful citizens died, many people were injured and numerous houses were damaged during the aerial bombardment carried out on 9 August 2008 in village Karbi. Eyewitnesses recall the tragedy in Karbi in detail. Their stories are identical, whether speak together or separately. Only the number of shells is different. Some of them recall only one shell, while the others four. Nevertheless, factual circumstances and casualties are identical. **Lasha Bidzinashvili** remembers well that day.

"Georgian army had not been present in the village either before or after that. Georgian army stood in the gardens, in approximately 1,5-2 kilometers

¹²² Interview with Ivane Dzabakhidze was recorded by the Association of School Directors on 14 August, in Tbilisi, public school #118.



Crater after bombardment in the center of Village Karbi, 9 August 2008.

from the place of bombardment. Following this bombardment, the village has almost entirely emptied."¹²³

Izo Bidzinashvili recalls:

"From 7 August we heard the terrible noise of shooting. Jets started flying in from the direction of Tskhinvali on 8 August from 7 a.m. They flew at low heights. Two bombs were dropped in the village center approximately at 7 a.m. on 9 August too, as a result of which Tsatso (Dodo) Unapkoshvili was heavily wounded."¹²⁴

Otar Bidzinashvili also confirms the first bombardment of the village in the morning of 9 August:

"At around 7:30 a.m. on 9 August a shell hit the center of village Karbi and exploded. At the place of explosion Tsatso Unapkoshvili has died, Soso Gnolidze's house was demolished, Otari Mariamidze's house was terribly damaged and he himself was wounded, Valiko Unapkoshvili's house was damaged and he himself got wounded, the cattle was slaughtered."¹²⁵

However, morning bombardment of the village was not the one-time action, and as Otari Bidzinashvili recalls:

"A blast was heard again in 1-2 hours. Another shell was dropped in the village center, the Bidzinaant neighborhood."

Lasha Bidzinashvili, who is the son of one of the killed, Anzor Bidzinashvili, will never forget the shells in his district.

"On 9 August, around 11 am, bombardment had started in the Bidzinaant district. Russian jets flew from Tskhinvali's side, they flew extremely fast and low and dropped the bombs in seconds, probably 4 of those, which exploded immediately."

As a result of the 11 a.m. bombardment, according to the story of

¹²³ Interview with Lasha Bidzinashvili was recorded on 15 August 2008 by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, Public School #115.

¹²⁴ Tsatso (Dodo) Unapkoshvili, also known as Dodo Mariamidze. Unapkoshvili is the surname of a spouse. Therefore, part of neighbors calls her by her maiden name, and another part - by her spouse's surname. Tsatso Unapkoshvili's death as a result of bombardment is confirmed also by the resident of village Karbi Tengiz Tevdorashvili, interview was recorded by the GYLA in the village.

¹²⁵ Interview with Otari Bidzinashvili was recorded by the GYLA.

Otar Bidzinashvili, which was confirmed by many other eye-witnesses,¹²⁶ **Amiran Tevdorashvili** and **Irakli Tevdorashvili** died on the spot, while **Giorgi Mariamidze** was wounded but died the next day.

*"Also, in approximately 30-50 meters from me **Nazo Tevdorashvili, Tsiala Bidzinashvili, Anzor Bidzinashvili, Valiko Shevardenidze** died on spot, and **Tengiz Tevdorashvili, Guram Tevdorashvili, Davit Rcheulishvili, Rusudan Rcheulishvili, and Mediko Aniashvili** were wounded on spot. As a result of explosion both of my lower extremities were injured, one finger of lower left extremity was torn off, I was wounded in the right elbow and in front."*

Mediko Aniashvili from Sveri remembers 9 August clearly, when she received numerous wounds as a result of bombardments.

*"Neighbor called me at around 10 o'clock. I was talking to her and suddenly heard the drone of the jet. I thought it flew over, but a horrible noise of dropping the bomb was heard and by my side, in front of me, two people, neighbors, **Valiko Shavardenidze** and **Anzori Bidzinashvili** had died on the spot. I was injured from this bomb as well. Shrapnel hit me in the stomach, I had a perforated wound and had my entire body bleeding. I was in such a shock that could not even feel the pain. I ran around like a madman, as in front of me I saw dead people lying on the ground. I wanted to run away, but there was such a mist in the yard I could see nothing. Entire yard is in holes from shrapnel."¹²⁷*

Killing of Tsatso (Dodo) Mariamidze - Unapkoshvili

Tsatso Unapkoshvili, also known as Dodo Mariamidze, died from wounds received during the 7 a.m. bombardment.

*"A shell hit at 7 in the morning the house of **Tsatso (Dodo) Mariamidze**, resulting in the death of **Dodo Mariamidze** and wounding **Valodia (same as Valiko) Unapkoshvili** and **Otar Mariamidze**."¹²⁸*

His daughter, **Tamar Unapkoshvili** recalled in the interview with us:

"on 9 August, at approximately 6 to 7 a.m. the cluster bomb had hit the house. At this time my mother was in her house. My mother

¹²⁶ Our researchers interviewed many people concerning the bombardment of village Karbi and casualties. All other interviews are identical of information provided by Otar Bidzinashvili. Interview with Nana Maisuradze was recorded by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, in the republican hospital, on 15 August 2008, her house was damaged from bombardments; interview with Merab Bidzinashvili was recorded on 15 August 2008 by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, Public School #115, his father died during the bombardment; interview with Nino Gmoladze and Eldino Gmoladze was recorded on 15 August 2008 by the Association of School Directors of Georgia, in the Tbilisi Public School #115, they lost residential house; interview with Archil Sidamonidze was recorded on 15 August 2008 by the Association of School Directors of Georgia, in the Tbilisi Public School #115, lost a residential house. The case of village Karbi was elaborated by the Georgian NGO "Article 42", that carried the case of victims of bombardments of village Karbi to the European Human Rights Court in Strasbourg.

¹²⁷ Interviews with the resident of village Karbi Mediko Aniashvili were recorded by the GYLA in village Karbi.

¹²⁸ Koba Mariamidze is the son of killed Giorgi Mariamidze, interview with him was recorded by the GYLA.



The House of Tamar Unapkoshvili after the bombardment of village Karbi, August 2008.

(Tsatso Unapkoshvili) was heavily wounded: her hands were cut, the area around heart and lungs was torn out, extremities and bones broken. She was taken to the Gori hospital due to severe injuries of the body, but she died before getting there."

Killing of Anzor Bidzinashvili

Izo Bidzinashvili, wife of the deceased told us that frightened from the first bombardment, they left the house and searched for the shelter:

"I was afraid, as there was a repeated sound of the blast. My spouse paused at the house of the Shevardnadzes, in the Bidzinaant district. At the time the third shell had already dropped. I ran out as soon as I've heard the explosion, as my son Lasha and spouse Anzor Bidzinashvili were outside. There was a horrible smoke, I could see nothing, and I

couldn't reach the place of explosion. My son was going towards the house and saw his father, Anzor Bidzinashvili, whose right extremity was entirely cut off. He died on spot from the wounds."

Lasha Bidzinashvili:

"My father stood on the road together with other neighbors, very close to the house. There were total of 20 people, out of which 8 died and approximately 10 were wounded. Shells cut my father's leg off. He died on the spot."

Killing of Giorgi Mariamidze

Koba Mariamidze, son of another victim of the 9 August bombardment, Giorgi Mariamidze, recalls that on August 9 he was in Gori, when he was informed about death of his father. At this point in time Gori was severely bombarded as well. At 1:30 p.m. the village trustee **Vasiko Tevdorashvili** informed him that his father, Giorgi Mariamidze, was wounded in head and was taken by ambulance to the Tkviavi hospital, from where he was taken by the reanimation ambulance to Tbilisi.

"As my father had lost consciousness and was registered as unknown person, we searched around all hospitals and found him in the reanimation department of hospital #8. He was attached to a medical ventilator, and died at approximately 8 a.m. on 11 August."

Killing of Valiko Shevardenidze

The same shell dropped in the Bidzinaankari killed the 75 years old Valiko Shevardenidze, who stood by the gates of his own house, talking to the neighbors.

According to **Marina Shevardenidze**, the old man "was heavily wounded in the cardiac area. He died on the spot and we couldn't hospitalize him in time."¹²⁹ **Sopio Giorgishvili** eye-witnessed the fact of killing also and confirms that Valiko Shevardenidze died from the very bombardment together with his other neighbors. Marina Shevardenidze herself suffers from the degradation of eyesight and hearing. She lost the residential house.

Killing of Tsiala Bidzinashvili

Piruz Bidzinashvili, husband of the dead lady, eye-witnessed the 9 August bombardment, wife's death, and home destruction.

"I heard a terrible blast. Sound came from above. It happened in seconds. My spouse, Tsiala Bidzinashvili was in the yard of our house. After the blast shell shrapnel hit her in the stomach area, fingers on both hands were torn off and both arms were injured, almost torn. She died on the spot.

Following the blast a shell splinter hit me in the left thigh, right arm, and tore off four toes on my right foot."¹³⁰

Killings of Nazo Tevdorashvili, Amiran Tevdorashvili, and Irakli Tevdorashvili

During the explosion, **Guram Tevdorashvili** stood in front of Piruz Bidzinashvili's house together with other villagers, listening to the radio. He escaped death himself, but was severely injured and was treated for months.

"We were 7-8 people. At this point I heard a terrible blast. Then I don't remember anything. I lost consciousness. As I know from the people who were with me, I was crying dazzled for them to take care of my mother. As a result of bombardments, both my lower extremities were injured. I still endure strong pains, and have difficulties moving. I lost some of eye-sight in both eyes. They first took me to the Tkviavi and then the Gori hospitals, and finally they brought me to village Ateni, in my spouse's family.



Wounded Georgian after the bombardment of village Karbi, August 2008.

129 Interview with Marina Shevardenidze was recorded by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, on 15 August 2008.

130 Interview with Piruz Bidzinashvili was recorded by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, in the republican hospital on 15 August 2008.

At the time of the blast, my 75 year-old mother, Nazo Tevdorashvili, was coming to my place from her house. After the explosion she was heavily wounded, she was first taken to Tkviavi hospital, then to Gori. She died shortly after arriving in the Gori hospital.

Giorgi Mariamidze, Amiran Tevdorashvili, and his brother Irakli Tevdorashvili stood by me. All three of them died from the blast."¹³¹

Amiran Tevdorashvili's daughter, **Natia Tevdorashvili** told us that after the bombardment of the Bidzinaant district of village Karbi the population fled massively and could not pay due respect to the dead.

"Women looked after their dead and buried them right there in the yard in pits dug with their own hands."¹³²

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE ACHABETI

Anzor Babutsidze, just like many of his neighbors, left Achabeti on 8 August 2008 during the three-hour cease fire humanitarian corridor announced from the gun-fire bombardments. However, he remembers pretty well, that while driving he saw how the shooting resumed.

"On 8 August, after 6 o'clock the cannon fires resumed. 20 bombs were dropped in the village. They fired at the bypass road and the bridge, where people were on the run."

Shmagi Babutsidze also recalls the bombardment of the bridge:

"On 8 August, at 7:30 in the evening my parents, neighbors, sisters and I left the village by our car. We were crossing over the bridge. This was the only bridge connecting Eredvi road to the bypass road. They shot at us from everywhere on the bridge but didn't get us. They shot at us from howitzers and mortars. There is the Ossetian settlement, called Dampaleti, it's on a high hill and they shot at us from there. Only civilians fled on that bridge."¹³³

These very bombardments caused the most victims and casualties in the village. Unfortunately we were not able to verify all the stories of killed Achabeti inhabitants. Thus we provide only the list of those people that have been mentioned to us by the IDPs during numerous interviews. One of them is **Anichka Mindishvili**. We will tell the story in the following chapter due to its extremely cruel nature. The others killed during bombardment are **Omar Chovelidze, Levan Razmadze, Nodar Otiaashvili, Omar babutsidze, Elene Babutsidze and Giorgi Babutsidze.**¹³⁴

131 Interview with Guram Tevdorashvili was recorded by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, on 15 August 2008.

132 Interview with Natia Tevdorashvili was recorded by the GYLA, in Tbilisi, on 15 August 2008.

133 Interview with Anzor Babutsidze and Shmagi babucidze was recorded by the GYLA in the IDP settlement, Department of Geology, Tbilisi, 24 Mosashvili St.

134 The murder of Giorgi Babutsidze by the persons of Ossetian nationality in military uniforms was told to our researchers by Alexsi Chlaidze, resident of Zemo Achabeti. Additionally see the chapter Ethnic Cleansing: Zemo Achabeti

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE VANATI

Shootings were no news for the residents of Vanati, thus the attack on 5th of August was expected as ordinary by the locals. Eye-witnesses tell that shot from large-caliber cannons from the Ossetian side has happened before as well. On 7 August the house of Basishvili family was destroyed from such fire. **Vazha Jojishvili** from Vanati told us about the tragedy of his village. He was the one to eye-witness the killing of Shermadin Basishvili's spouse, Jujuna Basishvili. We believe that information spread by the Georgian government on 7th of August about the causality among civilian population in Vanati was exactly about the killing of Jujuna Basishvili.

Vaja Basishvili recalls:

*"On 7 August a missile hit the house of resident of village Vanati Shermadin Basishvili. The house was demolished completely. His spouse has died."*¹³⁵

On 8-9 August aerial bombardments were carried out and the village was being destroyed. The population massively fled from their houses. Bombs were dropped in the gardens and yards of the civilian population.¹³⁶

Vaja Jojishvili:

"Russian military jets flew over. They dropped bombs. One of the bombs hit the garden of my neighbor Otar Jojishvili. At this point I was in the garden as well. I was frightened and laid down in the water channel. There was a smell of smoke and gunpowder."

Other victims of Vanati bombing, according to the witnesses were **Meri Babashvili** and **Vladimer Jojishvili**. Although we have verified their death due to the bombing (by death certificates and official information from the municipality in charge), we were not able to find out exact details and circumstances of killing.

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE SHINDISI

Giorgi Arabashvili from Shindisi recollected the details of bombardment of the village with our researchers. According to the eyewitnesses, village Shindisi, just like virtually every other Georgian village, was heavily bombarded by the Russian aviation. Houses and the village infrastructure were destructed. **Ivane Gogidze** from Shindisi was killed from one of such bombardments.

Giorgi Arabashvili told us that during the bombardments strange explosive devices were falling. Many of them did not explode and fields were covered

¹³⁵ Interview with Vazha Jojishvili was recorded by the HRC on 25 December 2008.

¹³⁶ For more detailed information about damage of the village Vanati see the chapter on Ethnic Cleansing: village Vanati



Crater left after bombardment in village Shindisi.

with them. His brother, **Ramaz Arabashvili**, found one of such devices.

*"He was returning home from the land plot, when he found a strange device in the field. He took it with him to show it to me. He called me out and we inspected it. It didn't seem to be dangerous. He showed it to fellow villagers as well, saying that there were some other devices out in the field. He wanted to put it away, went a bit far away, and suddenly it exploded. It killed him on the spot. We couldn't help him in any way. I can't tell you what type of a mine it was, as we didn't touch these devices until later, when after the war, Georgian miners took them out. **Ilia Bedianashvili** also exploded on a mine in village Pkhvenisi and died."¹³⁷*

Anzor Abramishvili was still in the village when it was bombarded.

"During the bombardment we were at home. We were very afraid. Explosion occurred near the house. They threw out nice objects from the Russian jets - neighbors picked them up. It suddenly exploded. 2 people died and 4 were heavily wounded. Those objects were fancy balls, which were activated by a hand temperature. Afterwards none of us has touched it, although they threw out quite a lot of those in various places."¹³⁸

The second person mentioned by Anzor Abramishvili is **Ivane Gogidze**, who has died during the bombardment of village Shindisi.



Remains of car left after bombardment, Road to the village Variani

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE VARIANI

Russian aerial bombardments took away the life of inhabitants of village Variani, **Malkhaz Bedoshvili** and **Omar Bedoshvili**.

Nana Labadze recalls

*"On 8 August village Variani of the Gori District was under aerial bombardments. The village was also shot at from various weapons. During the bombardment, 15 people were wounded and father and son, **Malkhaz***

¹³⁷ Interview with Giorgi Arabashvili was recorded by the union "21st Century" on 15 August 2008 in Tbilisi, in Public School #115.

¹³⁸ Interview with Anzor Abramishvili was recorded by the union "21st Century" on 15 August 2008 in Tbilisi, in Public School #115.

Bedoshvili and Omar Bedoshvili, were killed. Several minor children were wounded during this very bombardment also.¹³⁹

Vano Natsvlashvili, resident of the same village, confirmed the killing of father and son in an interview with the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association. Another eyewitness, **Giorgi Makishvili** from Variani, told us about other victims:

*"During the aerial bombardment, it was around 9-10 o'clock, when a bomb dropped in Variani. This happened at the front of the village, killing the local resident father and son. Makho Bedoshvili was the name of the son. 8 people were wounded: Ilia Aduashvili, Temo Aduashvili, Beka Giorgishvili, Nikoloz Kereselidze, Mikheil Khizanishvili, 12 year-old Vako Urjumelashvili, and 11 year-old Tsira Urjumelashvili."*¹⁴⁰



Remains of car left after bombardment, Road to the village Variani

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE PKHVENISI

Killing of Ilia Bedianashvili

Karaman Bedianashvili watched the killing of his own father, 78 year-old Ilia Bedianashvili, in his own yard in village Pkhvenisi.

*"My father, Ilia Bedianashvili died because of various traumas and wounds caused from the military activities in August 2008. Residential house was totally destroyed by shells dropped by the Russian air strikers."*¹⁴¹

The bombardment occurred on 8 August 2008 and that is when Ilia Bedianashvili died. Neighbors assisted his son in burying the body: **Azo Nadi-radze, Vakhtang Nadiradze, and Noshre Nariashvili**, who moved quietly through the gardens, because the tanks and soldiers of Russian armed forces were already in the village. They have confirmed the killing of Ilia Bedianashvili and its concrete circumstances with your researchers. Karaman Bedianashvili stayed in the village throughout the entire conflict. He was constantly hiding and he himself became the victim of inhuman treatment.

Giorgi Arabashvili from Shindisi also recalled in an interview with us the killing of Ilia Bedianashvili as a result of bombardments.¹⁴²

139 Interview was recorded on 15 August 2008 by the union "21st Century", in Tbilisi in kindergarten #76.

140 Interview was recorded on 16 August 2008 by the union "21st Century", in Tbilisi in Public School #32.

141 Interview with Karaman Bedianashvili was recorded by the union "Article 42".

142 Interview with Giorgi Arabashvili was recorded by the union "21st Century" on 15 August 2008 in Tbilisi, Public School #115. Ilia Bedianashvili's death was mentioned by the Giorgi Arabashvili in sub-chapter on bombar-

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE MEGHVREKISI

Killings of Hamlet Maisuradze and Otar Maisuradze

A resident of village Meghvrekisi, **Roman Nadiradze**, told us that on 8 August, approximately at 6 o'clock, the bombardment of the village started.

"So-called cluster bombs and the 3-meter rockets fell from several jets. 4 people were wounded in several seconds. Cattle was wounded and slaughtered. More than 20 houses were damaged and destroyed.

*Many people had died. We don't know anything about many of them. A majority of houses in village Meghvrekisi were burned and raided and whoever they met there, including the old men, they've killed."*¹⁴³

Another respondent **Ramaz Maisuradze** told us about people killed during the very bombardments:

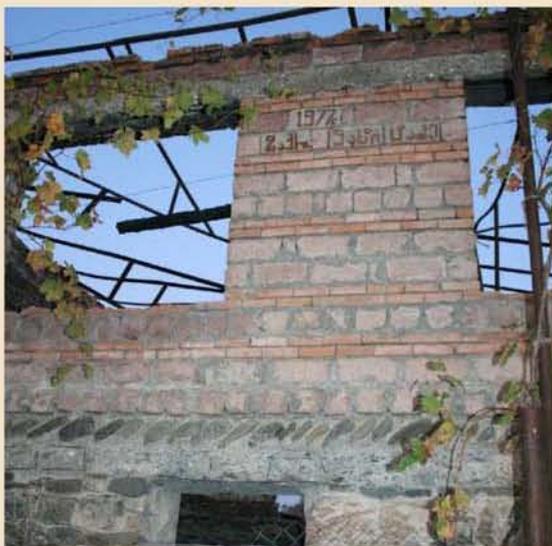
*"My father, Hamlet Maisuradze and my cousin, Otar Maisuradze, died from aerial bombardments. Neighbors assisted in burying them in the house yard."*¹⁴⁴

At the last stage of preparing the present work, we re-interviewed the people who already returned to the village Meghvrekisi. Villagers go through pains when recalling the death of Hamlet Maisuradze and Otar Maisuradze, as they could not pull them out of the destructed house from bombardments and save them.

Murder of Olia Kasradze

Villagers recalled also the killing of an old lady Olia Kasradze, whose house was demolished during the bombardments. Wounded and horror-stricken, she ran around to save herself when she bumped into the Ossetians and Russians in uniforms. Ms. Olia Kasradze herself was ethnically Ossetian and she was punished for bringing up Georgian children.

She was strangled right there in the village brook.¹⁴⁵



Bombarded house in Meghvrekisi village.

dments of village Shindisi

143 Interview was recorded by the representatives of the Public Defender's Office on 15 August in Tbilisi, Public School #176. Unfortunately, the interviewers had not recorded the names and surnames of persons, about whose deaths Mr. Roman Nadiradze relates.

144 Interview with Ramaz Maisuradze was recorded by the representatives of the Public Defender's Office on 15 August in Tbilisi, in Public School #191.

145 Interviews were recorded on 24 October 2009 in village Meghvrekisi, by the author of present work, Tinatin Khidasheli.

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE TORTIZA

Nino Berdznishvili told our interviewers that on 7 August she left Gori together with her family and went to village Tortiza for safety reasons, however, she witnessed even graver tragedy in the village and had to leave for Tbilisi on 12 August.

"Eight bombs were dropped in this small, very old village. Three of these had exploded. I saw with my own eyes how the fellow villagers collected the parts of the body of a neighbor lady and buried them right there in the garden. My cousin's child died on the spot. There were other dead and wounded. My daughter and niece, Lana Pilishvili and Izabela Berdznishvili, barely escaped death, but received light body injuries. Our house was damaged as well."¹⁴⁶

In the words of **Zhana (Eugenia) Bezhanishvili**, village Tortiza was bombarded from jets from 12 August.

*"We hid from bombardments in the cellars. It's impossible to convey in words what we've seen and felt. The village is destroyed, houses are completely demolished, but who cares for these... I don't know how many lives of villagers were taken away by the bombardments on that day. Neighbor's 17 year-old son **Nugzar Akhalkatsi** received a lethal wound in front of our eyes in the neck area from a splinter of a jet bomb. Being heavily wounded, they rushed him to Tbilisi because Gori was severely bombarded as well, but he died soon on the way. On this ill-fated day, another of our neighbors - **Eter Merebashvili** - has died in front of us also."¹⁴⁷*

***Maksim Akopian** needed help, but we couldn't assist anymore, as we had difficult times ourselves and tried to somehow escape from bombardments. My spouse covered the dead body in a blanket and buried it in the yard by the well."¹⁴⁸*

On 12 August, another resident of the village **Lali Gogidze** also eye-witnessed the bombardment of this very district of village Tortiza. She fully confirmed the story told by Zhana Bezhanishvili and told us about other victims as well.

*"One of the first bombs fell on my residential house. House first demolished and then fire emerged. It burned down entirely. Second shell hit neighbor's **Eter Merebashvili's** gate. She was in the yard and died at once from the bomb hit. Another shell hit another neighbor*

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Nino Berdzenishvili was recorded in Tbilisi, Public School #89. Unfortunately Ms. Berdzenishvili does not indicate the names and surnames of the killed persons in the village.

¹⁴⁷ Death of Eter Merabishvili as a result of bombardment is confirmed by Lali Gogidze also, interview was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, Public School #100.

¹⁴⁸ Interview was published in magazine "Post Factum" #3/2008; interview was recorded in Tbilisi, kindergarten #201; interview is available at www.psroots.org

Kristine Merebashvili's house. She was wounded, while the other neighbor, **Maksime**, I don't remember his last name, (she means *Maksime Akofian*, author) who talked to Kristine Merabishvili at this point, died on the spot. One more shell hit my neighbor's Nugzar Akhalkatsi residential house and caused the death of his 16 years old grand-son **Nugzar Akhalkatsi**. Shelling continued for half an hour. Village was bombarded from three planes simultaneously."¹⁴⁹

Unfortunately, we are not aware of names of people mentioned in Nino Berdznishvili's interview. However, we should assume that she talks about this very bombardment. Pursuant to the information known to us and verified respectively, at least four people had been killed during the bombardment of village Tortiza on 12 August: **Maksime Akopian, Shalva Vanishvili, Eter Merebashvili** and **Nugzar Akhalkatsi**. Two people were severely wounded as well: Zaza Akhalkatsi and Venera Akhalkatsi.

Husband of the deceased Eter Merebashvili, **Shalva Merebashvili** recalls:

"I have spent three days and night next to the graveyard. I would eat a small portion of bread daily and that was all my food. On the third day, when it was calm, I have dug her out with my own hands and burring next to the village church".¹⁵⁰

Kishvardi Vanishvili spoke to us about the bombardment of 12 August, as on that day he lost his father **Shalva Vanishvili**. During the military activities, regardless of the fact that he had moved the family out, he mostly stayed in the village together with old parents, who refused to leave the village. Kishvardi Vanishvili told us that bombardment of the village on 12 August was carried out in the morning.

"It was around 11 in the morning on 12 August, when my father went out in the yard. The yard is in approximately 20 meters from the house. There was a calf tied up in the yard and he went to see after it. He had left for less than 5 minutes when I heard the explosion. It was a rather loud noise. Window glasses broke from the explosion. I rushed outside immediately. I thought my father would have been hurt. I noticed jets in the sky. I think there were two of them. When I went out in the yard I saw my father lying on the ground. His t-shirt was all bloody. He couldn't talk anymore. He was wounded in the stomach area. He was bleeding strongly. He died in approximately 10 minutes after we brought him home."¹⁵¹



Shalva Merabishvili at the grave of his wife killed after bombardment. The remains of the ordinance in the front garden of Merabishvili's House.

149 Interview with Shalva Merebashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, on June 1, 2009.

150 Interview with Lali Gogidze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, Public School #100

151 Interview with Kishvardi Vanishvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, on 10 September 2009.

BOMBARDMENT OF THE VILLAGE ZEMO NIKOZI

The resident of village Zemo Nikozi, Ivane Dzamukashvili recalls, that there was an intensive shelling and bombardment on 9th of August. Those who stayed, were hiding in basements, and in the evening village was basically emptied. Ivane Dzamukashvili was one of them as well. As a result of bombing lots of houses were demolished, people have died. Our witness recalls:

*“My neighbor, **Marine Mindiashvili** has died while bombings of 9th of August. She was in her yard, when the bomb hit her house. Marine Mindiashvili was wounded in head and it caused her death. Her husband, Davit Mindiashvili buried her in the backyard of their house.”¹⁵²*

Amiran Mchedlidze has dies in village Nikozi after the bombardments as well.

Head of church, **high priest Isaia** recalls bombardments in an interview with our researchers:

“There were five shells dropped on the territory of the house of worship. As a result priests chambers have been destroyed completely, as well as other premises for liturgy. The worst was the destruction of X century Cathedral Palace, that has been fundamentally renovated just recently.

We have witnessed massive bombardment of the Nikozi on 11th of August. Only the Church survived bombardment, all other supplementary buildings and premises have been ruined. There were 32 bombs dropped on the territory all together.

The church itself, that stands in Nikozi from the 6th century has been looted. Thefts entered the church from the windows and stole sacred items and all valuable supplies for liturgy.”



Building of Nikozi Eparchy damaged during the bombardment.

152 Interview with Ivane Dzamukashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, at the kindergarden #90

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE SVENETI

Killing of Vasiko Ganjelashvili

Maia Saatashvili left the village on 9 August after Georgian troops had entered the village - she escaped from constant bombardments in the village.

"I eye-witnessed personally, how Russian jets bombarded our territories. My neighbor Vasiko Ganjelashvili died after the explosion of the very bomb."¹⁵³

BOMBARDMENT OF VILLAGE KEKHVI

The **OSCE/HRAM** November 2008 report contains significant pieces of information on people killed during the bombardment of village Kekhvi. Eyewitnesses provided the mission with information on 2 women, who were killed

during the bombardment of the car, and on their three fellow villagers, who also became victims of the aerial bombardment. However, unfortunately, the OSCE report contains extremely scarce information and does not provide names and surnames.

Suliko Kakhniashvili from Kekhvi told us that **Vaso Kakhniashvili** and **Grisha Kakhniashvili** were killed during the bombardment of village Kekhvi. Apart from this, Suliko Kakhniashvili told us about the women killed in the car.

"When the bombardment ceased, I went outside and saw right there, just a bit away from the house, that some of my fellow villagers lay down unconscious. I approached them and saw that they were dead. That day we couldn't even bury them. These killed people were: Grisha Kakhniashvili and Vaso Kakhniashvili.

As I learned from the villagers later, Tinatin Avaliani and Marika Kakhniashvili had also been killed as a result of the 9 August bombardment in a car near village Eredvi (when they left the village).¹⁵⁴ We buried the dead on 10 August..."¹⁵⁵



Destroyed Village of Kekhvi after the bombardment.

153 Interview with Maia Saatashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 14 August 2008 in Tbilisi, Secondary School #39.

154 See detailed information on killings of Tinatin Avalliani-Kakhiashvili and Marika Kakhniashvili in a sub-chapter on bombardment of entrance road to village Eredvi.

155 Interview with Suliko Kakhniashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 5 May 2009, in village Koda.

BOMBARDMENT OF GORI



9 August, Bombardment of the Industrial Settlement

Bombarded Khakhutashvili Street, Kombinati settlement, Gori.

Killings of Maia Vazagashvili and Giorgi Muradashvili

Tsitsino Kushashvili lost a daughter during the bombardment of Gori on 9 August. She well remembers that morning, noticing three jets from her own apartment.

"Prior to bombarding the jet approached so close that I even saw the pilot from the balcony, he was Russian. Later I recognized that pilot on the photo published in the Georgian newspaper "Kviris Palitra". The pilot was captured by the Georgian Army, treated in Tbilisi and afterwards exchanged for Georgian POWs."¹⁵⁶

According to the story told by Tsitsino Kushashvili, which is confirmed by the stories of her other neighbors, the first bomb was dropped on the Gori tank unit, while the other in the yard of the apartment block. *"There were women sitting and they all were killed"*, - she told us with regret. She tried to

¹⁵⁶ Interview Tsitsino Kushashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 9 September 2008 in Tbilisi, the Zhvania Children's Hospital.



Maia Vazagashvili killed during the bombardment of the Kombinati settlement, also in the picture her mother Tsitsino Kushashvili and son Giviko Tsverava.

escape with her daughter and a grandchild, but the bombardment had continued. "I saw my daughter had fallen, and a grandchild too. I ran to them. *Maia* passed away in 5 minutes." Her grandchild was rushed to the hospital and was seriously operated on a leg. Fortunately she has survived.

Giorgi Muradashvili has also been killed during this bombardment. His neighbor, **Lili Kerdokashvili** left Gori right on 9 August, after the morning bombing. She told us about the bombardment.

*"At this point 15 people had been killed. Shell shrapnel hit my neighbor **Giorgi Muradashvili** straight into the heart."¹⁵⁷*

Killings of Merab Mchedlidze, Natela Mchedlidze, and Natela Skhirtladze

Levan Mchedlidze lost his parents **Merab Mchedlidze** and **Natela Mchedlidze** during the bombardment of the Gori Kombinat Settlement on 9 August 2008.

At the time of military operations he was in Gori with the family. Since it was relatively quiet in the town, many displaced from the villages found a shelter in Gori, and Levan also hosted relatives from villages Kheiti and Nuli. In the morning on 9 August he stood on the balcony of her flat with his

¹⁵⁷ Interview was recorded by the union "21st Century" on 15 August 2008 in Tbilisi, Public School #22.

friend's grandmother **Natela Skhirtladze** when he first heard the noise of rumble and then saw the jets. Residents of Gori were hopeful, thinking those were Georgian jets and this is when the blast was heard.

*"I don't remember what happened after the blast, but as my brother told me later he found me near the house where I stood, and I don't remember how I went down the stairs and got outside. I was wounded in knees, head, and left arm. My middle finger on a right hand was almost torn off. I was taken to hospital in Gori, later in Tbilisi. I didn't know anything for a week. Then my neighbor told me in the same hospital that **my parents had been killed**. They had been completely torn to pieces. I haven't seen any of them and haven't attended their burial, as my family members did not know in which hospital I was. Later I learned that **my friend's grandmother had also been killed**, who stood with me on a balcony that morning."¹⁵⁸*

Killings of Vera Kekoshvili, Merab Kekoshvili and their relatives

Tsira Khuroshvili lost mother Vera Kekoshvili, her brother's grandson 13 year-old Merab Kekoshvili and relatives on 9 August during the bombardment of Gori. She wasn't in Gori herself, but learned the details of tragedy from neighbors. 4 people had died that day in her mother's apartment.

"During the 9 August bombardment shells hit the house of my mother and my brother's son. By then there were guests visiting my mother from Tamarasheni, my aunt and cousin's spouse. My brother's grandchildren, Merab and Lika, also happened to be in the house. They were all together, eating. Then there was an explosion and everyone was killed except Lika. Lika was badly injured. She was burned. Her eyes were closed from burns. When I entered the ward, I was appalled. Her face, hands, legs were in burns. There was "shrapnel" all over her body.

We couldn't find bodies of any of my relatives or my mom. We only buried one leg of my mother and also a foot below the ankle of my brother's grandchild. My nephew Shurman buried these parts of the body right there in the yard in front of the house prior to my arrival



The only surviving member of the Kekoshvili family, After bombardment of Gori on 9 August 2008.

158 Interview with Levan Mchedlidze was recorded by the GYLA in Gori, on 5 November 2009.

in Gori.

As I learned later, the shell hit the very point where all five of them sat and that's why we couldn't even find their corpses; the bodies were probably totally disintegrated and were scattered around."¹⁵⁹

Killing of Mimoza Lotsulashvili

On 9 August 2008 **Maia Kurtauli** was approximately 3-4 meters away from the Gori School #7 where she met the mother of her daughter-in-law MIMOZA Lotsulashvili and discussed the existing situation. Right then she heard a noise. "Suddenly it got dark" – Maia Kurtauli recalls.

"A bomb was dropped that second. Then I don't remember anything. When I opened my eyes I was lying on the ground. Metal things and rocks were flying in the air. There was a terrible dust and smell. I looked on the side. I pushed the mother of my daughter-in-law with my arm saying – girl, I think I'm dying. It turned out she had already been killed.

My face and a jaw bled like a fountain. Then two boys, reservists, grabbed me and rushed me to the road - Mshvidoba (peace) Street."¹⁶⁰

Reservists took Maia Kurtauli to a hospital.

12 August, Explosion at the Central Square of Gori

Killing of Givi (Gocha) Sekhniashvili

A majority of eyewitnesses of the 12 August bombardment had gathered in the yard of Municipality to receive humanitarian assistance. Right then, at half past ten in the morning, another bombardment was carried out. **Avtandil Tetvadze**, who was severely injured, told us that he was on Stalin Street.

"I left the house in slippers. I stood by the Bank of Georgia. Suddenly some noise and yelling was heard. I remember strong waves coming and some bright objects falling. I thought it was my imagination. These waves probably stupefied me. I didn't feel the pain, and don't even know how I was wounded in the leg. I lay on the asphalt for some half an hour. I felt something in



Givi (Gocha) Sekhniashvili killed after the bombardment of the Main Square in Gori.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Tsira Khuroshvili was recorded by the GYLA in Gori, on 10 November 2009.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Maia Kurtauli was recorded by the GYLA in Gori, on 5 August 2009.

the left leg, looked down and I was bleeding. I had a fracture near the ankle and on the sole. [...] A woman ran out from the yard crying and yelling, I asked her to call an ambulance. She was saying there were wounded in the yard. I looked at the square and on a sidewalk in the corner in front of the Municipality; a poor man was lying in blood. I think he was already dead. When I was going towards the Municipality yard, I remember noticing this man; he sat on the window-sill of the Municipality window. After the explosion he was lying on the ground motionless. The man was already dead."¹⁶¹

Eye-witnesses who escaped death during the 12 August bombardment of Gori recalled that day in interviews with us in detail. **Alexander Akopov** is one of them:

*"When we went down to the square, there were quite a few people. Nodar and I stood right by the underground, in front of the gold shop, i.e. to the left of the Gori Municipality building, approximately 50 meters away. Suddenly I heard a horrible sound of roar. It was the sound of an explosion, although I haven't seen a jet in the sky. A huge wave threw us to the ground, the pressure lifted me up in the air and then I fell to the ground right on Nodar Mchedlidze. Nodar had fainted. Bomb shrapnel hit me from the left, penetrating through."*¹⁶²

Nodar Mchedlishvili, who is mentioned by Aleksandre Akopov, was going home through Stalin Street at half past ten in the morning when he was gravely wounded and saw people killed from the bombardment.

"I noticed old men in the Municipality yard there standing and waiting to receive humanitarian assistance. Then the Toyota taxi stopped in front of me. A foreign journalist came out who spoke Russian well.



Journalists killed during the bombardment of the Gori Main Square: Tsadok Yecheskeli, Stan Storimans - Stanislaus, Norbertus Ida Maria

¹⁶¹ Interview with Avtandil Tetvadze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, in the traumatologic hospital located on the Ushangi Chkheidze Street. Person referred to by Avtandil Tetvadze is Gocha Sekhniashvili. There will be another story about his death below.

¹⁶² Interview with Aleksandre Akopov was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 22 October 2008.

Two other foreigners followed him. There was a jeep, a white two-door Mitsubishi car. The driver of the Jeep offered foreigners a ride to the site of bombardment. [...] Suddenly I heard the sound of an explosion. It was a terrible noise, as if the earth shook. The sound of rustle and rumble was heard. I didn't notice the jet or hear its sound. It was just the sound of a blast only. As if something hit the ground and blew up. The pressure lifted me up in the air and I crashed into the wall of the gold jewelry shop located in the Stalin Street, beside the "khareba" pharmacy. After the crash I fell right there on the ground and lost consciousness.

I was in a shock probably and don't remember how and when they took me out. I didn't feel the pain, but when I looked at my right leg, I saw my trousers were punched in three places and I was bleeding.

One of the dark-skin foreign journalists was wounded. He also hid behind the Toyota car during the explosion, but from the other side. A second journalist, Dutch, was lying to the right from me, approximately one meter and a half from the car with his face down. The third took a camera in his hands and shot everything that happened there in front of the Municipality.

*I noticed **Merab Tatulashvili** right there, who was wounded as well. We are friends with Merab and that's why I recognized him immediately. Temur Boghrashvili was with him, a former investigator. He was wounded also.*

*At this point, **they laid down three dead bodies in front of me on the sidewalk. Afterwards the ambulances came as well. They took the severely wounded.**"¹⁶³*

Ghvtiso Sekhniashvili's brother, **Givi (Gocha) Sekhniashvili**, was killed during the bombardment of the Gori central square.

"We heard the sound of a terrible blast. I called my brother immediately. He didn't answer twice. Someone replied for the third time and ... told me he had died. It was around noon. He had stood in front of the Dutch journalist, about 30 meters away."¹⁶⁴

Soso Bolotashvili was with Gocha Sekhniashvili at the square when the



Vaja Bestavashvili, Avtandil Kerdokashvili and Amiran Kurtanidze killed during the bombardment at the Gori Central Square.

¹⁶³ Interview with Nodar Mchedlishvili was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 28 August 2008.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Ghvtiso Sekhniashvili was recorded by the GYLA in the church of Gori on 29 August 2008.

explosion occurred. "It was like an earthquake. The pressure lifted me up in the air and bumped into a wall," he told us in recalling his friend's death.

"I felt Gocha falling on me from above. Shortly after I managed to lay him over, he was all in blood. Another man asked for help right there, half a meter away, and a bit further away, the lady. There were many people around me before the explosion, waiting for humanitarian assistance and in 15 seconds the majority swam in blood on the square. I had my head close to his and I heard him whisper, "help me". He didn't say anything anymore."¹⁶⁵

Sofia Samurgamova, who was wounded herself, recalled:

"I saw a boy, who lay under the Municipality wall in the corner approximately 20 meters from me. There was a lot of blood around him and probably he was dead already. He was very far from me and I couldn't recognize him right away, but as I learned later, this boy was Gocha Sekhniashvili.

After these events I saw Sekhniashvili's father. He came to my pharmacy, dressed in black. I asked him why he wore black. He told me his son had died during the bombardment and when he described the circumstances and the place, I understood it was the dead boy I've seen."¹⁶⁶

Killings of Vazha Bestavashvili and Avtandil Kerdokashvili

Marekh Baliashvili and her family were in the village Boshura of Gori District in August 2008 as there was relatively quiet. On 11 August their neighbor died in the village and Marekh Baliashvili's spouse, **Vazha Bestavashvili**, and the son-in-law of the deceased lady, **Avto Kerdokishvili**, went to Gori for gasoline.

"They spent that night at home and went out in town the morning of the 12th. Shortly after I heard the explosion. At the time I didn't know where my husband was exactly. [...]

The neighbor's boy, Kakha Kitiashvili, drove by a car at twenty past twelve. I went out from the yard and headed towards Kakha's car. People had gathered around. Suddenly I saw a mother of another boy, Avto Kerdokishvili, on the ground. My brother-in-law stood right there and I asked what had happened and he told me Vazha was no



Vazha Bestavashvili and Avtandil Kerdokashvili killed during the bombardment of the Gori Central Square

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Soso Bolotashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 29 August 2008.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Sofia Samurgamova was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 19 May 2009.

longer alive. It turned out that Kakha drove dead Vazha and Avto by a car.

When the explosion occurred on a central square in Gori, they were wounded and died on the spot. My spouse had a perforated wound from the heart to the back by bomb shrapnel. His nose was also broken and forehead scratched. It seems he fell on his stomach as a result of the explosion. Avto was all torn in pieces."¹⁶⁷



Amiran Kurtanidze killed during the bombardment of the Gori Central Square, 12 August 2008.

Killing of Amiran Kurtanidze

During the first bombardment of Gori, **Tamar Kurtanidze's** house was damaged:

"Glasses were broken, sanitary engineering went out of order, lights went out, water turned off, and the roof was damaged. It was impossible to stay there."

Therefore, the entire family first moved to her husband's house, and afterwards, due to constantly increasing tensions, they left for Borjomi. However, they couldn't make father Amiran Kurtanidze

agree. Tamar recalled talking to her father last time, on 12 August, and asking him to leave Gori. Amiran Kurtanidze replied, "*I won't leave and will even die if needed.*" This was their last dialogue.

Amiran Kurtanidze died during the explosion in the Gori center on 12 August. Tamar Kurtanidze's brother-in-law notified her about her father's death.

"We were out for food and humanitarian assistance. Right then a bomb exploded in the center of the town and the bomb shrapnel hit him."¹⁶⁸

Daughter and son-in-law buried the old man on 14 August.

Killing of Viktor Khaduri

Vera Khaduri was in her house with her spouse, Viktor Khaduri, and a son. "*We listened to the 11 o'clock news and then went down to the basement, as we were afraid of bombardments*", - Vera told us. "*Everything happened in seconds. Viktor stood up and headed towards exit, when he fell down after 3-4 steps.*"¹⁶⁹ **Sergo Khaduri** remembers that morning very well:

"*I was adjusting a chair in the basement and suddenly a pressure threw me away. My father stood by me and he also fell. Everything*

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Marekh Ballashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 19 May 2009.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Tamar Kurtanidze was recorded by the GYLA on 28 May 2009.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Vera Khaduri and Sergo Khaduri was recorded by the GYLA in Gori, Ketevan Tsamebuli Street, on 29 August 2008.

continued for about 15 seconds probably. An enormous window broke. We all were at home. When I approached him, he was still breathing, bleeding from the back. He was wounded in the chest area, perforated on the back.

He died in seconds, write there, in my hands."

Killing of Zavena Anesashvili

Tsisana Anesashvili was going to catch a taxi in the center of the town together with her spouse **Zavena Anesashvili** in the morning of 12th of August, saying they "*wanted to visit their children in Khevtubani*", when they heard the first explosion from the Verkhvebis Ubani (district of asps, current Sukhishvili Street).

"I was frightened and my spouse went to town alone. I went home in about 15-20 minutes. Suddenly I heard big noise of a shake, I thought the building was brought down. I ran out scared, but met no one. I returned back and switched on the TV. I think it was TV company "Rustavi 2", at 11 o'clock. They announced that a bomb was dropped in the Gori center, killing one civilian and two journalists, but I learned later that there were more casualties. [...] I learned about my husband's death from a stranger. Apparently he was trying to help her in starting the engine when the explosion took place and shrapnel hit my husband in the back. [...] I saw this Zhiguli type car after a transfer of the body from the mortuary, all in ashes in front of the "Aversi" drugstore. Its tires were even burned. The spouse of this woman died there as well. [...]"

He was wounded in the shoulders, perforated in the chest area. The wound was deep from the back, kind of perforated in front. His medical reference says he had numerous gunfire wounds as a result of the bomb explosion."¹⁷⁰

Killing of Ana Dokadze

Nino Dokadze recalled that on 8 August, when Gori was bombarded for the first time, the entire family moved in with her aunt, as she had a basement and they felt much safer. Nevertheless, due to repeated bombardments on 9 August they left the town and fled to village Ateni. The old grandmother refused to leave the town and stayed in her own house in Gori.

They have not heard anything about her since 12 August. Nino Dokadze and her mother returned to the town only on the 22nd and found out that on 12 August, during the bombardment of the central square in Gori, Ana Dokadze was there as well, "*she had left my aunt's place and wanted to walk by the Gori Municipality to receive humanitarian assistance.*"

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Tsisana Anesashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 13 December 2008, at #30 Shindisi Street.

On 23 August, Ana Dokadze's body was found in the Barnovi Hospital where they learned from the doctors that she had died on 17 August.

"My mother was told in the Gori hospital that my grandmother was brought to the hospital on 12 August after the bombardment of the Gori center and she was registered as wounded. Bomb shrapnel hit her in the stomach. She also had a head trauma, caused probably from the fall."¹⁷¹

Giorgi Malkhaziani stood right there as well, in the queue of the humanitarian assistance. He was heavily wounded after the blast. He recalled in an interview with us:

"I saw approximately 5 meters away from me an old lady lying on the ground. I don't know whether she was alive or not. But afterwards the boy, who gave us the buckwheat, put me and that wounded old lady in the car and took us to the military hospital. Later Nodar Mchedlishvili told me that this woman had died, bomb shrapnel hit her in the stomach and all her guts had been cut."¹⁷²

As **Nodar Mchedlishvili** later clarified, the old lady was Ana Dokadze.

Killing of Avtandil Tsertsvadze

Merab Tatulashvili was in Tbilisi but in the morning on 12 August his brother had a car accident in Gori center and he arrived there immediately to help him. At this point Gori was bombed. He escaped death despite wounds, but right there he saw his acquaintance Avto Tsertsvadze, who was killed from the bombardment.

"There was one acquaintance on the central square, Avto Tsertsvadze, whom I learned later had died. Avto is my spouse's cousin and I knew him thereof. I even spoke a couple of words with him. He asked me, uncle Merab how are you, do you need any help? I told him everything was fine. I inquired about him that very evening on 12 August. I saw him at central square just a couple of seconds prior to the explosion. I called him on mobile, but he didn't answer. Then I called Avto's brother, Soso Tsertsvadze, and told him that I saw Avto in front of the post building on the central square of Gori during the bombardment of the Gori center in the morning, and asked him how he was. That very day Soso went to Gori, but couldn't find Avto anywhere. I advised him to look for him in the hospital. In about 2-3 hours I called Soso and he told me he had found Avto in Gori in the mortuary, and that he had been killed."¹⁷³

In the morning on the 12th, **Lali Tsertsvadze** tried to reach her husband

171 Interview with Nino Dokadze was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 12 May 2009.

172 Interview with Giorgi Malkhaziani was recorded by the GYLA on 11 May 2009.

173 Interview with Merab Tatulashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 19 May 2009.

by phone but in vain. Later in the evening they found Avtandil Tsertsvadze in the hospital dead.

"My spouse had two wounds, one from the right side. This was a perforated wound, coming out on the left. He had small pieces of bomb shrapnel that hit him on the arm and leg as well from the right. His death certificate says he had died from wounds caused by the gunfire during the bombardment."¹⁷⁴

Killing of Karlo Abuashvili

83 year-old **Karlo Abuashvili** was in Gori for the entire August war. He didn't follow his family to Kvishkheti. He preferred staying in his own house to the end.

On 12 August a neighbor called his grandchild, **Neli Abuashvili** and informed that "grandfather was wounded from the bombardment in the Gori center and that a neighbor doctor, **Ira Ispriants**, gave him first aid." Neighbors brought Karlo Abuashvili to the Gori hospital, and from there to Tbilisi.

"He died in the morning on 28 August, with numerous wounds caused by mine shrapnel on the lower left extremity, as well as with his left ankle bone broken from gunfire."¹⁷⁵

After returning to Gori, the family learned from the neighbors that they had seen Karlo Abuashvili wounded during the bombardment of the central square in Gori, that two young boys aided him and brought home.

Killing of Aleksandre Bazandarashvili

Mzia Bazandarashvili well remembers the awful morning of 12 August. Her husband Aleksandre Bazandarashvili was on duty the night before.

"A terrible blast was heard. There was such a noise that I thought a bomb dropped in my yard. There was a horrible rumble, as if the sky roared."¹⁷⁶

Afterwards she remembers looking after her husband. There was no one anymore on the central square of Gori and she looked for him in the hospital. They couldn't find the spouse among the dead either and then someone told her that "he was wounded and taken to the Ghudushauri Hospital in Tbilisi."

Mzia bazandarashvili could not go to Tbilisi that day, but her daughter



Alexander Bazandarashvili killed during the bombardment of Gori Central Square.

174 Interview with Lali Tsertsvadze was recorded by the GYLA on 28 May 2009.

175 Interview with Neli Abuashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 19 May 2009.

176 Interview with Mzia Bazandarashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 1 May 2009.

and relatives had fled to Tbilisi and they took care after the father. Doctors told them:

"His organism is boiled to such an extent that we couldn't suture him, flesh is decomposing, it will be a miracle if he survives."

Aleksandre Bazandarashvili was alive for another 9 days in the hospital and died on 22 August.

2.2. DELIBERATE KILLING, MURDER

In addition to the deaths caused by indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing, there is evidence also of direct and deliberate murders of civilians during the conflict. In many cases the victims were civilians, women, elderly and children. These numerous cases further demonstrate a plan, executed through the commission of a range of crimes, to cleanse South Ossetia of all population of Georgian nationality. It is the combined effect of these crimes that resulted in the displacement of virtually all Georgians from the region.

Before we tell the story of murders in conflict zone, it will be interesting to recall an extract from the official communication of the **Russian Authorities** to the Fact-Finding Mission:

*"Pursuant to the data of the Inquiry Committee appointed by the Russian Federation Prosecutor General's Office, during the implementation of the peace enforcement operation in Georgia, **NO** instances have been identified where servicemen of Russian Armed forces took part in murders, rape, violence, inhuman treatment of civilians, looting, arson, and destruction of civil buildings.*

From the day one of the operation, the Russian military command undertook exhaustive measures to prevent pillaging, looting and acts of lawlessness with respect to the local Georgian population.

Russian troops, jointly with the South Ossetian law enforcement and military units, provided round-the-clock protection of homes and land allotments that remained undamaged in Georgian villages, at the same time ensuring safety and security of the South Ossetian residents regardless of their ethnic background."¹⁷⁷

Unfortunately, beyond the official statements of the Russian authorities there is a truth, which remains in the ashes and ruins of houses and villages of people of Georgian ethnicity in the territory of former South Ossetian Autonomous District. Villages are still branded by the trail of marauding, looting, arsons, destruction of buildings and killings. Even a year and a half after

¹⁷⁷ Report of the International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, September 2009, Volume III, "Views of the sides on the conflict, chronologies and responses to questionnaires", Russia, Response to Question #5, pp. 468-469.

the end of the conflict, once thriving villages are now a horrible thing to see.

War stories, which rest in the memories of eyewitnesses, are much more profound and very different from the official statements of the Russian Federation.

A resident of the village Tirdznisi, **Zaira Lalashvili**, remembers exactly that when the war broke out, the Georgian army wasn't in the village.

"Only on 10 August, when they fled from Eredvi, they entered our village on the way back and advised us to flee as well. After the Georgians fled, the Russians drove only on the central road, the highway. I remember one armored personnel carrier which drove with a white flag. Russian soldiers sitting on it were saying they were peacekeepers. This is when all the horrifying actions started."¹⁷⁸

Extract from the statement of another resident of Tirdznisi, **Mikheil Demurov**:

"In the morning on 12 August, the Russian military column entered the village. [...] There were cars of Ossetians mixed with the military column of Russians. In the column, Ossetians drove their cars among the Russian tanks. [...] After the entrance of the Russian column in the village on 12 August, there was total lawlessness in Tirdznisi for about 2-3 days. [...] From 12-15 August Russian soldiers moved frequently by tanks and armored personnel carriers on the road in the village, destroying everything on their way. Approximately on 15-16 August, Russian soldiers and military tanks were positioned at the entrance of the village along the bank of river Patara (small) Liakhvi. There were about 200-300 tanks in this place. Russians stayed there until September 2008.

[...] It was still dangerous, as Ossetians would still enter the village and loot and raid us. Every day at 9 a.m. the Russians would drive by and right after that the Ossetians would start coming in. Ossetians moved on a central road by cars stolen from us, with the plates removed. Russians didn't tell Ossetians anything really. Even in September 2008 the Ossetians would still enter the village occasionally.¹⁷⁹

Inhabitants of village Tirdznisi also told our researchers many stories of violence and murder.

Murder of Natela Kaidarashvili

Natela, sister of resident of Tirdznisi **Tinatin Kaidarashvili** died in the village.

*"It was the **end of August** probably. That day, approximately at 12:00*

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Zaira Lalashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 18 October 2008.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Mikheil Demurov was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi on 13 December 2009.

or 12:30 she went outside her house. She was deaf and dumb. She returned home in one or two hours.

Poor lady, she looked awful: her mouth was bleeding, she couldn't open her eyes, they were terribly swollen. She didn't tell me anything and I didn't asked anything either. I laid her down. All day long I put cold cloths on her face. Her shoulders were all bruised as well. Later that day I learned that there was the Red Cross in the village. They came with an interpreter and when they saw Natela the doctor told me she had a rib and a jaw bone broken. We didn't follow them to the hospital.

I took care of my sister for two days all alone. I couldn't close my eyes, I was afraid that she would pass away alone. On the third day, around 2 o'clock at night she died."¹⁸⁰

Jemal Lapachi, her neighbor, eye-witnessed the violence used against Natela Kaidarashvili. He describes in detail how the soldiers jumped off the armored personnel carrier and brutally beat Natela Kaidarashvili. Jemal Lapachi recalls, that there was a Russian flag on the armored personnel carrier and the Russian soldiers cursed in Russian.

"At this point I hid in the gardens behind the Trinity Church located on the other side of the road, in front of the village school. That place where Natela was beaten is in approximately 50 meters from the gardens. [...] I heard the sound of cursing and shouting. They cursed in Russian. There were approximately 3-4 cars - armored personnel carrier, Ural, Vilis. A Russian flag hung on the top of the armored personnel carrier. As I saw, all of them wore colored military uniforms. There were many soldiers, armed with machine-guns. One of them even had a bazooka on his shoulder.

I saw soldiers jumping from the armored personnel carrier and beating Natela. They gathered around Natela, approximately 4-5 people who beat her. I saw they hit her with the machine-gun butts. At the same time they cursed in Russian. I don't know exactly but Russians and Ossetians might have been together."¹⁸¹

Her neighbor, 82 year-old **Tamar Razmadze** witnessed violence towards Natela Kaidarashvili as well:

"I walked around the village. I wasn't afraid. I would walk down, look at my son's house, feed the cattle and return back. And then once I was going to my son's house down the village. It was around noon. I don't remember the date. I believe I saw 4 military cars near the school/bakery. When I approached I saw 8 Ossetian soldiers. Natela Kaidarashvili was dumb and they beat her. The rest were watching.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Tinatin Kaidarashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 17 October 2008.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Jemal Lapachi was recorded by the GYLA in village Tirdznisi on 24 October 2009.

*One hit her in the head with something, Natela fell. I told them she was dumb and to leave her alone. They told me in Georgian mind your own business, grandma."*¹⁸²

Her neighbors **Tariel Samadashvili** and **Leila Edisherashvili**¹⁸³ also confirm the brutal murder of Natela Kaidarashvili.

Murder of Ivane Lalashvili

Ivane Lalashvili's wife, **Zaira Lalashvili**, recalls 14 August as follows:

"Ossetians entered the village on 14 August. My spouse Ivane Lalashvili and I hid in the orchards. It was around 9:00 - 10:00 a.m. An old lady and man who escaped from Eredvi entered our orchard. It turned out they were on the road for two days and asked for water. We let them drink it. Then I told my spouse to see them off. In a while I heard the sound of shooting, it was terrible. It was approximately 11:00 o'clock. The shooting lasted about 20 minutes.

*After the shooting stopped, I waited for my spouse for a while, and as he didn't appear, I went to look after him. I found him in the neighbor's garden, close to my house. He was kneeling, resting on his hands. I thought from far away that everything was fine, but when I went close, I saw his head was all open and brains spilt over. He then fell on the ground and I saw his forehead, neck, heart, and wrists were all pierced."*¹⁸⁴

Sergo Demurishvili from village Tirdznisi told us that on 14 August 2008, it was at 11 or 12 o'clock when they noticed a white plateless car "Niva".

"There were four sitting in military uniforms, wearing white armbands on left arms. The deceased and Nika Demurishvili saw off the elders, showed them the way. This Niva drove in right then. They started shooting directly from the car, aiming at them, I hid in the ditch. They then came out of the car, two of them ran after shooting, and the third followed them quietly. 'Sava' and 'tame' - that's how they called each other. Murder took place 300 meters from my house. There is a ditch near my house and I was hiding in there. Ivane first hid, but they found him and killed him in 5 meters from me, emptying the entire charger on her. Two of them were shooting. The poor thing was very distorted. Then they pillaged everything and left."

Nukri Demurov clarified that the deceased mentioned by Sergo Demurishvili was Ivane Lalashvili.

"It was 14 August, the Ossetians entered the district with a white

182 Interview with Tamar Razmadze was recorded by the GYLA on 18 October 2008.

183 Interview with Leila Edisherashvili and Tariel Samadashvili was recorded by the HRC in Gori on 8 September 2008, in kindergarten #13.

184 Interview with Zaira Lalashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 18 October 2008.

plateless Niva. We sat in a lower district, Vano (Ivane Lalashvili), Malkhaz Kabulashvili from Vanati, Severa and I. As soon as we saw the Niva we ran away. We ran towards the gardens and two with machine-guns ran after us shooting. I ran in front and they couldn't catch up with me. I hid in the orchard. I heard their voices nearby. They called each other 'sava' and 'tame'. In about half an hour I returned and met Vano in one of the orchards. He was lying prone, all shot. His brains were scattered on the ground. Skull, shoulders, hands were all shot."¹⁸⁵

Murder of Teimuraz Khmiadashvili

Lamazo (Ira) Khmiadashvili from Tirdznisi found her spouse Teimuraz Khmiadashvili dead in his own house on 13 August 2008.¹⁸⁶

"It was 8 August probably. The bombardment started and the village emptied soon. On 10 August, the Georgian army drove by in front of my house heading for Gori. When the Georgian army left the village, a Russian military column followed them immediately. I don't remember exact date when this happened. After the Russians, Ossetian marauders started coming into the village.

It was 13 August and the Ossetians were walking around the village. There were Russians as well, protecting the Ossetians. Ossetians drove in a white Niva. [...] All of us were hiding in the orchards, and I was hiding as well. I went to a house quietly to see my husband, who didn't follow me to hide. When I got home, the door was left open. I entered and saw my husband lying prone, bleeding, his face was colored all in blood. His nose and head were broken. When I entered he opened his eyes and took one breath. I thought he would survive. I brought him water but couldn't save him. I called him Temo, Temo, but he couldn't hear anything anymore. He was dead. We buried him on the 15th.

I alone followed the coffin carried by the four people. No one else had come to the burial, everyone was afraid, hiding."¹⁸⁷

Murder of Jamlet Bortsvadze

Inhabitant of village Eredvi **Gulnaz Bortsvadze** told us the story of her spouse murdered by the Russians in military uniforms:

"They were shooting all over in the village. We were bombarded. We were hiding. On 8 August I went to my brother. After that I searched for Jamlet and Hamlet all the time and several times I visited the Red Cross, City Hall, Ministry of Refugees. I walked among the IDPs

185 Interview with Nukri Demurov was recorded by the GYLA on 2 November 2008.

186 Interview with Lamazo (Ira) Khmiadashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 17 October 2008.

187 Interviews were recorded on 2 November 2008 by the researcher of the GYLA with the residents of village Tirdznisi. Lamara Tsamalashvili and Otar Khmiadashvili confirm the murder of Teimuraz Khmiadashvili.

in orchards and took pictures with me to show them around if someone had seen him. I visited mortuaries. If I learned somewhere that 2 brothers had been murdered. I would inquire as to who, where, and how. I lost them both, I was told thousands of things and visited thousands of places. I went through hard times.

Makharashvili called me on 23 or 24 September. I don't know the name. He told me he worked in Gori and met someone named Zakro Archuadze from village Kitsnisi, who told him that they had buried an unknown dead in the entrance of village Kitsnisi, who might have been their relative.

Red Cross assisted me. They transferred the body on the same day: there was nothing... bones were in the sack... it wasn't a corpse anymore."¹⁸⁸

Our researchers found **Zakro Archuadze**, eyewitness of the murder named by Gulnazi Bortsvadze.

"A car comes out from the house of neighbor Gia Naochashvili. It was 06. Just a common civilian 06. Two came out of the car, wearing Russian greenish uniforms. There was a distance of 100 - 150 meters between us. There are bushes there and a spruce and that spruce was covering me. They first came out and then shot. I went back by 20 meters, crawling. On the side of the central road, Jamlet was lying dead on a sidewalk.

It was on 12th or 13th. "¹⁸⁹

Murders of Tengiz Tarielashvili and Natela Kristesiashvili

Venera Arbolishvili witnessed numerous occasions of brutality in her own village. Her spouse escaped from bombardment, but only to become a victim of the offenders.

"Eredvi was bombarded for the first time on 8 August at 4 p.m. A bomb was dropped in the center of the village. There were residential houses only, even the militia building was far away. On the other side the Didi (big) Liakhvi Gorge was bombed. When village Eredvi was bombarded, there were no Georgian soldiers in the village. The army was located in the woods at the posts. The local militia was in the village on 8 August.

My spouse and I were in the house during the bombardment. While we stood in the yard, a small white car drove by. It was the morning of 13 August. It stopped by the gates. I thought they were Georgians and would help us. Suddenly, the car drove back to the gate and shot from there. They shot even without opening the car doors. Everything happened in seconds. They shot twice: one at me and the other at

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Gulnaz Bortsvadze was recorded by the GYLA on 30 July 2009.

¹⁸⁹ Interview was recorded by the GYLA in October 2009.

my spouse. After the first shot my spouse bumped into me in front, I couldn't hold myself on feet and fell. They thought they had killed us both, but the second bullet hit my husband as well. Bullets hit him in the shoulder and a head.

When they left us they wounded Gaioz on the road as well and murdered his wife - Natela Kristesiashvili."¹⁹⁰

Following her husband's death, Venera Arbolashvili tried to commit a suicide. *"I wanted to commit a suicide, and first cut the vein on the wrist, and then the artery on the arm (by the elbow)." Neighbors saved her.*

Gaioz Tarielashvili remembers the murders of Tengiz Tarielashvili and his spouse Natela Kristesashvili in details also. He remembers well that armed persons drove around the village on 13 August in cars, shooting in all directions.¹⁹¹ Four armed men drove near Mr. Gaioz in a white Volga and they even shot at him, but the wounded found a shelter in the neighbor's house and escaped.

"I saw from the open gate of Tengiz Tarielashvili's house that Tengiz Tarielashvili and his wife - Venera - were lying under the balcony. Our neighbor, Tamaz Tarielashvili, stood nearby. I told Tamaz that Venera was alive. I also told him the Ossetians had wounded me. While I was talking to Tamaz I heard three bullets shot. I asked Tamaz immediately to come to my place. When Tamaz and I entered the yard of my house we saw my wife - Natela Kristesiashvili - lying backwards dead. Her mouth was bleeding.

Those who wounded me had murdered Tengiz Tarielashvili and my spouse. On a previous day, on 12 August, the very abovementioned four persons had come by a white Volga, when they burned the entire village down. The murder of Tengiz and Natela and my wounding occurred at the same time, with short intervals in between, before 10 a.m. on 13th of August."¹⁹²

Murder of Otar Tsozniashvili

Otar Tsozniashvili's son, **Gia Tsozniashvili**, eye-witnessed the death of his neighbors during the bombardment on 8 August. However, his father was not a victim of this bombardment.

"My father, Otar Tsozniashvili, was murdered on 12 August. He had died in the orchard. My neighbor, Bichiko Tsozniashvili saw him on 9 September. I went to the village on 10 September and buried him. He was in a strange position, as if they'd tied him to the tree."¹⁹³

190 Interview with Venera Arbolashvili was recorded by the GYLA in the IDP settlement, village Koda.

191 Interview with Gaioz Tarielashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi on 25 May 2009.

192 Researchers of the GYLA interviewed about the murder of Tengiz Tarielashvili and Natela Kristesashvili Tamaz Tarielashvili as well, who confirmed information available to us previously. Interview was taken in Koda on 20 May 2009.

193 Interview with Gia Tsozniashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi; neighbors Grisha Ozgebishvili and Ivane Zhuzhniashvili told him about father's murder.

Murders of Amiran Mchedlidze and Suliko Mchedlidze

Manana Mchedlidze, resident of village Khviti, starts relating her story like many other women dressed in black like her:

"We lived in village Khviti. Bombardments started and my children, grandchildren and I left the village. I had a spouse Amiran Mchedlidze. My spouse died in the morning on 12 August. Poor man was lying in front of the house of the Kotolovs. Then the soldiers walked by. They thought he could've been alive and once again shot at him bullets. Two days later the neighbors brought the priest, transferred his dead body in our yard and buried him right there."

Mrs. Manana's son-in-law has also died on 9 August, though he was a soldier in the Senaki battalion.

Eyewitnesses of Amiran Mchedlidze's murder, neighbors mother and daughter **Leila Ergemlidze** and **Ketevan Ergemlidze** told us:

"On 12 August we saw how Amiran Mchedlidze was coming up. Then we entered the house and shortly after we heard some sound, as if the capsule had blown up, and then we heard Amiran crying to help him, but we were afraid and could not look out. We looked out only in 15-20 minutes, when Natasha Gogishvili and Nineli Doijashvili had come to Amiran's dead body. Amiran was all in blood, already dead. We put a paper bag on him and went home. No one has gone to the dead body afterwards."

Nineli (Zhuzhuna) Doijashvili has helped many of her injured fellow villagers. She told us the following about Amiran Mchedlidze's murder:

"He was wounded in the head and leg. When I saw him for the second time he was shot in the heart also. Probably those three armed men in uniforms, who stood nearby, shot at him. I hid when I saw them."

Frightened, they ran towards the house of their neighbor Suliko Mchedlidze to hide, but *"when we saw the house, it was demolished. Eldar and I started looking for Suliko and we found him headless."*¹⁹⁴

Murder of Elguja Okropiridze

The inhabitant of village Disevi **Giorgi Okropiridze** recalled that the Ossetians reappeared in the village on 13 August. At this point half of the village was already burned down. First they would loot the houses and then put to fire. The population remaining the village was hiding in the woods. They were going down to village, replacing each other.

"On 15 August 70% of houses in the village were torched. I saw the process from the forest. Everything was seen well from the heights were I was. Elguja Okropiridze was murdered exactly on 15 August."

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Nineli (Zhuzhuna) Doijashvili was recorded by the HRC.

Giorgi Okropiridze recalled that Elguja Okropiridze resisted house burning. He was asking them not to burn down his house, and in return they fired 4 bullets at him.¹⁹⁵

His neighbor **Shota Okropiridze** also confirms the fact of murder of Elguja Okropiridze. He saw the dead body by his house.

Vakhtang Okropiridze told us that 70 year-old man Elguja Okropiridze begged the Ossetians not to burn his house and "*he was brutally murdered. 4 bullets were shot at him. They got him in the face.*"¹⁹⁶

Lili Mamisashvili also confirmed that her neighbor Elguja Okropiridze was murdered right when he opposed the burn-down of his house.¹⁹⁷

Otar Okropiridze also confirmed that they would shot anyone opposing them. "*That's how the Ossetians murdered my fellow villager Elguja Okropiridze, and burned one woman - **Nato Okropiridze**¹⁹⁸ - in the house.*"

Murder of Viktor Gagvishvili

The Russian army was already in the village Ergneti on 12 August. There were just several old men left. Victor Gagvishvili was in his own house when soldiers approached his gate. They demanded from him to leave the village. The old man was hesitating, having hard time to leave his home. Having watched the insult and brutal beating of his neighbor, he got scared and when tried to run away from the occupants they shot him in the back. Neighbors buried him quietly right there in the yard. Only after returning to the village, family members transferred his body to a graveyard.

There were many eyewitnesses of Victor Gagvishvili's murder, as the old men remaining in the village were hiding together in the basement of Valiko (Burda) Kasradze's house in the Kasradziant district. That day they were together also, and Victor Gagvishvili went over to his house for several minutes to feed the cattle. Tragedy occurred right then.

*"In approximately 10-15 minutes after Victor left, we heard a sound of shooting. In one or two minutes Viktor entered the yard of Valiko's house. He asked for help, saying he was dying, sat right there on the stairs in the yard and passed away in a minute."*¹⁹⁹



The grave of Viktor Gagvishvili in the front garden of his house, village Ergneti.

195 Interview was recorded by the HRC on 15 December 2008 in Tbilisi, in kindergarten located at 51 Tsotne Dadiani St.

196 Interview was recorded by the HRC on 10 December 2008.

197 Interview was recorded by the HRC on 12 January 2009, in kindergarten #107 in the Gldani Micro District #6.

198 Nato Okropiridze's murder is described in the Chapter on Ethnic Cleansing, sub-chapter village Disevi.

199 Interview with Taniel Kasradze about the murder of Viktor Gagvishvili was recorded by the GYLA on 10 September 2009 in village Ergneti.

In several minutes three armed men with white armbands entered the room where the old men were. *"Then they made us stand by the fence. Then they checked the shoulders of those who were relatively younger, to see if they were soldiers. Then they went upstairs and searched the house"* - recalled Taniel Kasradze. One lady among them, **Liana Champuridze**, was ethnically Ossetian and she was begging on her knees the armed men to spare the lives of the elderly. *"Miracle and Liana's begging saved us"*, the eye-witnesses were saying.

Victor Gagvishvili's murder was reported in the **OSCE/HRAM** 2008 report as well.

"In Ergneti, for example, a villager described to us how he saw a group of ten "Ossetians" in Russian uniforms hit an 80-year old man in the back and then shoot him. The victim crawled into a building, said "I've been shot," and then fell down and died."²⁰⁰

Another old man whose beating is talked about in the village is **Gaioz Kasradze**. 80-year old **Tamar Doijashvili**, who left Ergneti by the end of September with the help of the Red Cross, is an eye-witness of almost every brutality that had occurred in the village.

Gaioz Kasradze was beaten just in front of her: *"He was smeared all in blood, with his head broken. They thought he was dead and threw him in the channel"*²⁰¹, said Tamar Doijashvili, who watched everything from the basement. Gaioz Kasradze escaped death then, but died in several weeks in displacement.

Murder of Giorgi Kasradze

In village Ergneti, Mamisaantubani, the village was gradually emptying from population in parallel with the entry of Russian armed forces. Yet, just like in many other Georgian villages, several old men stayed in the village until the last day. 93 year-old Giorgi Kasradze also was in the village and was not leaving his home. After 12 August neighbors have not heard anything about him, but later they found him dead in the debris of his own burned house. Unfortunately we could not find eyewitnesses of this drastic murder, but during the visit in the village we talked to his grandchild, **Makvala Kasradze** and his neighbors, who saw Mr. Giorgi Kasradze's corpse and managed to bury him.²⁰²

On 22 August 2008 Giorgi Kasradze's son **Vakhtang Kasradze** managed to enter the village, who was the first to see the remains of his father burned in the house:

200 See "Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia", OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, p. 23.

201 Interview with 80-year old Tamar Doijashvili was recorded by Tinatin Khidasheli in village Ergneti on 24 October 2009.

202 His grandchild and relatives told Tinatin Khidasheli about the death of Giorgi Kasradze on 17 October 2009 in village Ergneti.

"Because father was chained to bed, I headed to his room straight away, on the first floor of the house. Father wasn't there. The room was entirely burnt. The bed, on which my father used to lie, was made of wood. There were only ashes remaining from it. When turning back, approximately in two meters from the bed, I noticed a bone of the spine on the floor in the middle of the room. It was about 30-40 centimeters long. It had a shape of the spine, with part of the ribs on it, protruded on the sides and I guessed from it that it was a spine bone. This spine bone was reduced to coal and I haven't touched it. Russian soldiers followed me nearby and I showed it to them also and told them not to touch it. My father was chained to a bed, and therefore I thought those were my father's bones, I knew he wouldn't have escaped from there.

In about a week I decided to go to Ergneti again, I wanted to bury my father. I met the same Russian soldiers at the Meghvrekisi block post. When I told them about the location of my house, one of them told me that he was there himself and buried my father. He had taken digital pictures. In pictures I recognized the place of the grave, in the yard next to the house, it was dug on the eastern side."²⁰³

Murder of Giorgi Kobaladze

Simon Tsereteli from Ergneti was constantly in the village. He went to Gori just for couple of days and then returned back. In the morning he was hiding with several neighbors in the garden; they wanted to save at least the cattle. He told us that that day he and his neighbor Giorgi Kobaladze were together.

"I went home for a while to look after the cattle and a military car stopped at his gate. Probably they came for looting. Shootout started, and then the fire was ablaze. I was scared and ran downstairs."²⁰⁴

When Simon Tsereteli returned to his neighborhood in the village, he found Giorgi Kobaladze dead in his house yard.

There were Russians and Ossetians walking around in the village and it was dangerous for the



The house where Giorgi Kobaladze was killed and his grave in the yard, village Ergneti.

203 Interview with Vakhtang Kasradze was recorded by the GYLA on 24 June 2009 in village Ergneti.

204 Interview with Simon Tsereteli was recorded by Tinatin Khidasheli in village Ergneti on 24 October 2009. According to Simon Tsereteli's story, Giorgi Kobaladze was displaced during the first war. He himself is from Tskhinvali and after 1990s lived with his daughter in village Ergneti. Resident of village Ergneti Simon Tsereteli is on the cover of the current report.

old men to move freely. Afterwards they entered Giorgi Kobaladze's house several more times. Later, when entering the village had become more or less safer, the old man was buried in his own yard. Eyewitnesses confirm that Giorgi Kobaladze's burned corpse had a wound caused from a knife,²⁰⁵ which was confirmed later by the expert examination also.

Shota Jokhadze saw Giorgi Kobaladze's body several minutes after the murder.

"Giorgi was lying unconscious at the bottom of the two-step stairs of the room. I went close, turned him around and saw that he had a wound on the left near the neck and he was bleeding. I understood that he was dead. I left the corpse there and went outside; I wanted to call people for help. At this time the house was already on fire. As soon as I went outside in the yard, I saw three soldiers coming out of the front door of the first floor of the house. They were in greenish military uniforms, two of them had military hats on. They were holding machine-guns in the hands. One of them told me in Georgian, but with the Ossetian accent not to touch the house or otherwise they'd kill me as well. Then all three of them walked past me. One of the soldiers hit me with a knife in the elbow of the right hand. Giorgi also had a wound from a knife; probably the same Ossetian hit him with a knife in the neck."²⁰⁶

Murder of brothers Mikheil Melitauri and Shakro Melitauri

Couple **Gulnara Iosebidge**²⁰⁷ and Mikheil Melitauri, who were over 70, stayed in the village Tkviavi even after the bombardment. "We weren't inclined towards leaving the village, I preferred dying here to a begging life", Gulnara Iosebidge told us. On the 12th, her brother-in-law Shakro Melitauri returned to the village also and was visiting them.

*"At approximately 5 o'clock I heard knocking. We didn't open the door and they **fired an antitank shell at us**. It had a terrible sound. A door opened up and 2 of them rushed in, in civilian clothes, talking in Ossetian. I saw them beating someone, saying "that's what the Georgians deserved". When I went out from the kitchen, I saw my spouse and brother-in-law lying low under the table. I thought they were hiding and it turned out that they'd killed them. They were leaning on each other bleeding, their faces were swollen.*

Then they drove the "Jiguli 06" car out of the garage and took it away. They also took the hand tractor with them. I took care of the bodies to prevent a cat from eating them. I had one bucket of spirit and vodka;

205 Interview with Tinatin Tsereteli was recorded by Tinatin Khidasheli on 27 October 2009 in Tbilisi.

206 Interview with Shota Jokhadze was recorded by the GYLA in village Ergneti on 25 June 2009.

207 Interview with Gulnara Iosebidge and her son Badri Melitauri was recorded by the HRC in village Tkviavi on 9 September 2008.

I was dipping bed-sheet in it and then put it on them to scare away the insects."

Their neighbor **Zaza Razmadze** recalls meeting Gulnara Iosebidze, when he heard of neighbors' murder.

"I stood by Zura's house. They had already entered inside. One of the armed in military uniform saw me and shot at me from a machine-gun. I ran, crawled over the fence and hid in the orchards. Late at night I went towards home and then I met Gulnara, who asked me to help her bury murdered Shakro and Misha.

When I entered the house I saw corpses in blood on the balcony. I saw Shakro and his brother shot by several bullets. Each of them had 6-7 bullets in them, if not more."²⁰⁸

Another old lady from Tkviavi, **Zina Merebashvili**, remained in the village throughout the entire war. During the bombardments she hid in the basement, and otherwise she tried to help fellow villagers staying in the village.

*"Ossetians were looting everything, burning everything, they even murdered my neighbors; the Melitauri brothers, Shamil Okropiridze, Nodar Buturi, Gela Chikhladze, **Koba Jashiashvili**. They told about another man in the village also, but I didn't know who he was".²⁰⁹*

Giorgi Razmadze, who also witnessed the torching of the Melitauris house, informed us about another murder:

*"I saw how they set the houses of Tamaz Kapanadze, Zaza Razmadze, Misha Melitauri on fire. They first murdered Misha Melitauri, **Gogia Chokheli**, Shakro Melitauri and then set the house on fire. They also burned the house of Demetrashvili."²¹⁰*

Unfortunately, we could not obtain additional information about the murders of Koba Jashiashvili and **Gogia Chokheli**, as villagers could not recognize them by name. They told us in the village that they probably were not from the Tkiavi. Those days people fled from their own villages and found shelter wherever they could, so it is possible that several such displaced were still remaining in village Tkviavi as well.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Zaza Razmadze was recorded by the HRC in village Tkviavi on 9 September 2008.

²⁰⁹ Interview with Zina Merabishvili was recorded by the HRC in village Tkviavi on 9 September 2008. Ms. Zina herself is the first war IDP from Tkhinvali.

²¹⁰ Interview with Giorgi Razmadze was recorded by the staff of the Public Defender's Office of Georgia in Tbilisi on 15 August 2008, in the Secondary School #191.

Murder of Jaba Jalabadze

Apart from the story of the Melitauris, in village Tkviavi our researchers learned about six other horrifying murders.

Eyewitnesses recall how 25-year old Jaba Jalabadze, who had hearing problems, was murdered. When ordered to push the car, Jaba turned around and tried to get away from the Ossetians in white armbands. He was shot dead on the spot as if due to disobedience.²¹¹ **Vladimer Givnishvili** told us about the murder of Jaba Jalabadze:

"Tanks and soldiers were coming in, they burned houses and raided the people, murdering some and looting, taking any kind of belongings. In village Tkviavi they murdered the resident of Plavi, Jaba Jalabadze."²¹²

Murder of Gela Chikhladze

Gela Chikhladze was locked up in the marani (wine storage) of his own house. After looting the house, they set the house on fire by a traditional method and despite his desperate crying and begging they closed the door on him. Gela Chikhladze's half-brother **Givi Kapanadze** recalls that on 12 August they were hiding in the orchards about 30 meters from the house and from there he saw how a dozen soldiers entered the house, followed by the armed men in uniforms in several minutes.



The house after bombardment, village Tkviavi.

"I saw them getting hold of Gela. Two Ossetians with machine-guns ran towards me as well and made me raise my hands up. I was with my father-in-law Giorgi Turashvili. They threw us in the pigsty. Both Ossetians were guarding us with machine-guns. Nothing was seen from the pigsty. I only remember that I hardly heard a sound of shooting. I also heard my brother's wheeze. When they left, we ran to the orchards. At about 10 p.m. my friend Zaza Razmadze and I left the orchards and went to my brother's house. The house was on fire. The fire was almost extinguished and there was a terribly smoke and smell. Ossetians moved all around. We looked for my brother with a phone light, but couldn't find anything."²¹³

At dawn neighbors found the burned body of Gela Chikhladze.

"I went over to Gela Chikhladze's house. I don't remember the exact date, probably it was 18 or 19 August. There was a dog in the door. There was a terrible smell in the house. I entered the kitchen and from

211 Interview was recorded by the Union "21st Century". Young respondent man asked not to disclose his identity due to security reasons.

212 Interview with Vladimer Givnishvili was recorded by union "21st Century", in School #32 of Tbilisi on 15 August 2008.

213 Interview with Givi Kapanadze was recorded by the GYLA.

*there one can see the front room. I recognized Gela's boots. I looked into the room from a window. I saw a hand with fingers which were seen in white. I couldn't see anything else, he was so burnt."*²¹⁴

According to **Tamara Surameli**, Gela Chikhladze was buried in the yard of his own house with the assistance of Russian militaries dislocated in Tkviavi.

"Gela was so decomposed that they put him on a table by a shovel. There was nothing seen, he was entirely burned".

His relative **Shota Chikhladze** also confirmed this drastic story. *"On 11 and 12 August the family relatives had died. My father's uncle was murdered."*²¹⁵ They were saying about Gela Chikhladze in the village that he was decapitated and thus murdered. Although the eyewitnesses and neighbors who found the dead body did not confirm this story. For instance, a resident of village Meghvrikisi, **Roman Nadiradze**, told us:

"My uncle (Gela Chikhladze) was decapitated in the village Tkviavi".²¹⁶

The case of Gela Chikhladze's murder made it to the pages of the American edition "CHICAGO TRIBUNE"²¹⁷ as well, where the eye-witness of murder Givi Chikhladze described his story in detail.

According to the witnesses and relatives of Gela Chikhladze, the reason of brutality against him was his friendship with the Former Minister of Defense of Georgia Irakli Okruashvili.

Murders of Nodar Butauri and Shamil Okropiridze

56-year old **Shamil Okropiridze** was shot dead in front of his own house for resistance during house pillage. 10 bullets have hit Okropiridze. Our respondent recalled that following days were relatively quiet and they buried the dead.

Tamar Surameli recalls, that when she found Gela Chikhladze's corpse, she has discovered about the murder of Shamil Okropiridze as well.

"Our neighbor Shamil Okropiridze's daughter-in-law was going around



The bombed house of Nodar Butauri.

214 Interview with Tamar Malisheva-Surameli was recorded by the GYLA in village Tkviavi on 15 October 2009.

215 Interview with Shota Chikhladze was recorded by Union "21st Century", in School #32 of Tbilisi on 16 August 2008. Unfortunately it is not discernible in the interview who were those relatives of Shota Chikhladze that were murdered. From his story today it is possible to establish only that one of them was Gela Chikhladze.

216 Interview with Roman Nadiradze was recorded by the representatives of the Public Defender's Office on 15 August in Tbilisi, Public School #176.

217 "Georgians flee as friends die and villages burn; Pro-Moscow fighters make the region a netherworld of lawlessness", by Alex Rodriguez, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, 14 September 2008.

the village asking for help in digging the grave. She came to our neighborhood and when she saw me she told me that Shamil was murdered, that her hands were sore, she couldn't get the earth out because it was hard and that she didn't know what to do. Then Tsitso took boys with her to bury Shamil."

Eugenia Naskidashvili-Okropiridze found her brother-in-law dead in his own house in the morning on 13 August.

"When I entered Shamil's yard, I saw his corpse lying there by the yard entrance door. On 12 August 2008, villager boys sneaked into the yard from the orchards and laid Shamil's dead body in his house yard. When I lifted the cloth up he had wounds on the face as well and his body was all in holes. His house windows were fired at and a wall was broken out."²¹⁸

On the same day Tamar Surameli learned about another murder.

"My neighbor Tamaz Kapanadze let us know that Nodar Butauri had died. He found him dead and put him in the blanket, he had been all in blood."

Then they buried the body with the help of the young guys, who were still in the village. *"But apparently they hadn't dug deep enough and then dogs messed it up and Nodar was seen"*, recalls the grievous Tamar Surameli.

Ossetian para-militaries wanted to take away the car (Kamaz) from Nodar. He was murdered for showing verbal resistance.

Murder of Ioseb (Soso) Odiashvili

Residents of Tkviavi tell about another murder.

IDPs told us that 25 year-old Ioseb Odiashvili was abducted by the Ossetians together with other Georgians on 12 August and taken in captivity. **Levan Giguashvili** recalled that after going into the minibus he looked around at Georgians being there; they were mainly neighbors from villages; however there were also several people from Tkviavi, including Soso Odiashvili whom he recognized. Neighbors said also that Soso jumped out of the car and tried to run. They caught him on the run and shot him dead with a machine-gun.

We inquired further about Soso Odiashvili's murder and discovered that the minibus by which Soso Odiashvili and other detainees had been transferred got into an accident on the Tirdznisi road, leading to casualties. During the accident, a driver of Ossetian nationality, whose name is unknown to us, died on the spot, just like the detainee from Mereti **Tamaz Makharashvili**. As the eyewitnesses tell us:

"one of the Georgians was stuck under the minibus. It seems he fell

²¹⁸ Interview with Eugenia Okropiridze was recorded by the GYLA on 17 July 2009, in village Tkviavi of the Gori District.

*off the window when the minibus had flipped over and then the minibus had fallen on him."*²¹⁹

Following numerous interviews we found **Giorgi Khabazishvili**, who took the wounded fellow villager over to his house. He cleaned his wounds, but couldn't save him. Giorgi Khabazishvili told us that at noon on 12 August they found the wounded young man and his neighbor Amiran Lapachi took him to Tkviavi.

*"Soso was wounded in the right arm and stomach area close to the navel. He had deep wounds in both stomach and the arm. He was bleeding a lot. Soso kind of fainted in my house. As he told my spouse, Ossetian soldiers put him together with other residents of Tkviavi in one of the Georgian's minibus and took him towards Tskhinvali. On the way, just a bit away from village Tirdznisi, they had an accident and right then Soso and several other Georgians ran away. Ossetian soldiers fired at them and that's when he was wounded. He hadn't said anything else."*²²⁰

A similar story was told by his father **Vladimer Odishvili**, who stayed with his son until his death. Soso Odishvili died on 14 August. But because soldiers were still in the village, they didn't dare taking him to the graveyard and therefore buried him right there in the garden in front of the house.²²¹

Former detainees in the Tkviavi minibus relate also how the Ossetians shot dead one young man there, but unfortunately no one knew his name. Levan Giguashvili and Tamaz Chalauri told us similar stories. **Tamaz Chalauri** told us:

*"There was a skinny boy by my side. It seems he'd been moving around and the Ossetian hit him in the head with the butt once or twice. When he hit him he got me with the butt on the right side near the hip. Then Suddenly, the Ossetian soldier charged the machine-gun and shot at this boy twice in the head. They murdered that boy on me, blood spilled all over me. At the moment I thought they would shoot me as well and I was awaiting death."*²²²

Levan Giguashvili confirms this story and remembers how the Ossetians got rid of the corpse:

"Ossetian driver stopped the minibus and they took that boy's corpse out to the road. They shot another bullet at him outside also, and then we continued our journey. This event occurred in the vicinities of village Brotsleti."

219 Interview with Levan Giguashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 15 October 2008.

220 Interview with Giorgi Khabazishvili was recorded by the GYLA in village Tkviavi on 16 October 2009.

221 Interview with Vladimer Odiashvili was recorded by the GYLA in village Tkviavi on 16 October 2009.

222 Interview with Tamaz Chalauri was recorded by the GYLA on 13 October 2008.

Murder of Aleksandre Bibilashvili

*"Armed people without uniforms were shooting on 13 August in the village Karaleti, not sparing anyone who resisted them. That's how they murdered one of my fellow villagers Aliko Bibilashvili. He hadn't even resisted the Ossetians, just stood at the so-called village "birzha" (place for socializing, gathering) where he was shot at."*²²³

The case of Aleksandre Bibilashvili's murder was told by **Bidzina Sukhitashvili**.

The spouse of murdered Aleksandre Bibilashvili, **Zoia Bibilashvili**, told us the following:

*"At 4 or 5 p.m. on 12 August Aliko went outside to buy cigarettes. On the way back he saw men sitting at the so-called village "birzha" and approached them. He was going to sit down when they fired at him from the brown, "Zhiguli" type car. They were Ossetians. Russians had not entered yet and they didn't wear uniforms. They fired from a machine-gun. My spouse died on the spot."*²²⁴

Zoia's neighbor **Izolda Tediashvili** confirmed Aleksandre Bibilashvili's murder.

"Aliko had left home. He was holding bread in his hand. When he got to "birzha", Vasiko was sitting there, our villager, Zaalishvili is his surname. He went there and sat as well. It was 12 August, I remember well. Big tensions started that day in our village. Ossetians drove by in a car. Aliko called to them, what's up boys. He had thought they were Georgian - they didn't wear uniforms. They called back, why are you here? why haven't you left? Then they shot him twice from the machine-gun. They were shooting as the car drove."

*"Our neighbor Maro Samkharadze saw from the window how the Ossetians shot Aliko. At that point they shot at our villagers Givi and Gela as well. They wanted to take the car away. It was just them. These were same Ossetians who shot Aliko. Givi's car was towing Gia's car, and when he saw the Ossetians were after him, he cut the belt and ran away. They were pissed off that they couldn't catch Givi and take his car away. Givi was wounded then. Then they went up and were shooting spontaneously. When they saw Aliko at the "birzha" they gunned him down."*²²⁵

Presumably, the OSCE/HRAM 2008 report talks about this murder as well. Although the report does not indicate the name and surname of the victim,

223 Interview with Bidzina Sukhitashvili was recorded on 4 December 2008 by the HRC.

224 Interview with Zoia Bibilashvili and Izolda Tediashvili was recorded on 4 December 2008 by the HRC.

225 Story similar to the murder of Aleksandre Bibilashvili was told by resident of village Karaleti Eldar Gogishvili in an interview with the representative of the Public Defender's Office, recorded on 16 August 2008 in Tbilisi, Public School #169.



The car of Vakhtang Shavdatunashvili where Merab Khekhelashvili was killed.

the story and circumstances of the murder are identical. The report also describes the shooting from the car jammed with the Ossetians.²²⁶

Murder of Moris Papuashvili

The murder of Moris Papuashvili, resident of village Akhaldaba, is recalled by his colleague **Merab Khekhelashvili**, with who he went to the Gori TV-radio transmitter station of village Akhaldaba on 12 August to fulfill his official duties.

"At approximately 11 o'clock the aerial bombardment renewed. They hadn't dropped bombs on the antenna directly, but approximately 100 meters from the antenna, in the woods. That place

was all in smoke. The bombardment continued for approximately 20 minutes with certain pauses in between. Moris Papuashvili and I got afraid that the jets would bomb the station, and therefore left the TV-radio station building and got away from there. We found a shelter right there, in a former dump in the territory adjacent to the station."

Soon the Director of the TV-radio station Vakhtang Shavdatunashvili went up to the Akhaldaba antenna and tried to rescue Moris and Merab from there by his own car "Zhiguli". However, as Merab Khekhelashvili told us:

"We haven't even driven one kilometer when we saw the tanks moving towards the TV-radio station. When the tanks approached us at approximately 20-30 meters, soldiers sitting on them launched intense fire at us. We hid in the passenger compartment."²²⁷

Vakhtang Shavdatunashvili himself recalls in detail the moment when he immediately appeared in front of the tank:

"Suddenly, we heard some sound. Unexpectedly a tank appeared from the turn. First I saw one tank only. There were soldiers sitting on the tank, wearing greenish military uniforms and armed with machine-guns. There were approximately 7-8 soldiers sitting on the tank. Part of soldiers sitting on the tank fired at our car. This tank was about 40 meters from us. Soldiers shot at us from machine-gun. As soon as I saw the tank I stopped the car right on the path. Nevertheless, soldiers continued firing at us."²²⁸

Afterwards everything happened rapidly. The wounded waited for the

226 See "Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia", OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, p. 23.

227 Interview with Merab Khekhelashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 12 October 2008.

228 Interview with Vakhtang Shavdatunashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 27 October 2009, in village Akhaldaba of the Gori District.

last soldiers to pass by and then tried to get out of the car crawling. At this very point they discovered that Moris Papuashvili was already lying on the ground smeared in blood.

*"A bullet hit Moris in the throat, where he was bleeding a lot from, and soon he fainted. Giorgi Khosruashvili, who was visiting us, was also wounded like Vakhtang Shavdatuashvili, who had a relatively lighter wound."*²²⁹

Those who stayed alive went to look for medical aid to save the wounded and their own lives. After they returned they found Moris Papuashvili already dead about 200 meters away from the car.

*"Moris' knees and arms were entirely torn, as it seems he crawled a lot to finally reach that place. There was a blood trail all along", told us Vasil Papuashvili.*²³⁰

It was strange that Moris already had two wounds:

"One on the left in the throat where he was bleeding from and two bullets in the forehead, shot above the eyes."

Vasil Papuashvili assumes that *"he probably crawled when the soldiers noticed him and fired at him", as when his friends had left him he had only one bullet in the throat.*

Giorgi Giorgashvili told us about the new bullet trace as well.

*"The bullet hit him in the forehead above the right eye, which had come out slightly and was visible."*²³¹

Murder of Valiko Jojishvili

Not everyone managed to leave village Vanati due to the patrolling by the occupying forces. Part of the population remaining in the village was taken into captivity, and therefore even after the end of bombardments the elderly staying in the village were hiding in the basements, and those who dared to resist, were murdered on the spot.

Vazha Jojishvili recalled with regret one of the very elderly who stayed in the village:

*"My uncle, Valiko Jojishvili was unable to leave the village with me, and was murdered by the Russian soldiers on 13 December."*²³²

229 Interview with Merab Khekhelashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 12 October 2008.

230 Interview with Vasil Papuashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 29 October 2009.

231 Interview with Giorgi Giorgashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 2 October 2008. Information on Moris Papuashvili's murder and incident at the TV-radio transmitter is confirmed also in the interview given to the GYLA by Giorgi Khosruashvili, Vakhtang Shavdatuashvili, and Vasil Papuashvili.

232 Interview with Vazha Jojishvili was recorded by the HRC on 25 December 2008.

Murder of Alichka Mindiashvili

Gia Babutsidze left village Achabeti together with the family on 8 August. However, he could not return to take out his 70-year old mother. Later, during the occupation he managed to enter the village with the assistance of Russian soldiers and buried the corpse of her mother burned in the debris of her own house in the yard.

"I noticed from the car that absolute majority of houses was burnt down. When I approached my house, I asked the Russians to stop the car to look for my mother, who had difficulties moving and therefore I assumed I would have found her somewhere in the territory adjacent to the house. My house and other premises in the yard were all burned. When I couldn't find my mother in the territory adjacent to the house and hopes to see her alive had gone, I decided to enter the burned house at least to find her corpse.

As soon as I entered the house I headed to her bedroom, because usually she rarely left this room. Having entered the bedroom, I saw a horrible scene; there were my mother's bones and ashes on the bed. Although the house and all furniture in it were totally burnt, I noticed my mother's bones and ashes on the steel bed very well. It became obvious that she couldn't find her way out of the blazing house."²³³

Murder of Vasil Mekarishvili

Russians appeared for the first time in village Dvani on 12 August. Just like everywhere else, the Ossetians followed the Russians and started looting the houses and intimidating and raiding the remaining population.

*"On 13 August, we were in the village center when Vasiko was murdered", **Giorgi Mekarishvili** told us sadly. He himself is disabled physically and therefore couldn't leave the village. In the afternoon he was in the village center when a car stopped and three armed and drunk Ossetians got out. All three of them wore uniforms and had weapons. One of them demanded from others to kiss crosses on his chest.*

"I believe there were three crosses, white, red, and black. They talked to us in Georgian but with the Ossetian accent. In the village they had met Aliosha Kokoshvili and as he had told me personally, they had put a gun in his mouth demanding to kiss the crosses. They went to Vasiko demanding the same, but were refused. He was mentally ill and instead of kissing stood up and cursed at them. Afterwards he had even pushed one of them. In return, the soldier put a gun to Vasiko's throat and shot. He died that very second."²³⁴

Temur Kopadze also confirmed the murder of Vasiko Mekarishvili.

²³³ Interview was recorded by the HRC on 24 November 2008 in Tbilisi, Kindergarten #117, 42 Zhvania St.

²³⁴ Interview with Giorgi Mekarishvili was recorded by the HRC in village Dvani on 23 October 2008.

Although Temur does not remember exactly whether it was 12 or 13 August, but he clearly remembers murder of a man in the village center well.

"They demanded a kiss from them. Vasiko probably didn't get it simply what they'd wanted. He was mentally ill. They shot him and killed him. Then they threw him there and left."²³⁵

Murder of Ervand Bezhashvili

Temur Kopadze stayed in the village until 16 August. On 11 August people of various nationalities started entering the village gradually and setting the houses on fire. Someone called his neighbor Vazha Kokoshvili and told that "his house was on fire". They went out of the basement to check the house. This was when they heard crying of a woman.

*"I followed the voice and I saw Nato Bezhashvili. **Ervand Bezhashvili**, her husband, was dead. Nato told us that she'd seen how her husband had been shot and murdered by the group of marauders consisting of Ossetians and Russians, who had been returning from the 'ceremony' of rising the Russian flag on a village church. I still don't understand why they'd murdered him."*

Similar to Temur Kopadze, **Manana Gogaladze-Ivanishvili** also told us about the murder of Ervand Bezhashvili. She recalled the story told by neighbors that he'd refused the Ossetians to kiss the flag and that's why they'd shot him. We could not verify this particular reason of murder, but the fact of murder was confirmed during numerous other interviews.²³⁶



TEDOTSMINDA EXECUTION

Murders of Rolandi Burnadze and Tariel (Beglar) Gogishvili

Natela Chovelidze fled Tskhinvali during the first war and was living in village Khviti in displacement together with her husband. Roland Burnadze was murdered during the August 2008 war.

"I had a husband Rolandi Burnadze, who died from the Russian aggression. Already on 7 August they started firing shells. At this point in time the Georgian army had already gone. On 9 August my spouse took my mother and myself out of the



Roland Burnadze killed in his own car, on the road to Tedotsminda.

²³⁵ Interview with Temur Kopadze was recorded by the HRC in Gori on 11 September 2008, at the bus station.

²³⁶ Interview with Manana Gogaladze-Ivanishvili was recorded by the HRC in Gori on 8 September 2008, kindergarten #10.

village. My son Giorgi had already gone away. My spouse returned to the village.

Village Khviti was under a mass bombardment on 12 August. Rolandi and his cousin Tariel Gogishvili got scared and decided to leave. They drove by my spouse's car, white Jiguli-07, with the state plate number BOY 041. The soldiers shot them by Variani, a bit far away from the Kareli turn.

*I don't know exactly if they were Russians or Ossetians. I learned about their murder from **Merab Duashvili** from Variani and **Roin Omadze** from Pkhvenisi. They were there at the time. Soldiers pillaged the car and torched it. Bodies been lying dead like this for four days, and then their bodies were transferred with the Patriarch's assistance."²³⁷*

Paata Mchedlidze eye-witnessed the result of this appalling fact on 14 August, when he was leaving the village.

"We entered the turn towards farming. We saw "Jiguli-07" car, in which three people were shot dead. All windows were broken. The body of the car didn't seem to be damaged. The car had gone off the road."²³⁸

Our researchers found the persons mentioned by Natela Chovelidze and interviewed them. **Merab Aduashvili** was detained by Russian soldiers together with his neighbors and eye-witnessed the shooting at the white "Jiguli-07" right then.

"It had just dawned on 12 August, when a white 07 turned in from Shindisi. We still were lying with our faces down. Russian soldiers didn't warn or anything and started firing. They fired from two check-points simultaneously. The car passed the first check-point, the second, and went off the road. They kept shooting even after the car went off, and shot at least hundred of bullets. Soldiers laughed and chuckled during the shootout. When the car drove off, soldiers haven't even looked after the dead."²³⁹

Roin Omadze, who was also detained by Russian soldiers together with Merab Aduashvili, eyewitnessed the same story.²⁴⁰

We were told about the murder of Tariel (Beglar) Gogishvili by his spouse **Lamara Gogishvili**,²⁴¹ although she had obtained information from neighbors only and she confirmed what we know from the statements of

237 Interview with Natela Chovelidze was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 23 July 2009.

238 Interview was recorded by the representatives of the Public Defender's Office on 16 August 2008 in Tbilisi, 22 Dadiani St.

239 Interview with Merab Aduashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 21 August 2009, village Variani of Gori District.

240 Interview with Roin Omiadze was recorded by the GYLA on 23 August 2009, in village Variani of Gori District. Please see the detailed story of Roman Omiadze himself, Merab Aduashvili and several other detainees in the stories on the accident of the Tkviavi minibus and the captivity.

241 Interview with Lamara Gogishvili was recorded by the GYLA in Gori on 23 July 2009.

eyewitnesses.

Cars shot on 12 August were seen also by the resident of village Nikozi **Teimuraz Lazarashvili**, who was on his way with his brother-in-law from Gori to village Nikozi bringing his mother-in-law and father-in-law back.

"On 12 August [...] by the Russian military column - in approximately 50 meters there was a shot "Jiguli-07" car, with the state plate number 041. The driver, Rolandi Burnadze, was leaning on the driver's seat dead and his neighbor was dead also. Both of them were from village Zemo Khviti. I knew both of them closely, because we studied together in the Kvemo Nikozi secondary school. The car had gone off the road on the right side.

Right by the block post of Russians, "Vaz 24-10" Bulldog type of car, so-called "Volga" had crashed into the tank. The owner Amiran Razmadze from village Pkhvenisi was also dead in the car."²⁴²

The Georgian non-governmental organization "21st Century" recorded the story of the priest of the Gori St. Trinity Church **father Constantine**, who after the liturgy on 12 August 2008 was on the way to village Shindisi together with his mother and three other women fellow villagers. Right then he became the witness and victim of the tragedy that occurred in Sakasheti.

As priest father Constantine says, Russian soldiers fired at them. Although the women and the priest were clearly seen sitting in the car.

"Occupant was shooting continuously. 12 bullets hit the car: in front windshield, both front door windows, right door, rear windshield and the roof."

During the shootout father Constantine was severely wounded, and his mother **Nora Babiashvili** and another person **Pikria Mazmishvili** received five wounds.

"They didn't stop firing even when I managed to turn the car back. We were bleeding and they kept firing at us. They probably were pissed off that we were still alive. We swam in the blood and reached the



Transfer of bodies of Roland Burnadze and Taniel Gogishvili after execution of the road to Tedotsminda

²⁴² Interview was recorded by the GYLA on 19 May 2009.



Photos from video, after bodies were found and transferred. Road to Tedotsminda

Gori hospital miraculously."²⁴³

Murder of Tinatin Giorgadze

During the August war, people were often deliberately murdered by direct targeting, and the shooting of the cars by the village Tedotsminda of the Gori District is a continuation of these very unfortunate tragic stories.

Paata Giorgadze from Gori, left the conflict territory on 11 August, however, after intensification of bombardments of Gori he decided to return and take his old mother to village Arashenda. In the morning on 12 August, on the way to Arashenda, he encountered a rain of bullets.

"We were driving along the houses of village Tedotsminda. On the left side of the road we noticed the shot Zhiguli car. Its windows were broken and no one seemed to be around. As soon as we passed this car for several meters, unexpectedly a rain of bullets was fired at us. I couldn't even realize immediately from where they shot, as I couldn't see anyone. First bullets hit the front windshield, and therefore they shot from the north. However, the bullets rebounded on a windshield and we escaped. This time none of us were wounded and we got away.

Right there along the road, on a so-called Tedotsminda ascent, I noticed one infantry fighting vehicle or armored personnel carrier. They fired at us continuously, probably from the machine-guns. A rain of bullets carried on. Suddenly, I felt that I was wounded in the left leg. A bullet penetrated the driver's door (front left door) and then hit me in the left leg. I virtually couldn't drive the car anymore. I was shouting, asking for help. I crawled out

of the car. They continued shooting. Then the car was on fire. I saw my mother, who also crawled out of the car, then moaned once and put the head on the ground. Mother was wounded from the left side, near the stomach.

Father transferred my mother's body to village Arashenda and buried her right there, in the village cemetery on the third day, 14 August."²⁴⁴

243 Interview with the priest of the Gori St. Trinity Church father Constantine was recorded by the union "21st Century".

244 Interview with Paata Giorgadze was recorded by the GYLA on 16 June 2009.

Paata managed to hide away and then villagers brought him to the Gori hospital. By accident he met his classmate **Mamuka Berkatsashvili**, who told him a similar story. Mamuka's car was fired at on the same day in the same place, by village Tedotsminda, as a result of which two women sitting in his car were killed and he himself barely survived.

Murders of Dodo Garsevanishvili and Nino Abramishvili-Katsiashvili

The two women mentioned to Paata Giorgadze by his classmate Mamuka Berkatsashvili were Dodo Garsevanishvili and Nino Abramishvili-Katsiashvili.

Mamuka Berkatsashvili from Variani worked as a taxi driver and during the military operations helped the population in transporting. Among others, on 12 August he took two women with him by village Ortasheni, who were going to Variani. On the Tedotsminda ascent their car became the object of an intense fire as well.

"They fired from machine-guns from the north. I tried to turn the car to the left, but I didn't have enough power and collided with the mountain. At this moment I was already wounded. One bullet hit me on the side of the heart, while the other bullet first hit me in the right shoulder and perforated from there it damaged the right side of my face. I lost eye-sight rapidly. I opened the door and crawled out of the car. I went out of the car so that couldn't see the passengers, as I practically couldn't see with my right eye anymore. Then they fired the bazooka at the car. It hit the car on the right side on the front door, where Dodo Garsevanishvili had sat. As a result of explosion the pressure lifted the car in the air, and I bumped into the rock. Bazooka and window splinters hit me in the face and a left hand. When the fire stopped I moved my head up a little and saw the soldiers.

I couldn't hear voice of women in the car anymore.

Then the Russian soldier approached me. I recognized by appearance that he was Russian. He wore colored-leaf military uniform and a hat. He was very surprised to see me alive and pointed a machine-gun at me. He turned around and shouted to those who fired at us "I found alive", and then left. Soon that Russian soldier returned and three others followed him. They asked me "can you crawl?" I replied "I'll get away somehow, just don't shoot me." I leaned on a car and stood up. I was interested in the state of those women. I looked into the car and both of them had been already killed. Neither breathing nor moaning was heard and when I saw their faces, I got scared. I turned around and left."²⁴⁵

On his way back Mamuka Berkatsashvili saw two other cars, which had also been shot.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Mamuka Berkatsashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 12 June 2009.

Murder of Amiran Razmadze

Merab Aduashvili from Variani returned to his village on 11 August and saw that the village was almost empty. Following the three-day (8-10 August) intense bombardments, up to sixty men stayed in the village and they were leaving as well. Merab Aduashvili himself, together with his neighbors, went to the village cemetery in the evening on 11 August to see the wounded fellow villager, when the Russians detained him along with three others from Variani.

"There were approximately 15 soldiers, at least. There was some cloth similar to a Russian flag attached to the arm of uniforms of some of them. Soldiers besieged us, pointed guns at us and gave a sign to follow them."²⁴⁶

At the place of detention they met several other Georgians from village Pkhvenisi and two young men from Kutaisi. It was during this very detention that they eye-witnessed the Russians murdering Georgians fleeing from villages.

"It was around one o'clock at night when the black car -Volga appeared. When this car passed the cemetery, where the 2nd tank was positioned, they fired at it from there without any warning. The car continued its way and soldiers sitting at the gas station opened fire at it as well. The car was somewhere between the first and second block posts when it was fired from both sides and finally it crashed into the tank positioned towards Variani. Soldiers who stood there fired at the driver already in the stopped car again and then took out the dead body and threw it there. There was a willow tree, they cut branches off and threw them on the body. There was a woman also in the car (she was the spouse of the dead man) whom they took out and laid down in 5 meters away from the place where her husband had been thrown.

The woman was wounded. She was lying there all night. She cried throughout the whole night and asked for help in Russian or in Georgian. At the dawn they made us lay the woman on the tank and they drove her away by a tank towards Tskhinvali."

The woman about whom Merab Aduashvili had spoken is **Manana Chlaidze**, spouse of the dead Amiran Razmadze. she told our researchers that something blew up in the car and then she fainted and therefore remembers nothing. When she opened her eyes, her husband was lying dead on the ground and she herself sat by the wall of the gas station.

"I was all in blood. I was wounded in the shoulders, bottom, as well as in the right leg, and my right wrist was broken and apart from this I had hit the forehead."²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ Interview with Merab Aduashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 21 August 2009, in village Variani of the Gori District.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Manana Chlaidze was recorded by the GYLA on 13 October 2009.

Manana Chlaidze was taken to the field hospital by a tank, which she left immediately after receiving the first aid and walked to the Gori hospital.

Mikheil Ghoghadze, who was also detained at the Russian military block post, witnessed this fact as well.

"Russian soldiers opened fire at car 'Vaz 31', without any warning. They hadn't even called them to stop the car. After the end of fire I barely heard some shouting. The car crashed into the tank. Soon after the crash, shooting was heard again. Russian soldiers went up to the car and shot inside the car. Then they inspected the car, although I've heard Russians say also that the soldier had been dead as well."²⁴⁸

Merab Aduashvili told us also that during the shooting of black Volga, they accidentally shot and wounded their own interpreter, but threw him right there in the channel and unfortunately afterwards nobody had asked about his fate.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Mikheil Ghoghadze was recorded by the GYLA in village Pkhvenili on 21 August 2009.

| ETHNIC CLEANSING • TORCHING • DEMOLISHING GEORGIAN VILLAGES |

- 3.1 Statements made by the Representatives of South Ossetian de-facto Government on Ethnic Cleansing
- 3.2. Position of Russia regarding the annihilation of Georgian villages
- 3.3. Destructions of Georgian villages in the Statements of the International Organizations
- 3.4. Destruction of Georgian Villages in the Report of the International Fact-Finding mission on the conflict in Georgia
- 3.5. Destruction of Georgian villages in the International mass media
- 3.6 Attack on Georgian Villages – Ethnic Cleansing



Village Tamarasheni
 Villages Avnevi and Nuli
 Village Kekhvi
 Village Vanati
 Village Kurta
 Village Beloti
 Village Disevi
 Village Atsriskhevi
 Village Zemo Achabeti
 Village Kvemo Achabeti
 Eredvi - Berula - Argvitsi
 Village Eredvi
 Village Berula
 Village Kheiti
 Village Karaleti
 Village Gugutiantkari
 Village Ksuisi
 Village Zardiaantkari
 Village Satskheneti
 Village Törtiza
 Village Karbi
 Village Ergneti



3

“Now in Georgia every eleventh person is displaced”

Thomas Hammarberg*

“Ethnic cleansing was really carried out in regard to ethnic Georgians on the territory of South Ossetia during August 2008 conflict and after it.”

Report of the International Fact-Finding mission on the conflict in Georgia**

Stories in the ethnic Georgian villages of South Ossetia are equally shocking. Military formations enter villages, fill cars and boots with everything valuable, then burn houses and make their way towards next villages”

RFE/RL, Brian Whitmore, 30 September 2008.***

“The policy of robbing and destroying of civilians’ property turned former Georgian villages into ghost towns”.

„Human Rights Watch“****

“Despite the fact that there is no generally acknowledged interpretation of ethnic cleansing, during such attempts it is agreed that its purpose is to displace population so that the ethnic composition of the given territory changes and we get ethnically homogenous, i.e. “clean” territory.”

William Schabbas*****

“Ossetians were telling to us: None of the Georgians should stay here. If elderly people stay here, youngsters will come back as well and this is why you shall leave.”

Nodar Demetrashvili, IDP from Village Beloti

* "Human Rights in the Areas Affected by the south Ossetia Conflict", September 2008

** Report of the International Fact-Finding mission on the conflict in Georgia, September 2009

*** RADIO FREE EUROPE – „Rights Groups Say South Ossetian Militias Burning Georgian Villages“, by Brian Whitmore 30 September 2008

**** *Up in Flames*, Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia, Human Rights Watch, January 2009

***** William Schabbas, *Genocide in international law: the crime of crimes*, Cambridge University Press, 2000

3.1 STATEMENTS MADE BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF SOUTH OSSETIAN DE-FACTO GOVERNMENT ON ETHNIC CLEANSING



Already on 15 August, 2008 de-facto president of the Former Autonomous Republic of South Ossetia **Eduard Kokoity** replied to the question of a journalist of the Russian newspaper “*Kommersant*” “What is currently going on in the territory of Georgian enclaves?” – “**Nothing, everything is demolished; the borders of South Ossetia are defined**”. In the same interview, the de-facto president persistently repeated “***we do not intend to let anyone return ever. Currently there are approximately 18 thousand displaced from Georgia in North Ossetia and they are the ones who should be returned to South Ossetia***”.²⁴⁹

It was not the only statement by the de-facto president, Eduard Kokoity, and the representatives of the de-facto administration of South Ossetia. They regularly and voluntarily informed the world of their decision “**to destroy housing of the civilian population so as to prevent the return of the ethnic Georgian population**”.²⁵⁰

Newspaper “*USA Today*”, on August 19, 2008 was also mentioning statements of Eduard Kokoity:

*“Eduard Kokoity, the South Ossetian separatist leader, says Georgians shouldn't bother returning. He said their villages would be given to ethnic Ossetians.”*²⁵¹

249 Interview with the South Ossetian separatist leader Eduard Kokoity with Russian newspaper “*Kommersant*” from 15.08.08; No 144. <http://www.kommersant.ru/>

250 see, “Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia”, OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, p.47

251 see, “Homecoming may be impossible for Georgians” by Jeffrey Stinson, 19 August, 2008, *USA Today*, at http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-08-19-georgia_N.htm



Eduard Kokoity inspecting destroyed Georgian villages

“Nothing, everything is demolished; the borders of South Ossetia are defined”

Eduard Kokoity
„Kommersant“, 15 August, 2008

“we do not intend to let anyone return ever”

Eduard Kokoity
„Kommersant“, 15 August, 2008

“Georgian enclaves in South Ossetia are liquidated. The villages Kekhvi and Tamarasheni are totally destroyed now as a result of a military operation”

Eduard Kokoity
REGNUM.RU, 22 August, 2008

In his interview to the Russian edition of *“Komsomolskaia Pravda”* on 22 August 2008, the Chairman of the de-facto Parliament, **Znaur Gasiev**, acknowledged the ethnic cleansing, though at the same time he tried to assert its inevitability:

“There will be no war any more... We have carried out cruel acts, I know. But Georgians will not return here. We have burnt down all their houses in the enclaves territory. There was no other way to stop the war and undo the knot”.²⁵²

On the same day, 22 August 2008, the Russian agency “Regnum” printed another interview of Eduard Kokoity, where his attitude had not changed a bit: **“Georgian enclaves in South Ossetia are liquidated. The villages Kekhvi and Tamarasheni, which were uncontrolled [by South Ossetian separatist authorities], are totally destroyed now as a result of a military operation”.**²⁵³

252 see, “South Ossetia is won. What to do next?” by Dmitry Steshin, *“Komsomolskaia Pravda”*, 22 August, 2008, retrievable at <http://www.kp.ru/daily/24150/366813>

253 see, “Georgian Enclaves no longer Exist in South Ossetia” - interview with Eduard Kokoity, “Regnum” agency, 22 August. Reprinted on the same day by www.civil.ge

Later, the vice-chairman of the de-facto council of Ministers of South Ossetia, **Eleonora Bedoeva**, in her interview with OSCE Human Rights Assessment Mission (OSCE/ODIHR HRAM), which was in the conflict zone after the ceasing of hostilities, said:

“If a Georgian, who stays in the territory of South Ossetia, doesn’t justify our expectations we shall drive him away... I don’t need Georgians returning to northern villages Tamara-rasheni and others, and they won’t have such opportunity”.²⁵⁴

Besides, on 13 August 2008, then Head of Security Council of South Ossetia, Anatoli Barankievich, in his interview with the journalist of Russian edition *“Rasiiskaia Gazeta”* acknowledges accusations against them of pillaging and the annihilation of property of Georgians, but at the same time he tried to justify his own acts and said: **“War is war”**.²⁵⁵

Another proverbial attempt to justify own acts is an interview of the Head of Mass Media Committee, **Irina Gagloeva**, with the Human Rights Center “Memorial”. Mrs. Gagloeva tried to explain and justify violence committed in Georgian villages by the fact that

“They cooperated with Tbilisi and the Georgian military - in contrast to Georgian villages controlled by Ossetian Administration - and that’s why, ‘they got exactly what they had been preparing for themselves during last 18 years.”²⁵⁶

We consider that such statements need no further comments and analyses. They themselves give answers to all the questions concerning the motivation of the de-facto authorities.

One thing is the motivation of the authorities and the other is the actions of the common people who eagerly fulfil orders. When it comes to investigating the crimes, the perpetrators, and the causes, one cannot forget the statement of Human Rights Watch representative **Anna Neistat** made on 14 August 2008 to the British newspaper *“the Guardian”*, which was reflected later in the report of the organization also.

“The torching of houses in these villages (meaning Georgian villages, auth.) is in some ways a result of the massive Russia propaganda machine which constantly repeats claims of genocide and exaggerates the casualties. That is then used to justify retribution”.²⁵⁷

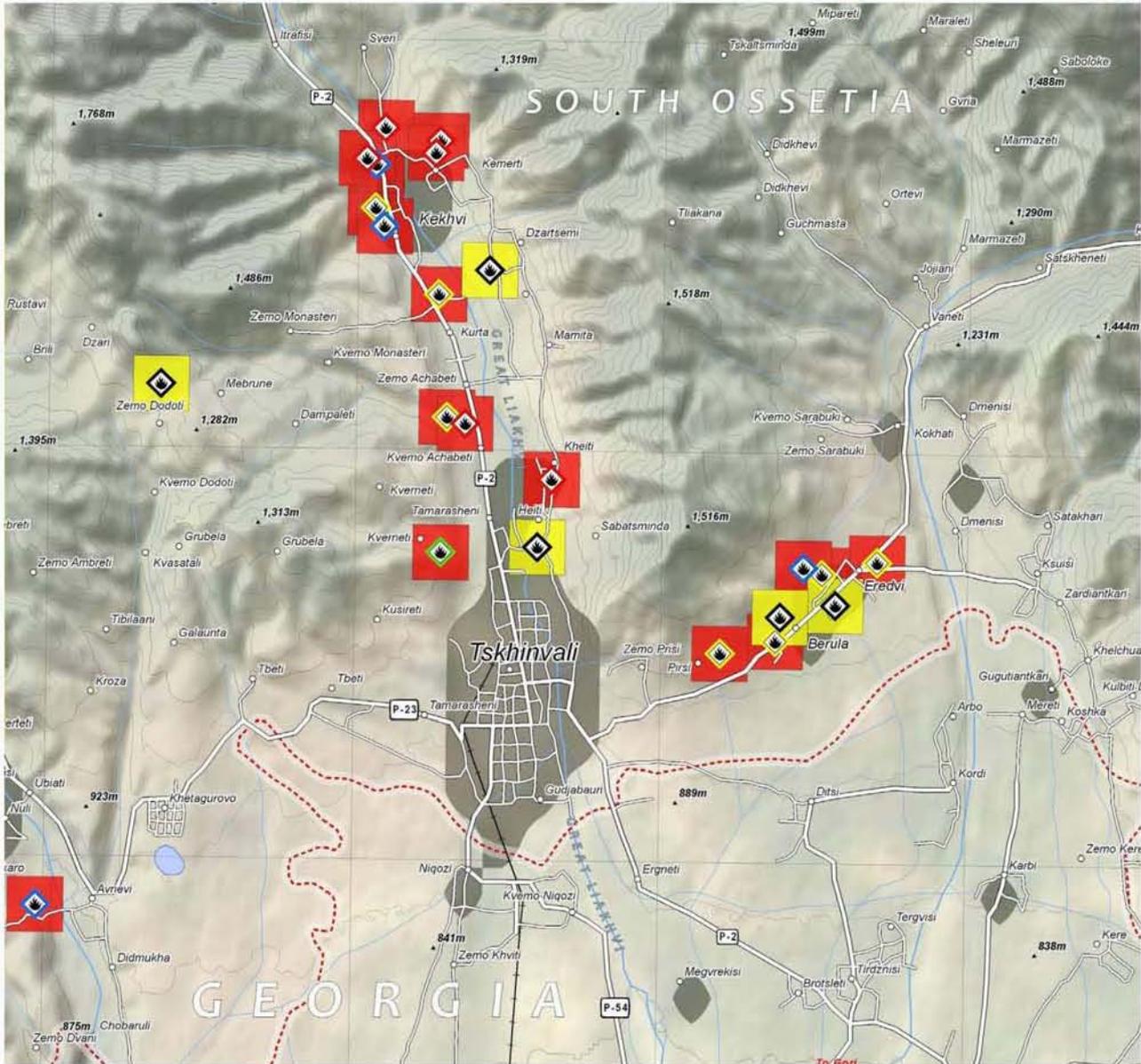
254 see, “Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia”, OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, p.48.

255 see, “South Ossetian Authorities acknowledged cases of looting: ‘war is war’”, August 13, 2008, at www.newsru.com/world/13aug2008/maroderstvo.html

256 see, *Up in Flames, Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the conflict over South Ossetia*, Human Rights Watch, January 2009, p. 152

257 see, “Human Rights Watch: Russia inflating casualty figures”, on 14 August, 2008, by Tom Parfitt, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/14/georgia.russia1>

Active Fires in South Ossetia, 7-24 August 2008 (Satellite 1)



Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 24 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

Map shows active fires in South Ossetia on the North and East of city Tskhinvali during the conflict and afterwards. 7-24 August, 2008. This photo gives factual evidence to the stories of our witnesses, about the new fires emerging in various villages after August 22, 2008.

Active Fires by Date

-  ... 10 August 2008
-  ... 12 August 2008
-  ... 13 August 2008
-  ... 17 August 2008
-  ... 19 August 2008
-  ... 22 August 2008

Human Rights organizations were not the only ones who related the violence carried out in Georgian villages as retribution for invented “genocide” by the Georgian side. We often heard such reasoning and arguments during our talks to the IDPs. One of them is a resident of Zemo Khviti village, a former captive, Tamaz Gogishvili, who remembers well the accusations raised by the Ossetians who entered his village:

*“Ossetians talked to us in broken Georgian, they said we had to be executed, as our people had killed their 12-year-old children in Tskhinvali”.*²⁵⁸

3.2. POSITION OF RUSSIA REGARDING THE ANNIHILATION OF GEORGIAN VILLAGES

In contrast to the statements of the representatives of the South Ossetian de-facto authorities, in the official communication sent to the independent International Fact-finding Mission on the conflict in Georgia, Russian authorities flatly denied the facts of “burning, robbery and destruction of civilian property” as well as “forcible displacement of ethnic Georgian population”.

“Russian military forces along with South Ossetian Law-enforcement authorities and military units ensured twenty-four-hour guarding of abandoned houses and plots of land in Georgian villages. Moreover, they ensured protection and security of the South Ossetia population in spite of their ethnic origin.

Moreover, the Russian Federation in the same communication claimed that “No case of international humanitarian or human rights violations were revealed during the period of peace enforcement operation against Georgia”.²⁵⁹

Despite the assertions of the Russian Federation officials, stories of displaced Georgians and other available evidence point to radically different conditions and prove Eduard Kokoity’s statement. A resident of Tamarasheni village, 31-year-old Davit Dzadzamia, captured on 10 August, passed by Georgian villages on his way to Tskhinvali detention center and remembered what he saw in his interview with our researchers:

*“On 10 August, I watched on the road to Tskhinvali, how they pillaged and burned the houses. Neighborhood was all in flames from Achabeti to Tamarasheni. Otar Tegashvili’s house was the first to burn down in Tamarasheni. Avto Gogidze’s house was already burned to ashes and it no longer smoked. Olina Datashvili’s and Kartlos Datashvili’s houses were burning and their store was on fire also”.*²⁶⁰

258 Interview with Tamaz Gogishvili is recorded by the GYLA in Gori, on 30 May 2009

259 see, Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, Volume III, September, 2009. p.484-486

260 Interview with Davit Dzadzamia is recorded by the GYLA on 30 January, 2009



Russian armed forces, Achabeti village (South Ossetia), August 2008

“Russian military forces along with South Ossetian Law-enforcement authorities and military units ensured twenty-four-hour guarding of abandoned houses and plots of land in Georgian villages. Moreover, they ensured protection and security of the South Ossetia population in spite of their ethnic origin.”

Answers of the Russian Federation

“Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia”

Moreover, the Russian Federation in the same communication claimed that “No case of international humanitarian or human rights violations were revealed during the period of peace enforcement operation against Georgia”

Answers of the Russian Federation

“Report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia”

3.3. DESTRUCTIONS OF GEORGIAN VILLAGES IN THE STATEMENTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

In contrast to the statements of the Russian Federation Authorities, the destruction of Georgian villages is confirmed by everyone, who managed to see with their own eyes the ruins of Georgian houses, after August 2008.

Human Rights Center “Memorial”:

“Presently the Georgian villages (the ones we have visited – Kekhvi, Kurta, Achabeti, Tamarasheni, Eredvi Vanati, Avnevi) have been virtually fully burnt down. Presently, a month after the end of warfare, the last houses are being burnt – everyday we witnessed new fires set in these villages”.²⁶¹

Human Rights Watch:

“When we visited Tamarasheni, Zemo Achabeti, Kvemo Achabeti, Kurta, and Kekhvi in August, our researchers saw first-hand these villages being looted and torched. When we returned in September, the villages had been almost fully destroyed. In Kekhvi, the debris of some houses along the road appeared to have been bulldozed. Also in September we visited Eredvi, Vanati, Avnevi, and Nuli, which by that time had been almost completely destroyed by burning. In November we visited Beloti, Satskheneti, Atsriskhevi, and Disevi, also almost fully destroyed.

Our observations on the ground and from these interviews have led us to conclude that the South Ossetian forces sought to ethnically cleanse these villages: that is, the destruction of the homes in these villages was deliberate, systematic, and carried out on the basis of the ethnic and imputed political affiliations of the residents of these villages, with the express purpose of forcing those who remained to leave and ensuring that no former residents would return”.²⁶²

Ad hoc committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

“Their actions can be confirmed by the visit of the delegation to Qsuisi village. The village is totally looted and destroyed. The delegation has got the information that in some cases villages were bulldozed and wiped off the face of the ground.”²⁶³

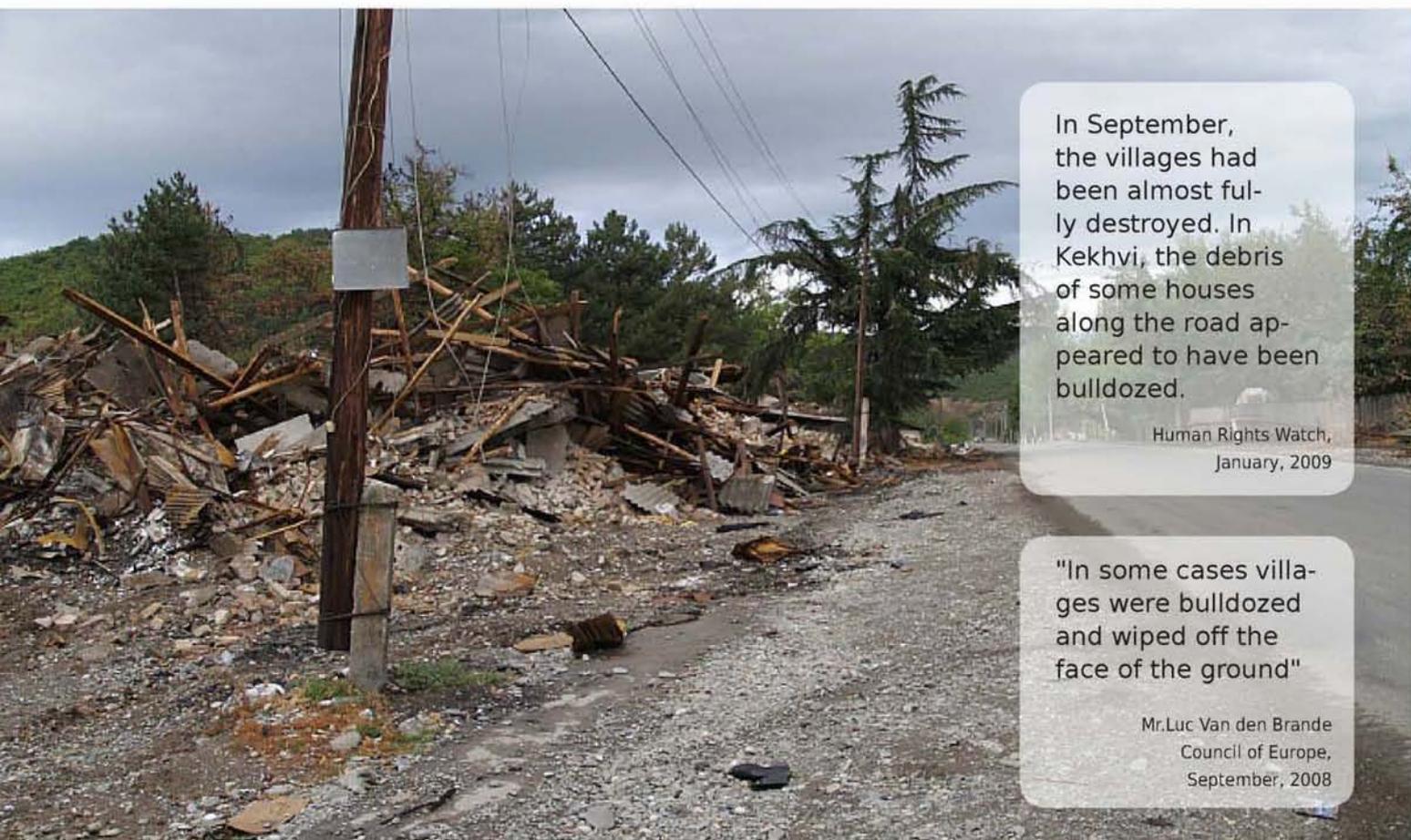
Amnesty International:

The satellite photos, which are available on-line, don’t leave any

261 Special press-release by the Memorial HRC: “A Month after the War, Violations of Human Rights and Norms of Humanitarian Law in the Conflict Zone in South Ossetia”, September 11, 2008

262 See, *Up in Flames, Humanitarian Law Violations and Civil Victims in the conflict over South Ossetia*, Human Rights Watch, January 2009, p. 131

263 See, Memorandum: The situation on the ground in Russia and Georgia in the context of the war between these countries, *ad hoc* Committee of the Bureau of the Assembly, prepared by Mr. Luc Van den Brande (Belgium, EPP/CD), 29 September 2008. Doc.11720 Addendum II



In September, the villages had been almost fully destroyed. In Kekhvi, the debris of some houses along the road appeared to have been bulldozed.

Human Rights Watch,
January, 2009

"In some cases villages were bulldozed and wiped off the face of the ground"

Mr. Luc Van den Brande
Council of Europe,
September, 2008

possibility of an alternative interpretation.²⁶⁴ "These images don't lie", said the representative of Amnesty International Ariela Blatte.²⁶⁵ Despite the fact that satellite material depicting the first days of the war was blocked virtually in all on-line sources²⁶⁶, it is still possible to learn the condition after the end of the conflict. The satellite photos, which are available, depict the damage suffered by Georgian villages during and after the military actions. We have had an opportunity to compare photos of 10 August and 19 August, where the degree of damage has considerably increased. The Amnesty International has pointed to these very facts.

²⁶⁴ See, www.unosat.org; and www.aaas.org/international/geotech/ge/georgia.kml

²⁶⁵ See, "Amnesty International Satellite Images Reveal Damage to the South Ossetian Villages after Major Fighting Ended"; Amnesty International Press Release. October 9, 2008. at http://www.aaas.org/news/releases/2008/1009geospatial_georgia.shtml

²⁶⁶ "Satellites Operated by Major Commercial vendors (GeoEye, DigitalGlobe, and ImageSat International) were fully booked, preventing the tasking of a new image by AAAS for the duration of this conflict. Therefore, AAAS was forced to rely upon imagery requested by other entities to meet the needs of the project. Fortunately, it was possible to acquire imagery of the region surrounding Tskhinvali, one of the major sites of damage upon areas of civilian infrastructure, with a time scale concurrent to the conflict in the region. Specifically, AAAS acquired satellite imagery of the region for the dates of August 10 and August 19, 2008 to establish whether satellite imagery analysis supported AI's witness reports", High-Resolution Satellite Imagery and the Conflict in South Ossetia, Summary Report, October 9, 2008, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Science and Human Rights Program

19 August 2008, Tamarasheni village, Satellite image (Satellite 2)

Source:
*High-Resolution
 Satellite Imagery
 and The Conflict
 in South Ossetia,
 Summary Report,
 October 9, 2008,*

"These images
 don't lie"

Ariela Blatter
 Amnesty International
 October, 2008

"Additional destruction is evident in the period from 10 to 19 August and it should be found out by all means who is responsible for protection of civilian population from militia attacks."²⁶⁷

OSCE/ODIHR Human Rights Assessment Mission

The OSCE-ODIHR Human Rights Assessment Mission visited the conflict zone in November 2008 and had an opportunity to have a look at and review all the stories told them by in the refugee camp by the Georgians who had fled from death. The Mission stated in its report:

"We all were in this village and confirmed destruction. In some villages houses were razed to the ground by bulldozers or other heavy machines".

In the same report we read:

"Many Georgian villages situated nearby Tskhinvali and inhabited mainly by ethnic Georgians are totally annihilated in South Ossetia. After Georgian troops had left, those houses were first looted and then burnt; as it turned out, de-facto authorities didn't respond to such acts. Presently there are left very few inhabitants in these villages and they are under grave conditions".²⁶⁸

267 See, "Amnesty International Satellite Images Reveal Damage to the South Ossetian Villages after Major Fighting Ended"; Amnesty International Press Release, October 9, 2008

268 See, "Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia", OSCE/ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, p. 18, 43

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Statement made by the Norwegian Helsinki Committee is also important. "Ethnic cleansing continues in South Ossetia conflict zone", says the press release issued on October 24th, 2008. Importance of this statement is raised by the fact, that NHC researchers have personally visited South Ossetia and witnessed many unlawful actions.

"Yet, this material strongly suggests a pattern of systematic attacks against the civilian population that continues today. The acts are seemingly aimed at changing the ethnic composition of the population in South Ossetia. During the first phase of the armed conflict (which continued for about five days from 7 August until 12 August), both parties seem to have committed war crimes in the form of indiscriminate bombings and disproportional use of force against mixed or civilian targets. In the second phase of the conflict the civilian population were specifically targeted in those areas effectively controlled by the Russian armed forces. These actions have led to ethnic cleansing.

The practice of large-scale looting was accompanied by killings, rape, taking of hostages, deprivation of liberty, beatings, and threats. In several villages the burning of houses and destruction of public and private civilian property had a systematic character. The material collected describes 16 alleged cases of killings of civilians (excluding deaths resulting from cross fire, bombing and shelling at the time of large scale military operations, and accidents with unexploded ordnance), in areas controlled by Russian forces, many of which seems to be instances of summarily executions."²⁶⁹

International Organization "**FLARE**", in its conclusions is also writing about different stories that "prove ethnic cleansing".

"Within the zone of conflict, entire villages of Eredvi, Avnevi, Nuli, Kurta, Achabeti, Tamarasheni, Kekhvi, Disevi have been deliberately burned and destroyed. Some of the villages such as in Patara Liakhvi and Didi Liakhvi, Pkhvenisi, Nikozi, Megrevkisi have also been accessed by the groupings of the Ossetian militia, according to the reports by the local residents.

Part of the villages in the area have also been subjected to bombings on August 8-10 (Eredvi, Kurta, Achabeti, Tamarasheni, Kekhvi, Tkviavi, Patara Liakhvi and Didi Liakhvi, Pkhvenisi, Nikozi)."²⁷⁰

269 See, "Georgia-Russia conflict: Ethnic Cleansing Continues in South Ossetian Conflict Zone in Georgia", by Aage Borchgrevink, The Norwegian Helsinki Committee, October 24, 2008, at <http://www.nhc.no/php/index.php?module=article&view=784>

270 See, International Monitoring Group of Freedom, Legality and Rights in Europe (FLARE) "Report on the Conditions of the Civil Population during the Conflict between the Russian Federation and Georgia," September 2008; p.10 at http://peace.yhrm.org/files/EUreport_final.pdf

3.4. DESTRUCTION OF GEORGIAN VILLAGES IN THE REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL FACT-FINDING MISSION ON THE CONFLICT IN GEORGIA

Ethnic cleansing of Georgians in the territory of former South Ossetia is acknowledged by the International Fact-Finding Mission on the conflicts in Georgia:

“With regard to allegations of ethnic cleansing committed by South Ossetian forces or irregular armed groups, however, the Mission found patterns of forced displacements of ethnic Georgians who had remained in their homes after the onset of hostilities. In addition, there was evidence of systematic looting and destruction of ethnic Georgian villages in South Ossetia. Consequently, several elements suggest the conclusion that ethnic cleansing was indeed practised against ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia both during and after the August 2008 conflict.”²⁷¹

Besides establishing systemic ethnic cleansing, the Mission in its report pointed to the responsibility of Russia, since according to the standards of International Law, the forces having effective control in this territory just after the warfare were entrusted with the task to defend the civilian population.

“Beyond those acts committed during the five days of hostilities from 7/8 to 12 August, additional acts were perpetrated after the ceasefire came into effect, raising serious concerns about the co-responsibility of those forces in control of the situation, whose duty it was to protect the civilian population.”²⁷²

3.5. DESTRUCTION OF GEORGIAN VILLAGES IN THE INTERNATIONAL MASS MEDIA

There is a consensus on this subject in the world solid mass media outlets. A lot was said and written on those days. Our report will not include full review of the August-September 2008 world media coverage, but we will offer some passages for illustration.

“The proof of the ethnic cleansing of Georgians is evident... Many villages surrounding Tskhinvali were burnt down and most of the houses were destroyed” – writes “the Economist” on 22 August, 2008.

On 25 September, 2008, “**The Economist**” again notified the world:

“Systematic destruction, looting and ethnic cleansing of the Georgian villages is still going on inside South Ossetia as well as outside its limits”.²⁷³

271 See, Report of the International Fact-Finding mission on the conflict in Georgia, volume I, p. 27, September 2009

272 See, Report of the International Fact-Finding mission on the conflict in Georgia, volume I, p. 26, September 2009

273 See, “Coping with the fraught aftermath of August war, Georgia and Russia – Tense times”, The Economist, 25 September 2008



„The proof of the ethnic cleansing of Georgians is evident...

“**Forward to Tbilisi**” is written in Russian on the gates of one of the burnt houses”

„*The Economist*”, 22 August, 2008.

On 4 September 2008 British “**The Guardian**” wrote:

“As you read this, another corner of Europe has been ethnically cleansed. That means young men murdered, old women driven out of their lifelong homes, villages plundered and torched.

“**We did carry out cleaning operations, yes,**” the militia leader “Captain Elrus” told “the Guardian’s” Luke Harding. These violent crimes have been committed under the noses of Russian troops, now unilaterally rebranded peacekeepers by the simple expedient of being given blue helmets. This ethnic cleansing has extended to the buffer zone around South Ossetia that Russia has unilaterally established.”²⁷⁴

On 12 August, 2008 the **Associated Press** correspondent reported that he had seen with his own eyes at least ten burning Georgian houses and had witnessed numerous looting in the region.

“**The New York Times**” wrote on August 14, 2008:

“As the conflict between Russia and Georgia enters its second week, there is growing evidence of looting and “ethnic cleansing” in a number of villages throughout the area of conflict. The attacks — some witnessed by reporters or documented by a human rights group — include stealing, the burning of villages and possibly even killings. {...} The identities of the attackers vary, but a pattern of violence by ethnic Ossetians against ethnic Georgians is emerging and has been confirmed by some Russian authorities. “Now Ossetians are running around and killing poor

274 See, “Only a combination of deterrence and detente can meet this challenge”, by Timothy Garton, *The Guardian*, 4 September, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2008/sep/04/russia.eu>

Georgians in their enclaves,” said Maj. Gen. Vyacheslav Nikolaevich Borisov, the commander in charge of the city of Gori, occupied by the Russians.”²⁷⁵

Another US newspaper “**Washington Times**” published similar material on 15 August, 2008. “Washington Times” was reporting about the ethnic cleansing as well.²⁷⁶

US based newspaper “**USA Today**” reported on 29 August, 2008:

“Since the warfare between Georgia and Russia in early August, Associated Press reporters have witnessed burning homes and looting in villages in the region. Another AP reporter saw burning and looting of Georgian homes in at least six separate areas from August 22 through Thursday: the villages of Achabeti, Kekhvi, Tamarasheni, Ksuisi and Eredvi, as well as near the capital Tskhinvali. With most Georgians gone, there seems to be an effort to erase even the memory of their presence here. On Thursday, a South Ossetian policeman knocked down a sign with the name of the Georgian village of Tamasheni, written in both Georgian and Latin scripts, as bulldozers razed the last remaining houses. At least three more Georgian villages have been bulldozed in South Ossetia, witnesses said.”²⁷⁷

3.6. ATTACK ON GEORGIAN VILLAGES – ETHNIC CLEANSING

Virtually every international organization that managed to enter the conflict zone during and after the war unanimously acknowledges that in August 2008 a purposeful attack was carried out on the Georgian population, in the Big Liakhvi, Small Liakhvi, and the Prone Gorges, as well as in the Kodori Gorge. Researchers, journalists, and most importantly witnesses relate numerous stories of pillaging and arson of villages, forcible displacement, killings, looting, humiliating treatment, intimidating, and torturing of the population.

VILLAGE TAMARASHENI

Satellite imagery of Tamarasheni provides on the one hand full information for corroborating the stories of witnesses interviewed by us and on the other hand exposes the degree of damage inflicted on the village.

Provided below are the two satellite images of village Tamarasheni. The first one is taken on 10 August, 2008 and it demonstrates fairly that the

275 See, Sabrina Tavernise and Matt Siege, „Signs of Ethnic Attacks in Georgia Conflict“, August 14, 2008, New York Times, at http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/15/world/europe/15ethnic.html?_r=1

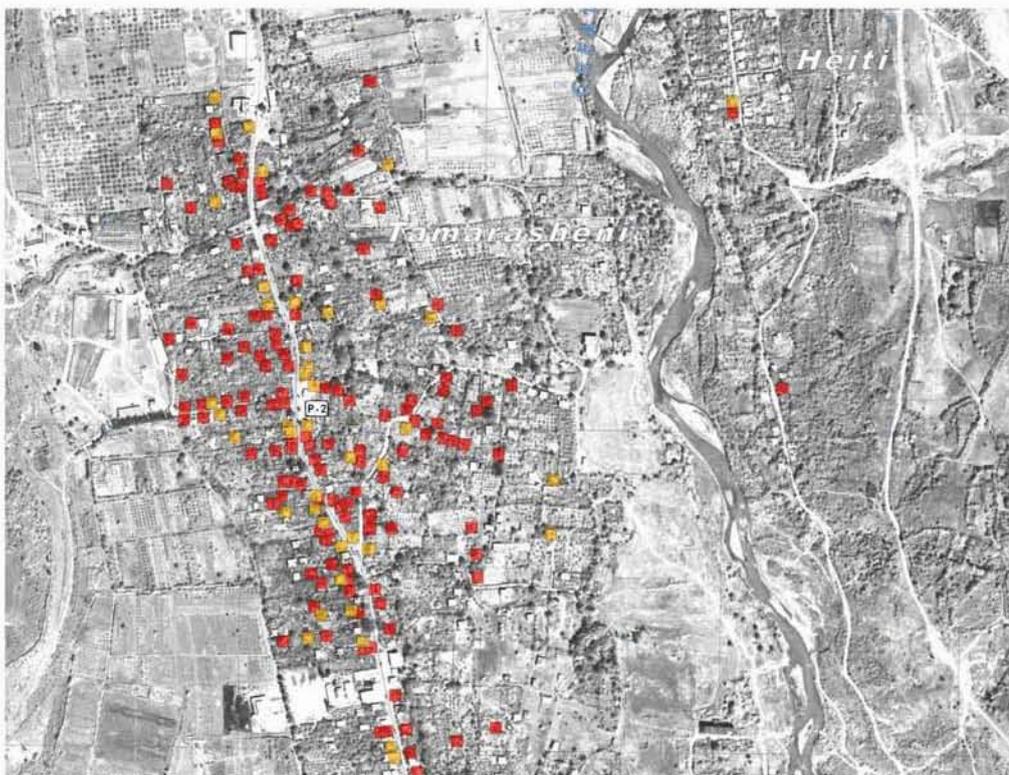
276 See, Kelly Hearn „Georgia claims ethnic cleansing, U.S. envoy cites credible reports of violence by 'irregular forces'“, August 15, 2008, The Washington Times, at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/aug/15/georgiacclaims-ethnic08>

277 See, “AP IMPACT: Georgians uprooted in South Ossetia”, By Yuras Karmanau, on 29 August, 2008 at http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-08-29-3937720385_x.htm

10 August 2008, Village Tamarasheni, Satellite image (Satellite 3)

The photo taken on 10 August 2008 clearly reveals that the village is not yet damaged

Source: High-Resolution Satellite Imagery and The Conflict in South Ossetia, Summary Report, October 9, 2008, AAAS, Science and Human Rights Program

19 August 2008, village Tamarasheni, Satellite image (Satellite 4)

The objects highlighted in red on the photo taken on 19 August are already destroyed, the objects in yellow – severely damaged. In total 152 objects.

Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 19 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

village is still almost unharmed. Satellite images of 10 August do not display traces of extreme violence, massive bombardments, or any other serious military operation, there are no fires noticed. As the stories of witnesses later prove, pillaging, torching, and destroying of the village started exactly from 11 August, 2008.



village Tamarasheni, August 2008

The second image was taken on 19 August. A detailed analysis of the satellite image clearly demonstrates that virtually everything is destroyed, a total of 152 objects. *"In the village of Tamarasheni, for example, 152 structures that were intact on 10 August seemed to have been damaged by 19 August."*²⁷⁸ Since the examined item is a village, obviously the torched, destroyed, and bombarded objects are residential houses and buildings, constructions clearly belonging to the civilian infrastructure.

On 9 October 2008 Amnesty International, relying on the very satellite imagery of Tamarasheni village, announced worldwide:

*"The village of Tamarasheni, for example, which was mostly inhabited by ethnic Georgians before the conflict, shows no damage at all on August 10. Nine days later, the analysis identified 152 damaged structures, a large proportion of the total number of structures in the village."*²⁷⁹

UNISAT material, a second source of satellite imagery, provides similar information. Pursuant to their data, there are 205 damaged objects in Tamarasheni. Witnesses state that the Georgian houses were up in flames until the end of September.

Statistics provide one more proof of ethnic cleansing, persecution of Georgians, and the eradication of former Georgian households.

Under the data of the census conducted in 2002, 241 families lived in village Tamarasheni. According to the 1989 census data, which provides information on ethnic composition, Georgians comprised 63 percent of the population, while Ossetians comprised

35 percent. Following the conflict in the 90s, Tamarasheni in fact remained within Georgian jurisdiction for the entire period, and the separatists viewed

278 See, "AAAS Analysis of Satellite Images Finds Hundreds of Structures Damaged in South Ossetia Fighting", 9 October 2008, at http://www.aaas.org/news/releases/2008/1009geospatial_georgia.shtml

279 See, "Amnesty International Satellite Images Reveal Damage to the South Ossetian Villages after Major Fighting Ended", Amnesty International Press Release, October 9, 2008

it as one of the major “Georgian enclaves”. Respectively, one of the highest degrees of damage is chronicled in this village.

Assuming that 241 families are the starting line, 205 destroyed houses captured on 19 August on the UN satellite images, the statements of witnesses (including representatives of international organizations, visiting Tamarasheni already in September) about burning houses in September, also photo and video materials in our possession are the prove of full destruction of the village Tamarasheni. Proud statements of Eduard Kokoity that the village was entirely ethnically cleansed of Georgians, and the trace of their existence wiped out, have been fulfilled.²⁸⁰

As mentioned above, we possess a videotape recorded in the village which follows a main village road and demonstrates clearly that none of the villages populated by Georgians have survived on the territories north and south of city Tskhinvali. Most of its parts have been simply bulldozed.

Village inhabitant **Alexi Nasuashvili** and his spouse **Eter Datashvili**²⁸¹ were in fact the last to leave Tamarasheni. Owing to grave illness, Alexi Nasuashvili could not move and therefore the elders stayed in the village, hoping in addition to save their life-time earnings. However, their hopes did not come true as neither did they save their own house nor help anyone else. Yet, they witnessed crimes, pillaging, and massive arson of houses of Georgians committed in their neighborhood.

81 years old **Eter Datashvili** remembers that the Ossetians appeared in the village for the first time on 11 August after the columns of the Russian troops passed by. Forays into the houses of Georgians followed immediately. Various groups visited them during several days. First they searched for weapons, but then on 11 August approximately five Ossetians and Russians in uniforms approached them. With sick Alexi Nasuashvili in the house, they put the second floor on fire and left laughing.

*“One Ossetian guy was holding a bottle full of kerosene in one hand and matches in the other. The Russian asked me in Russian whether we were alone. I said yes, me and my sick husband. **Why did you stay, we should burn the house,** and he rushed to the second floor. Two other Ossetians followed him. This Russian continued talking: go to Tskhinvali, they will feed you there. Another Russian stood by this Russian. Suddenly those*



Burnt shop of “Elit Electronics” in Tamarasheni

280 See, Eduard Kokoity’s interview with Russian agency “Regnum” on 22 August 2008, “Georgian enclaves do not any longer exist in South Ossetia”, “Georgian enclaves in South Ossetia have been liquidated. Villages Kekhvi and Tamarasheni which were uncontrolled as a result of military operations, now have been totally destroyed”. – the interview was reprinted by civil.ge on the same day, 22 August.

281 Interview with Alexi Nasuashvili and Eter Datashvili-Nasuashvili was recorded by GYLA, 5 December, 2008

Ossetians ran down the stairs, they were leaving the yard when one of them turned at the gate and told me in Georgian: do not go upstairs or I will shoot you. I asked these Russians whether the house was on fire. They said no and left. I nevertheless rushed upstairs. They had lifted the blankets, spilled kerosene on mattresses, and the mattresses were on fire. I took a pillow and started putting out a fire. Then I ran to another room: moistened the cloth and put it on blazing places. I finally put out the fire. When I went outside on the balcony I saw that houses of my neighbors were already on fire. These were the houses of Ivane Nasuashvili, Ioseb Datashvili, Zezva Gagnidze, Samson Datashvili, Elza Elbakidze, Robinzon Datashvili. Heat, smoke, and soot choked me and my husband.

It was probably on 12 August when I saw from the balcony of my house that the houses of my brother Guram Datashvili and nephew Gocha were burning. At the time Ossetians and Russians in military uniforms burned the houses. Sometimes I saw the Ossetians without uniforms burning the houses also.

On 13 or 14 August I was interested in the fate of my son's Merab Nasuashvili's house. I went out to the house of my neighbor Samson Datashvili and saw from his garden that the houses of Merab, my nephew Alexandre and neighbors Gochashvilis and Maisuradzes were already in flames".

Another witness **Ramaz Mindiashvili** left the village on 15 August. On the way he was captured but was released in several hours. "They had a lot to rob and that's why probably didn't have time for us" remembers the victim.

"I watched how they started pillaging the Elit Electronics store. They took the consumer equipment out and loaded it in the cars. They looted the neighboring drugstore as well. I saw how the public school in Tamarasheni was bombarded.

Afterwards they started burning the houses. First they put on fire the house of **Davit Datashvili**, Gangebeli of Liakhvi, and then the rest followed".²⁸²

Ana Datashvili remembers that she stayed in Tamarasheni until 14 August. The 75 year-old woman did not intend to leave the village. After her house was burned down she was held in the detention cell in Tskhinvali for 8 days and she was released only afterwards.

"I stayed in the village until 14 August. I watched the houses being looted. First they drove away abandoned cars or tractors. Then they would enter the houses and take everything out. Finally they would burn the houses. They would shoot something, which had a noise of a rocket, black smoke would go up and the house would start burning entirely.

Two armed Ossetians came on the 14th. They told me to leave the

²⁸² Interview with Ramaz Mindiashvili was recorded by the organization "21st Century", February 7, 2009

*house and go with them. I refused. He went up to the second floor and started shooting inside. Then the flames went up and the house started burning. They forced me to leave”.*²⁸³

VILLAGES AVNEVI AND NULI

The story of the villages Avnevi and Nuli is another grave tragedy in the chronology of the August war. An inhabitant of the village Avnevi, ethnic Ossetian **Tania Tosieva-Durglishvili** remembers that “on 13 August Kokoity drove by to have a look at the torched villages. My mother and he are cousins. He walked beside me and looked at me mockingly. He was pleased”.²⁸⁴

Satellite images taken by UNOSAT on 19 August provide documentary evidence of the unprecedented demolition of villages. The images demonstrate clearly that damage was inflicted on virtually all residential houses. Based on a preliminary analysis, the document shows that 153 buildings were damaged in the village Avnevi and 119 in the village Nuli.²⁸⁵ Unfortunately, we did not have access to imagery from a later period, which would factually verify the information on houses torched in September. It is also impossible to visit the villages Avnevi and Nuli, since they are situated in the

19 August 2008, village Avnevi, Satellite image (Satellite 5)



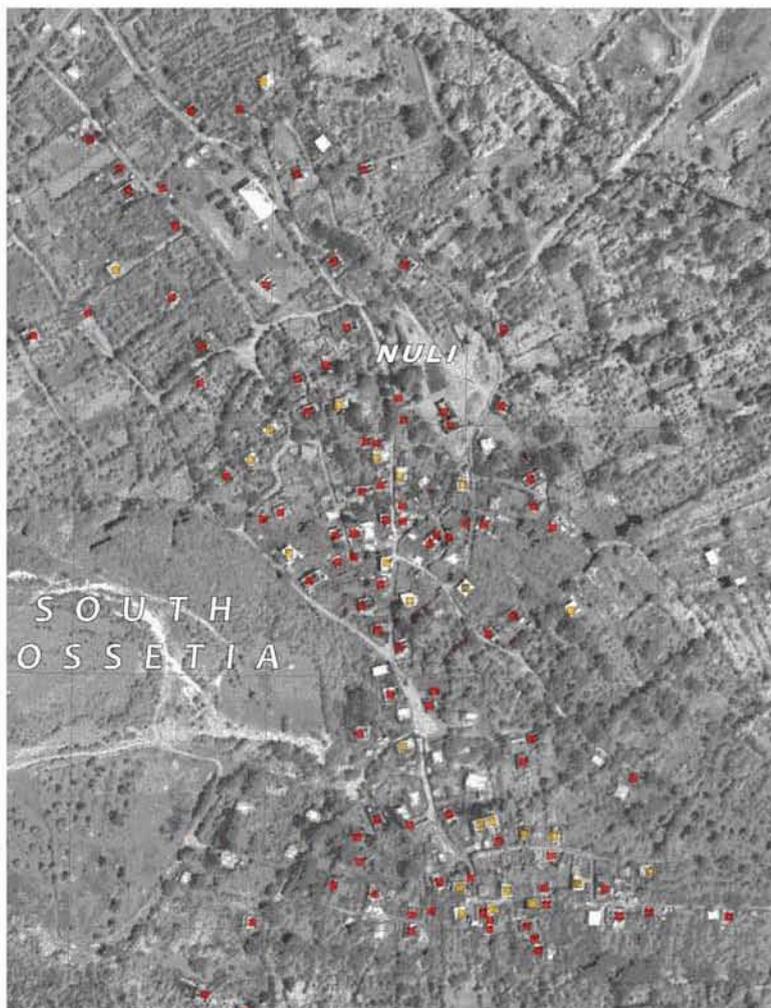
The objects highlighted in red on the photo taken on 19 August were destroyed by that time, while the objects in yellow – were severely damaged. In total 153 objects.

Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 19 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

283 Interview with Ana Datashvili was recorded by the GYLA, on 5 January, 2009 in Tbilisi at the Kindergarden #149

284 Interview with Tania Tosieva was recorded by GYLA, 29 May, 2009, in Tbilisi

285 See, High-Resolution Satellite Imagery and the Conflict in South Ossetia, Summary report, October 9, 2008, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Science and Human Rights Program

19 August 2008, village Nuli, Satellite image (Satellite 6)

The objects highlighted in red on the photo taken on 19 August were destroyed by that time, while the objects in yellow – were severely damaged. In total 119 objects.

Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 19 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

told us similar story of the village. He left Avnevi only on 1st of September:

*“The entire village was burned. I saw only torched and flaming houses. My house was burned while I was there. I stood in the yard, watching it burn. Then they killed my fellow villager **Shura Javakhishvili**, in front of his cousin Kalpeza Javakhishvili”.*

Tania Tosieva-Durglishvili lived in the village for more than 50 years and had extreme trouble leaving the village. Though her husband and children are Georgian, she herself is Ossetian, that’s why she knew almost everyone who entered the village for pillaging and ravaging. Thus she recalls in detail what she felt and saw over a month. A group of marauders who came to her place reassured her at hearing her surname (i.e. her Ossetian origin): *“Don’t be scared, stay here, we shall do you no harm”*.

Another group came up to her gate on 14 August.

“Ossetians came at midday. There were four of them by Jiguli. They got out of the car and entered the house. They had white armbands.

occupied territory and are closed for us, Georgian citizens.

Here one significant factor should be noted. Before August 2008 both villages were controlled by Georgian authorities and, accordingly, census was conducted there in 2002. According to the data of Statistics Department in 2002 there were 265 families in Avnevi and 124 – in Nuli. Relying on the information of satellite sources concerning damage, means a total destruction of Nuli and considerable one of Avnevi.

Two months after the completion of the war Ms. Tosieva managed to enter her village and saw that the whole village was demolished – *“Approximately in the middle of October 2008 I sneaked into Avnevi and saw with my own eyes the whole village burnt down. Only 4 houses remained. There were still houses of Zalina Bestaeva and Ana Kokoeva”*, she says.

Constantine Katselashvili

Those Ossetians recognized me – I am an Ossetian from Muguti village. They also were from Muguti. One of them appeared to be my namesake. They told me to write the Ossetian surname on the door, it might save the house from being burnt”.

But yet her house didn't escape being torched. Ms. Tosieva explained that *“As my son is Georgian and, in addition, a policeman, maybe that's why they didn't take into account that I am Ossetian and burnt the house anyway”*. She has recognized her son's classmates among the marauders, who apparently knew what her son, Petre Durglishvili, was engaged in. Tania Tosieva recalls:

“An Ossetian boy in Russian military uniform, green stained one, began scolding at me: where is your assassin boy”.

The fact that during the first days houses were destroyed on a selective basis is confirmed by other stories and details. For instance, the same Tania Tosieva tells us that during the bombardment Ossetians were sitting beside Russian pilots in the aircrafts showing them which houses had to be bombed.

“We saw Ossetian from Znauri, Tibilov, sitting in the aircraft. Evidently he was showing which houses to bomb. There were two of them. A pilot was Russian as well as the aircraft. First of all they bombed my brother-in-law's son's house, who used to work in Znauri and knew Tibilov”.

The fact of selective destruction of Georgian houses in the beginning was affirmed by another witness **Gurgen Durglishvili** as well. He said:

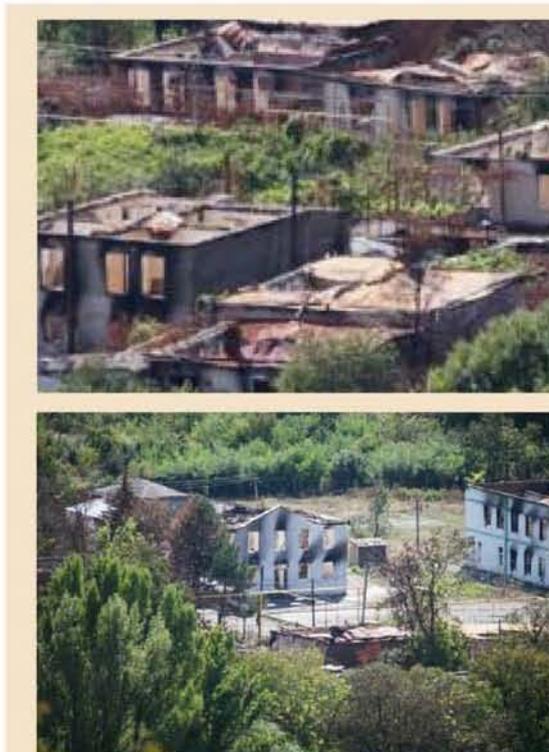
*“Ana Kokoeva's house was not burnt because she is Kokoity's relative. Zalina Bestaeva's nephews are fighters, the whole village knows it. During the war in 2008 Ossetians had a headquarters in Zalina's house”.*²⁸⁶

Those houses were still intact in October.

Many factors indicate that in the case of those two villages we are dealing with a purposeful policy of ethnic cleansing.

It is also confirmed by **OSCE-HRAM** mission that visited village Avnevi and described in its report:

“Avnevi... is virtually all burnt down”.²⁸⁷



Village Avnevi, August 2008

²⁸⁶ Interview with Gurgen Durglishvili was recorded by the GYLA 29 May, 2009, in Tbilisi

²⁸⁷ See, Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the conflict in Georgia”, OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, p. 43



Village Nuli, August 2008

Tania Tosieva gives us full details of the story she has witnessed and suffered from:

“On 9 August Russians and Ossetians entered village Avnevi together. Groups of 5-6 persons would enter the house, they would first take the stuff out and put them in the cars: there were silver Kamazs with open bodies and RAFs of khaki and cream colors. Then they would put the house on fire.

On the 14th, at 7 p.m, those three Ossetians came who shot Gurgen in the feet on 13 August. I stood by a gate when cream-colored car “RAF” came. It was congested with furniture. I recognized them, they were grandchildren of our neighbor, two brothers and their cousin. They were Pavle Kochiev’s grandchildren. One of the brothers suddenly hit Gurgen with the butt of a machine-gun in the head so powerfully that he fell. When he wanted to strangle the fallen man, the other brother kicked him with legs and fists. The one who kicked him hit me with a butt on the shoulder as well.

Then they ran up to the second floor. They flamed the blanket and started smashing things. While they were on the second floor Gurgen and I ran to the forest. From there we saw our house ablaze and how the roof had fallen. They looked for us in orchards, walked around shooting, and cursed us in Ossetian. They would have killed us had they found us, because we had recognized them.

Salome’s house was burned down on 9 August. I saw with my own eyes how they burned the houses of Salome Durglishvili, Hamlet Kapanadze, and Seiran Davitidze. Seiran Davitidze’s house was torched on 13 August by those who burned our house down”.

Inhabitants of Avnevi, as well as many other villages, mainly talk about pillage and cruelty of the Ossetians. Though it must be taken into account what the majority of the escaped from the Gorge population say about the armed forces of the Russian Federation. **Gurgen Durglishvili’s** words may be regarded as an expression of their opinion:

“While Ossetians were looting and burning houses, Russians were standing by tanks in the middle of the village. Russian tanks were located there during all the time until Ossetians were in the village. They used to take food and drinks while Ossetians were stealing the stuff. They put chickens on the tanks, took out vodka by cans”.

Inhabitants of village **Nuli** recall similar stories.



Village Avnevi,
August 2008

A resident of Nuli, **Ramaz Cercvadze**, during his talk about the village tragedy tried to explain the actions of the Ossetians witnessed by him, he recalls:

*“During the first war in 90ies Ossetians were upset about Nuli being Georgian village and now they managed to occupy it. We are no longer permitted to enter it”.*²⁸⁸

Iasha Toroshelidze is one more representative of a numerous army of IDPs from Prone Gorge. They not only burnt his household, but also beat violently an old man for bickering.

*“I don’t remember a date, but when the war broke out I was at home with my cattle. Approximately in a week the Ossetians came in with various big and small cars. They entered my yard and wanted to drive the cattle away. When I refused, they brutally beat me with weapon handles and told me to leave the village. They had been ordered to clean the village from Georgians. “Leave or Die” was the condition. Then they spilled gasoline on my house and burned it down. I left the village and went to Kareli together with my sister, who is 75 years-old”.*²⁸⁹

Ramaz Cercvadze’s house was also burnt down. He knows the names and surnames of the people who raided his village and enjoyed looting and torching the houses. According to the information by the inhabitants of Nuli, their majority was from the neighboring village Ubiati.

“After the arrival of the Russian soldiers, Ossetians from the neighboring Ossetian village Ubiati used to come, loot and torch houses. I know who those Ossetians are, since the village Ubiati is very close to Nuli. It is

288 Interview with Ramaz Cercvadze was recorded by GYLA, 11 December, 2008, in the compact settlement center of refugees, Surami, building of former technical school

289 Interview with 75-year-old Iasha Toroshelidze from Nuli village was recorded by the GYLA, in Gori 2nd kindergarten, 7 September, 2008

the first village to the north from Nuli and people know each other. The majority of the young men living in Ossetian villages were members of Ossetian military units, so called "Opolchenie", over a number of years. They wore military uniforms, had guns and a quite high salary. They had "Rossia" written on the sleeves of their uniforms."

Residents of village Nuli – **Glakho, Zina and Nina Chavchavadzes; Tinatin Ksovreli; Roman, Davit and Vazha Tkemaladzes**; as well as **Ramaz, Zaza, Zurab and Valiko Tsertsvadzes** – tell severe stories of mass bombardments, property destruction and insult.²⁹⁰ Their houses were looted and torched, they were made leave their own village under threat of death. As the inhabitants of Nuli say, there was left nothing but graves and memories in the village. Stories of these persons resemble each other like an apple cut in two. All of them were ousted, and their houses were looted and then torched.

Later, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, **Thomas Hammarberg**, wrote in his report that

"They all were compelled to flee".²⁹¹

The **International Fact-Finding Mission** to the Conflict in Georgia, which also visited the conflict zone and had an opportunity to talk to the IDPs as well as to the population remaining in the villages, noted that:

"Looting and burning of houses and property was the reason why Georgians from the villages surrounding Tskhinvali fled. Especially when it concerns persons who decided to stay despite the war, but then were compelled to flee".²⁹²

VILLAGE KEKHVI

80 year-old lady **Makvala Elbakidze** told us about the tragedy of the village Kekhvi.

"On 8 August one could hear from the morning the noise of helicopters; bombardments continued throughout the entire day. I saw blazing houses, how the villagers rushed into the houses trying to put out the fire. Many houses were torched due to these bombardments. From my house I saw the blazing houses of Kolia Kakhniashvili, Nodari Kakhniashvili, Koba Kakhniashvili, Elijan Ghonghadze, and Laura Nebieridze.

290 Interviews were recorded by the GYLA and the organization "Article 42" after October, 2008. The cases of the residents of Nuli village Glakho, Zina and Nina Chavchavadzes, Tinatin Qsovreli, Roman, Davit and Vazha Tkemaladzes, Ramaz, Zurab and Valiko Tsertsvadzes have been sent to the Human Rights Court in Strassburg

291 see, Thomas Hammarberg, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Human Rights in the Areas Affected by the south Ossetia Conflict, Special Mission to Georgia and Russian Federation, 22-29 August, 2008, CommDH(2008)22, 8 September 2008, para 31

292 See, Report of the International Fact-Finding mission on the conflict in Georgia, volume II, p. 392, September, 2009



Tsitsino Gagnidze –
“there were so many tanks they could cover the whole Georgia. The tanks were green with Russian flags on top”.

Malkhaz Kakhniashvili also recalls that bombardment continued till the 12th of August:

“Bombardments were carried out both from the mountain tops and the jets, day and night. Bombardments would start in the morning and then go on and on. They were bombarding from Java. Four helicopters and a fighter were flying below. Afterwards the jets followed. Helicopter and jets had red stars by the wings. Both of them were of dark grass color.”

Malkhaz Kakhniashvili saw women killed as a result of the bombardment. “A shell fell on the Tsveriakho mountain and two women died, their husbands were my cousins Nodar and Mito Kakhniashvilis.”

Bombardment did not leave a family untouched. **Malkhaz Kakhniashvili’s** mother was also heart by the bomb dropped near the yard of their house. She died from bleeding same day.

“On the 11th I started digging the grave in the yard, but I had to run to the field for three times as the village was bombarded”, added Malkhaz Kakhniashvili.²⁹³

Nazi Beruashvili also told us about bombardments from the mountain tops.

“On the 6th the bombardments started from the tops of Tliakana, Tsveriakho, Kitsina, Zaldada, and Itrapisi (Ossetian villages towards North). It lit and demolished everything. On the 7th and 8th the bombs

²⁹³ Interview with Malkhaz Kakhniashvili was recorded by GYLA, 4 July, 2009, in Tbilisi



Village Kekhvi, August 2008

were falling from the sky. There was a massive screaming and we haven't looked outside. A shell was dropped somewhere 100-150 meters away and the windows of the neighbors were all broken. The bombardment lasted for the whole day".

Another witness **Merab Kasradze** confirms intense bombardments in the first days as well. He escaped from the bombs "flying from the air like hail" on 8 August.

"Bombs were dropped on 8 August throughout the whole night. It kept on permanently. Sometimes there was 10 minute, half an hour, or sometimes one hour interval. It wasn't as massive as during the night on the 7th. However, after 6 pm permanent bombardments started again. They were as intense as on the night of 7th. Several residential houses were damaged during the 7th of August bombardment, including those of Robert Zangaladze and Goderdzi Bliadze".²⁹⁴

Tsitsino Gagnidze worked in the Kurta hospital as a nurse, and therefore she was constantly on the road taking care of the wounded. She left the village on 14 August and remembers clearly that intense bombardments lasted until 12 August. Then it subsided and land forces and Ossetians with and without uniforms entered the village. At this point Tsitsino was already hiding in the forest and watched the bombardment of not only Kekhvi, but the village Ditsi as well.

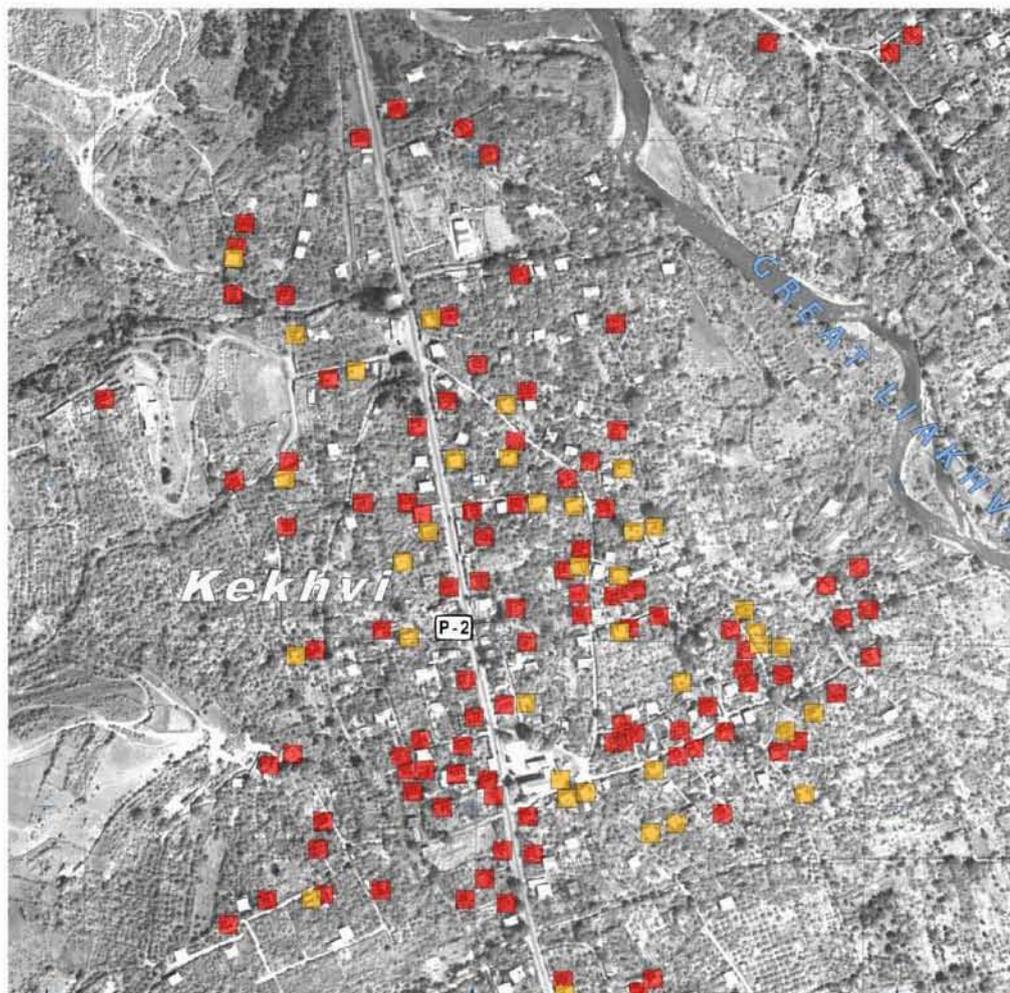
Makvala Elbakidze told us about the invasion of the Russian army in the evening of 9th of August:

"tanks and the land forces came in. There were all kinds of people. Tanks were followed by Russians, and then people of other nationalities. Soldiers were all in uniforms, holding the machine guns. There were a lot of them. They went up and down the village".

Tsitsino Gagnidze was saying *"there were so many tanks that they would have covered entire Georgia. They were of green color, flying Russian flags".*

As the stories of witnesses demonstrate, a large part of village Kekhvi was probably destroyed during the bombardments. Probably this also explains the multitude of damage depicted on the 19 August satellite

294 Interview with Merab Kasradze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi on April 27, 2009

19 August 2008. Village Kekhvi, Satellite image (Satellite 7)

The objects highlighted in red on the photo taken on 19 August were destroyed by that time, while the objects in yellow – were severely damaged. In total 252 objects.

Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 19 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

imagery. According to the satellite image taken on 19 August 2008, 44 percent of buildings in the village were already destroyed.

A majority of village inhabitants recall in interviews that looting of the village and torching of houses started in the evening on 11 August.

Tsitsino Gagnidze

"In the evening on the 11th (I was hiding in Makvala Nebieridze's garage) I saw that they were looting the house of Nazi Beruashvili. Small Kamaz stood by the house. When I glanced again in a while the house was on fire.

In the evening on the 12th I saw from the shed (my house is 50 meters away) that 6-7 persons entered the house. Kamaz stood on the roadside and they loaded things in it. When they finished I had a sigh of relief hoping they wouldn't burn the house. I turned back and didn't watch them leave. In 2 hours I looked outside and it was already in flames".

Makvala Elbakidze

"We were in the neighbor's house. When we went back my child saw that the smoke was coming out of our house. He was crying, horrified as his house was on fire. When I opened the house door, flames erupted, everything was burning inside. I still rushed in, hoping to save something. My left leg was burned while I was in the house".²⁹⁵

Davit Kasradze left the village on August 23. As he recalls, "at the time there were no more Georgians in the village except my wife and myself".

"On 14 August the tank came up from the Tskhinvali direction. It pushed the house of my neighbor Gode Kakniashvili and brought down the roof. Then the tank left Gode's house and entered the house of Nodar Kakhniashvili. It brought down its roof also. These houses are opposite to my house and I perfectly saw everything from my balcony.

Two green tanks and two bulldozers were standing by the shop at the village entrance. I haven't seen any inscription or flag on the tank. A shop and the houses around were all destroyed.

On August 15 I went down to Merab's house and saw the soldiers standing by my brother's house, approximately 10 men with white armbands. They stood by the house and watched my brother's house burning. I walked by the house of my second brother Valodia Kasradze, which was destroyed at the time but not torched yet. Merab's house was burnt down on the 19th".²⁹⁶

Malkhaz Kakhniashvili watched the destruction of the village from 200-300 meters away.

"It was probably 12-13 August when a special vehicle was driven in from the Roki tunnel, with something like a bomber on it, which was shooting fire. Thus they torched the entire village. I watched myself how they burned the village. Heavy machinery followed this vehicle (Russian soldiers and Ossetian gunmen). They first looted the houses and then torched them.

I saw how they robbed and burned the houses of Nugzar Kakhniashvili, Raman Kakhniashvili, Geshilo Meranashvili, Gia Zangaladze, and Goga Kakhniashvili".

Red Cross brought **Juleta Maghaldadze** and her husband out on 19 August. They couldn't flee from the village due to the spouse's illness. She recalls "I heard the noise of shooting and then the house was on fire".

On August 12 "when I got up I went over to my daughter and her house was already burned. Second daughter (Mzia) lives there as well. I picked up a stick and went on. Mzia's house was already burned as well.

²⁹⁵ Interview with Makvala Elbakidze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi in October, 2008

²⁹⁶ Interview with Davit Kasradze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi on April 29, 2009

Houses were ablaze while I was there. My house wasn't torched yet. They burned it on September 5. My neighbor saw it. They torched everything".²⁹⁷

Human Rights Watch also proves burning of houses in Kekhvi on 12th of August, 2008.

"In the village of Kekhvi, many houses were set on fire between 6.30 pm and 7.30 pm on August 12 – they were ablaze as Human Rights Watch researchers moved along the road."²⁹⁸

Meri Karelshvili and her husband did not intend to leave the village. They did not want to leave their child's grave. When the bombardments started their house was under attack also. *"Bombs were coming from above and the mountain tops also. Something huge would blast, tearing up the trees".* Old men tried to escape from bombs and looked for safe places. They hid in the gardens.

"Something hit our house. A wall was broken out in front. After a while we saw that my house was on fire. We couldn't put out the fire, it totally torched".²⁹⁹

In August 2008 tragedy fell upon **Dali Bagalishvili's** with all its gravity. Her child burst on a shell before her eyes, though she managed to save the child. After that tragedy she still stayed in the village when after numerous acts of looting they came with purpose to burn the house.

"They came and began breaking doors and windows. I ran up to them in tears – 'my child is in the hospital, take pity on me, haven't you child or mother, don't you fear the God when committing this evil deed'. They hit me twice on my back with the handle of a machine gun and left cursing".³⁰⁰

Yet, the hardest days for Ms. Bagalishvili were still ahead. On the next day the second group of Ossetians took her prisoner and she found herself in Tskhinvali "concentration camp".

Her house was burnt to ashes.

297 Interview with Juleta Magaldadze was recorded by the GYLA in Gori, at the IDP residence, Cottage #21, September, 2008

298 See, "HRW: Georgian Villages in South Ossetia Burnt, Looted", August 12, 2008, <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/08/12/georgian-villages-south-ossetia-burnt-looted>

299 Interview with Meri Karelshvili was recorded by the GYLA in Gori, Kindergarden #17, in September, 2008

300 Interview with Dali Bagalishvili was recorded GYLA on 14 August, 2009, in Gardabani, compact settlement of IDP

VILLAGE VANATI

"It was on 9th or 10th that my husband warned me "it's time to leave" and we decided to leave, but at this point the Russian and Ossetian troops had already entered the village. Approximately 13 tanks and 6 trucks full of Cossacks had entered. We ran to the forest and stayed there for 14 days, but from there we saw everything that had been happening in the village.

Robbers followed the army. The first group came by 4 cars: one Opel, one old and one new Russian military SUV, and one truck. They moved from house to house. They first shot in the houses and then started looting. They filled the truck. Then they would return with petrol and burn a house."

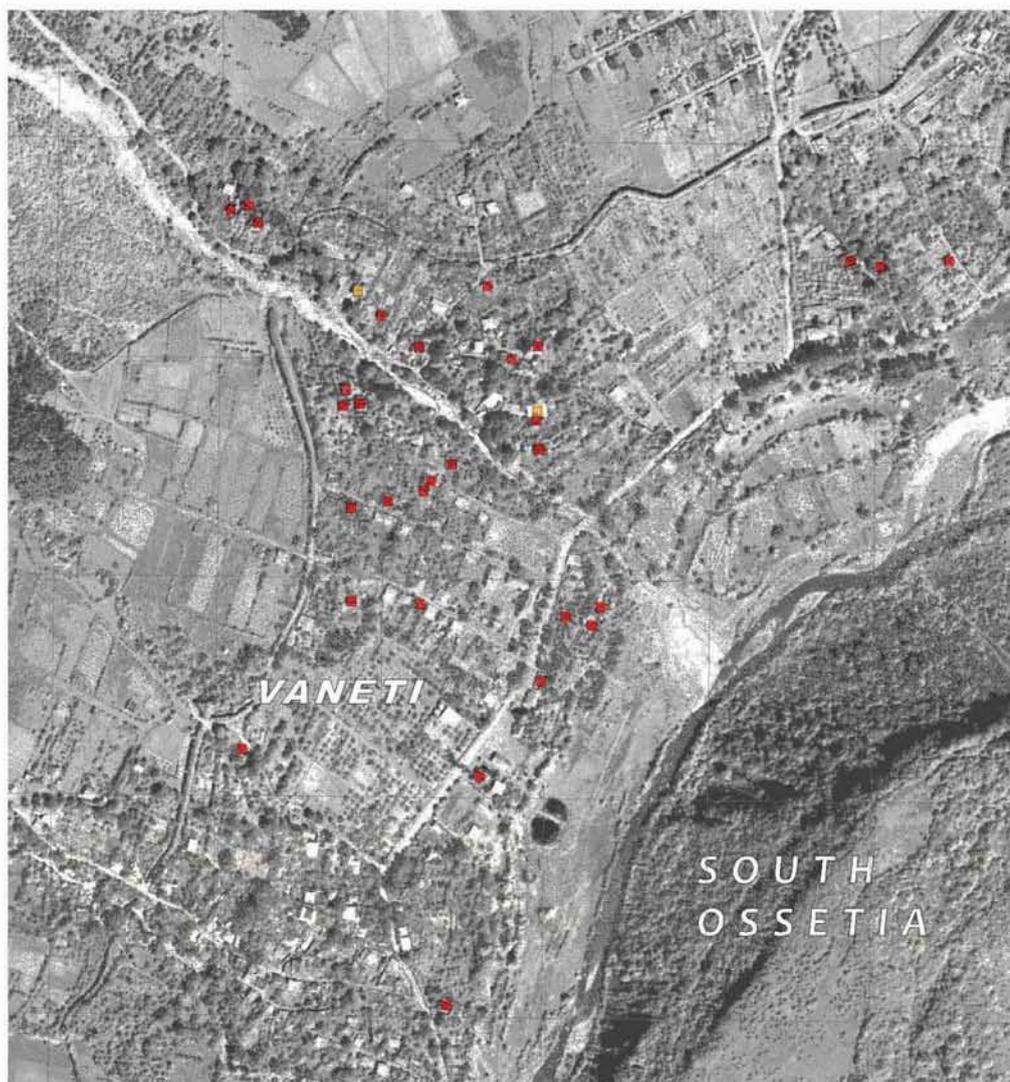
The same story was repeated every day.

"In the first place they torched the police building, followed by the village administration and the school. As a rule, looting would start at 1 pm and last until 8-9 pm. They burned all pillaged houses in the same evening.

There were approximately 15 persons in the group. The first group would mainly take valuables, while smaller items were left for the second group. They gave the order to burn to various groups. However, as a rule, another group would carry out the torching. Only the houses of Ossetians were left unburned, which were garnished with special white strips.



Russian military vehicle in the burning Georgian village

19 August 2008, Village Vanati, Satellite image (Satellite 8)

The objects highlighted in red on the photo taken on 19 August 2008 were destroyed by that time, while the objects in yellow – were severely damaged. In total 42 objects.

Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with World-View-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 19 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

Russian militaries stood in the entrance and exit of the village. During the looting and entire following days they would move in the village territory. They could not care less about the actions of the robbers.

The only thing that the Russian soldiers would do is shooting in the direction of the forest, to threaten the village population hiding there.

*There were approximately 50 houses in our village Vanati. Our village, just like other Georgian villages on this road, along the Small Liakhvi River, **Satskheneti, Atsrishevi, Gojaani**, no longer exists. They were all turned to ashes”.*

The story of the village Vanati, which is not much different from the stories of other Georgian villages, was told to the researchers of Human Rights Center on 8 September 2008 by a couple of approximately 65 years of age, who found shelter in the IDP settlement located at the Gori kindergarten

#13. They refused to disclose their names and surnames.

Tsiala Zakaroshvili, inhabitant of the same village recalls that the Georgian army had not entered her village, but Russians and Ossetians had come anyway and torched houses from approximately 9-10 August.

*"When I saw the fire for the first time, the council and police buildings were burning. Everything was burning down that line. My house is right at the entrance of Vanati, after you cross the bridge; it is 150 meters away from Ramaz's house. On the 11th I saw from my house a big truck (canvas covered) standing by the door of Ramaz. There were armed persons in uniforms. The house was put on fire. On the 12th I watched my house being robbed. I was in the garden; my relative woman and I were hiding there. They were in uniforms. They robbed others' houses also. They did not talk at all. They had something to shoot and that's how they put fires on. My house was torched around the 14th-15th".*³⁰¹

Ramaz Tsitsiloshvili was rather brief describing the tragedy of his village:

"Village is demolished. It is razed to the ground".³⁰²

Stories told by village inhabitants are evidenced by the images taken on August 19, 2008 by the UNOSAT satellite. Pursuant to this source, 42 buildings are demolished. At that, "primary analysis demonstrate that a distinctive residential district is heavily damaged".³⁰³

Under the 1989 census data, when the ethnic composition of villages was registered also, 59 percent of the village population was Georgian, and 40 percent Ossetian. Though, after the war in 90s, the ethnic balance in the villages controlled by Georgia altered, the minority of the Ossetian population still remained in some Georgian villages. It may be assumed that the 42 demolished buildings described by a satellite image during the first phase of the conflict, coincide exactly with the Georgian populated area of the village.

301 Interview with Tsiala Zakaroshvili was recorded GYLA in February, 2009, in Tbilisi, Military Hospital IDP shelter

302 Interview with Ramaz Tsitsiloshvili was recorded GYLA in February, 2009, in Tbilisi, Military Hospital IDP shelter

303 see, Village Damage Summary: Vanati, South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1& Formosat -2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 19 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All, at www.unosat.org

VILLAGE KURTA



destroyed village of Kurta. August 2008

A horrifying story of mass ousting of Georgians and destruction of property occurred in the village Kurta as well. An interim administration set up by the Georgian authorities in 2006 was located in Kurta, thus inciting the Ossetians' aggression. Residents of the village experienced serious problems already in 2007 when the Ossetians closed the road going to Gori and for the rest of the year the village was using a by-pass road to connect with the rest of Georgia.

The bombardment of Kurta was described in the **OSCE/HRAM** report as well.

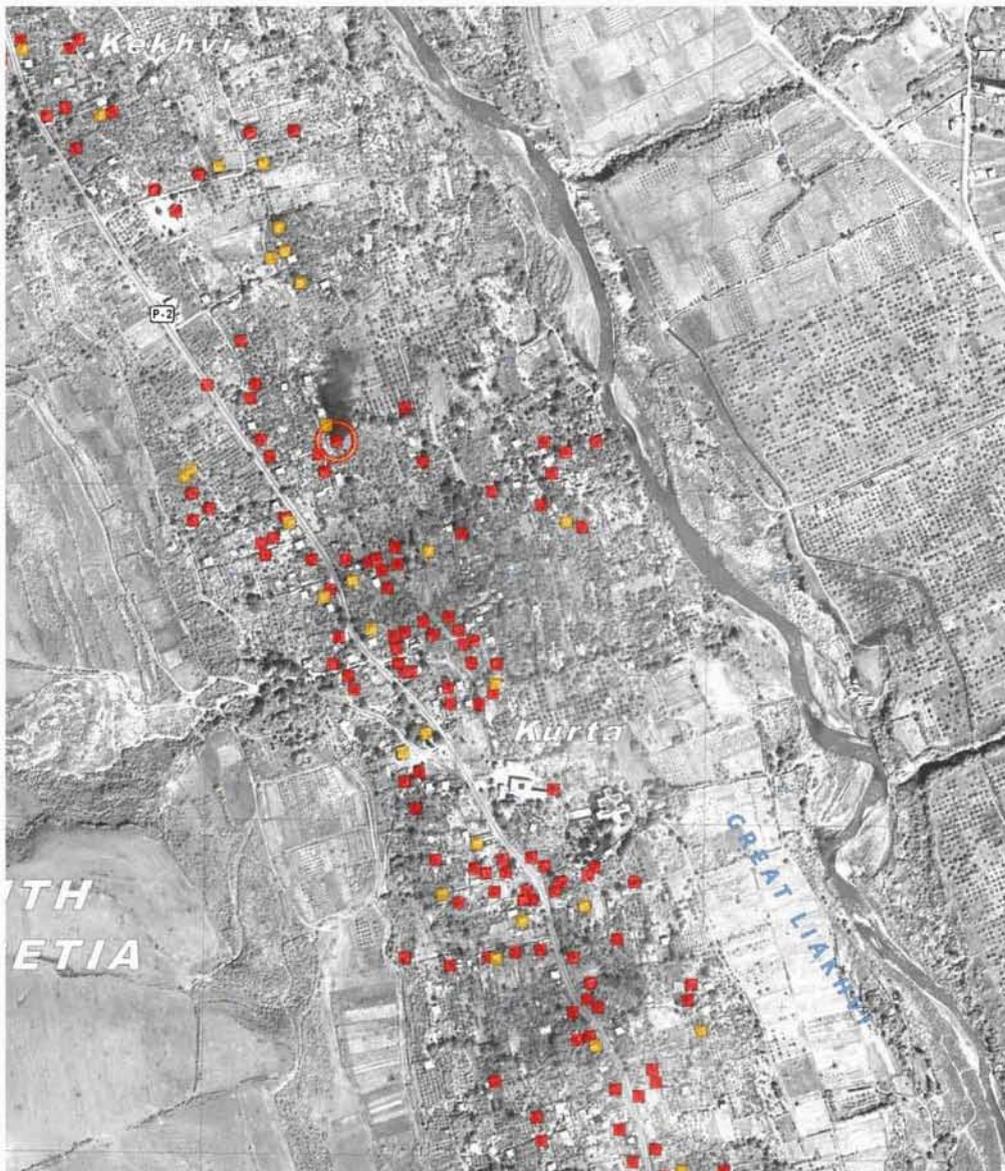
"Kurta, where the residence of Dimitri Sanakoev, the head of Interim administration of Tskhinvali region, was located, came under the heavy bombardment. Especially the neighborhood surrounding Sanakoev's residence suffered."³⁰⁴

Givi Guchmazashvili, resident of the village recalls that Dimitry Sanakoev's residence was constantly shot at.

"Situation in village Kurta was becoming tense throughout the entire May-August. They were permanently shooting from Tskhinvali and other territories controlled by the Ossetians. During this period civilians were wounded. e.g. my neighbor Mevlud Chlukhadze was wounded when a column of cars moving on the by-pass road was fired at. On 3-4 August shooting has become more intensive towards villages Avnevi-Nuli. Houses were destroyed in the villages and the population started to leave".³⁰⁵

304 See, "Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia", OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, p. 41.

305 Interview with Givi Guchmazashvili was recorded by the GYLA in February, 2009, in village Burbuki

19 August 2008. Kurta village, satellite image (satellite 9)

The objects highlighted in red on the photo taken on 19 August 2008 were destroyed by that time, while the objects in yellow - were severely damaged. In total 166 objects.

Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 19 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

According to the satellite imagery, 166 buildings were already destroyed in village Kurta on 19 August, whereas pursuant to the 2002 census, a total of 269 families lived in the village. This means that more than half of buildings no longer existed at the time of completion of the active hostilities. On the same image of 19th August, active fire spots are still apparent, which is an evidence to stories told by the witnesses below, according to which, similar to many other Georgian villages, the demolition of Georgian households in Kurta was carried up to their total liquidation, that once again proved, that Mr. Kokoity was keeping his promise entirely.

Stories of our respondents revive the events developing from 6 August 2008 in village Kurta and describe the tragedy of this small and beautiful Georgian village.

Gocha Khetaguri told us that:

*"Bombardment continued until 9 August. **Bidzina Kochishvili** and **Ksenia Chibirova** died as a result of bombardments".³⁰⁶*

At this point people were leaving the village massively. **Gocha Khetaguri** himself managed to bring 50 people out by his own car. **Guram Khachapuridze** recalls that shooting began on 6 August: *"sounds of explosion and shooting were heard in the village"*, then he adds, *"such situation often occurred in the Liakhvi Gorge, that's why we didn't pay much attention to it"*.³⁰⁷

Yet, witnesses tell us that shooting intensified since 7 August, and on 8 August jets appeared and land bombardment was accompanied by an air one. **Temur Kaulashvili** remembers well that Russians entered the village on 10 August.

"I stood in the street, at the corner to the district. The tanks appeared, many of them, with a lot of soldiers. Flags were flying on the tanks: blue, white and red. They shot from the tanks in all directions. Several groups of Ossetians followed also."

Omar Khutsinashvili also recalls:

"On 10 August at 4 a.m. Russian tanks came from Java and moved towards Tskhinvali. There were about 300 tanks and numerous land forces. The tanks (armored) were green with red stars. On 10 August the Russian army was followed by Ossetians. All Ossetians wore military uniforms and were armed. They came by vehicles, both trucks and soviet cars. My house as well as my garden was situated at the edge of the road and everything was seen well from there. I differed between Russians and Ossetians. Russians mainly followed the military column, there were tanks as well as infantry, and they wore military uniforms. Ossetians moved by groups, their uniforms were like guardians' ones."³⁰⁸

Omar Khutsinashvili, who spent the first months of displacement in the military hospital of the Ministry of Defense, recalls the first hours of invasion of the Russians and Ossetians.

"At 11-12 at night on the 10th I heard the noise of a crack. I was on the second floor of my house. I saw Mery and Gusein (Guram) Maisuradzes' house was on fire. At the same night I saw the houses of my

306 We couldn't manage to get the additional information concerning Bidzina Kochashvili and Ksenia Chibirova, killed during bombardment in Kurta, that is mentioned in Gocha Khetaguri's story. Ksenia Chibirova's death is confirmed by Gusein Maisuradze as well, "we were still in Kurta, walking along the road, when we saw Ksenia Kochieva's torn dead body on the second floor of her house. She was seen from the road", though the exact circumstances of her death are unknown to us, in particular, when and how she died

307 Interview with Guram Khachapuridze was recorded by the GYLA on 4 November 2009, in Gori, in Karaleti-Tsmin-datskali settlement

308 Interview with Omar Khutsinashvili was recorded by GYLA, 4 November, 2009, in Tbilisi

cousin –Avto Khetaguri and his son Gogita Khetaguri were burnt. Their houses were situated close to mine. Avto's house was 15 meters opposite from mine and his son's, Gogita's one, was about 50 meters away."

Then he ran frightened and watched from the hiding how the houses of his other relatives and neighbors – Gogita Khetaguri, Emzar Elbakidze, Gia Kochishvili, and Leri Jokhadze – were burned. On the 11th, when he was leaving the village, sharing the emotion stirred by what he had seen:

"When you come down from the top there is village Eredvi, it was entirely destroyed".

Temur Kaulashvili witnessed the burning of the houses.

"On the 11th I left the house and they were already burning them. Several people approached Gocha Khetaguri's house. I was hiding in the orchard. There were approximately 100 meters from my house to Gocha's one. There were around 5-6 people, all of them armed and holding machine-guns. They entered the house and the flames went up when they'd left.

They left Gocha's house and entered the one of Geronti. Geronti



Tariel Basishvili, village Kurta, September 2008

Jokhadze's house was a bit closer to mine. 5-6 men in military uniforms entered Geronti's house. In 5 minutes Geronti's house was ablaze"

Guram Khachapuridze returned to village Kurta on 12 September 2008 with the help of Russian soldiers. They looked for the father of his friend Joni Basishvili, Tariel. **Tariel Basishvili** stayed in the village during warfare and there was no information about him.

Before entering Kurta they had to pass by Big Liakhvi villages.

"We passed by Big Liakhvi villages – Tamarasheni, Qvemo and Zemo Achabeti. The villages were abandoned and houses burnt. In Kurta village I saw all the houses were burnt. Only two houses remained in Kurta – Moris Basishvili's and Vale Zoziashvili's. They were near the church and I thought that was the reason they had not been burnt. All other houses were burned down. As far as I know, later those houses were also burnt. Ossetians made Vale Zoziashvili's mother, who was still in the village, set the house to fire with her own hands and then sent her away. My house was also burnt in my district".

Joni Basishvili himself re-entered the village first time on 18 August.

"Then I saw Nodar's house. It's in the entrance of the village. I entered personally to check it out. It was blazing. One or two houses were hit by bombs as far as I understand and the rest were burnt because the walls still stood and I guessed from there".³⁰⁹

Gusein Maisuradze worked as a Deputy Minister of Economic Development in the South Ossetian Administration. He left the village on August 10.

"We went up to the forest on the mountain and my house was burned, I saw the houses of Avto Khetaguri and Emzari Elbakidze. I watched this from Tsveriakho. Everything was seen perfectly: Tamarasheni was in flames, as well as Kekhvi. All remaining houses were ablaze in the Elbakidze district. All of them were in flames".³¹⁰

VILLAGE BELOTI

"After the outbreak of the war the Ossetians used to come to our village everyday and took everything that had any value. Only in my neighborhood they took 200 cows and many pigs. They entirely burned the households of 60 families".

The story of destruction and expulsion was remembered by 75 year-old **Nadia Terashvili**, who lives in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees camp in Gori.³¹¹ Ms. Terashvili herself is Ossetian and that is why

309 Interview with Joni Basishvili was recorded by GYLA, 4 November, 2009, in Gori

310 Interview with Gusein (Guram) Maisuradze was recorded by GYLA, 8 August, 2009, in Tbilisi

311 Interview with Nadia Terashvili was recorded by HRC on 9 September, 2008, in Gori



Bombarded house, village Beloti, September 2008

she stayed in the village until 8 September. She saw a lot with her own eyes, including how they torched her daughter's, Ira Terashvili's house. **Irina Terashvili** was a public official of village Beloti and therefore she was chased after to be killed.

"I was hiding in the forest until 28 August 2008. For ten days, half-starved I was lying on the ground motionless, watching my house being devastated".³¹²

Ms. Nadia Terashvili spotted the heads of the Beloti's robbers, who according to her were from the Ossetian village Elturna, brothers Siukhaevs of around 30-40 years. *"They were the ones controlling everything in our region"* says the witness.

Vaso Archvadze, inhabitant of the same village Beloti tells us same story and confirms suspicion of Nadia Terashvili, while identifying Ossetian para-militaries:

"One Ossetian started walking around the houses. He warned us to leave or otherwise they would torch us all. He was from village Ertula, named Robe. He was wearing the uniform of the guard, a kind of green uniform that the militaries wear. I was acquainted with this Robe, he was our neighbor and used to come. He was from village Ertula, some two-three kilometers from Beloti.

My spouse and I lived in a new house. It was a two-floor, of capital construction, with a yard of 800-900 sq.m. in front.

I had up to 5,000 sq.m. of land separately, where I grew corn, beans, grapes and fruit, apple. All of us earned living with the gardens. We used to take the goods to Tskhinvali and sell there. In the house we had furniture, kitchenware, 700 liters of wine, 90 liters of vodka. Garden harvests of potatoes, beans, corn. We kept everything there and could not take with us anything. We had 10 pieces of cattle, 10 goats and sheep, 5 pigs with their piglets.

Our grandchildren told us that our house was torched. They saw the house burning but could not put out the fire because there was no water around".³¹³

312 Interview with Irina Terashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, in the publishing house "Samshoblo", 14 Kostava str.

313 Interview with Vaso Archvadze was recorded by the GYLA on February 7, 2009 in Gori, kindergarten #5

Statements of other inhabitants of village Beloti are no different. Statements of two elders, **Nodari Demetrashvili** and his Ossetian spouse **Zhenia Demetrashvili**, who were interviewed in village Shavshvebi by the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, throws further lucidity on the tragedy of the village.

Nodari:

"On the first day they put 5 houses on fire.

When they came for the first time they threw hand grenade in our house and destroyed the front corridor entirely. We still lived there for another month, wanted to save the house. They kept coming, saying they would still torch this house and that no Georgian should have stayed there. They said if elders stayed there, then the young would come also, and therefore we should have left. Our cattle were driven out entirely while we were there."

Zhenia:

"When we saw Ossetians, neighbors would run to the forest. I am Ossetian and I was staying at home. When they would enter my house I would speak to them in Ossetian. I stayed in the house so that they could not have torched it. I would sit in the yard, waiting for them to appear.

Than others came. They say they had received the order to burn entire village and that we had to leave.

A part of Ossetian soldiers took care of Ossetian women remaining in the village. Once they told us to tie white bands to our arms so that no one should have shot us. Once they told me even to hang white bed-sheet on the house.

A lot of houses were torched while we were there, and we watched the houses blazing. We tried to save our house but in vain. We could not reap the harvest at all, and pigs, hens, and cattle remained there."

Nodari:

"They burned the house of my brother Giorgi on 20 August. I watched it smoke from nearby. We could not manage to put out the fire as we were afraid of being killed. On the other day the house was completely torched. Numerous cars would come everyday, they emptied the houses and then put them on fire."

Zhenia:

"Ossetians would come everyday, lots of them by cars. They greeted us in Russian when they met me, but I would reply in Ossetian so that they would have known I was Ossetian.

On 7 September Red Cross moved us out. The village was already

entirely torched. We learned after we had left that our house had been burnt as well".

Other residents of the village give virtually the same evidence. **Jemali Rtveladze** and his spouse **Zinaida Sabanova**, who were interviewed in the IDP shelter in village Shavshvebi by the researchers of the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, recollect the same details of tragedy taking place in the village. They recall the threat of the Ossetians that they would kill everyone who would not leave the village, and that it was decided to burn down every house. That Ossetians, if they stayed in the village, should have tied white strips to their clothes or houses for protective purposes. They were hiding in the forest, watching from there the activities of marauders. *"When they came to us, they put the houses on fire straight away, first the house of Gurami Chipchiuri, then Gogia Pisadze's house, and then ours",* the elders recall.

"Ossetians were entering everyday in groups, were emptying the houses, and then put them on fire. There were 4-5 persons in the groups. They wore military uniforms and were armed. Some of them even had a mask on the face, majority of them were from neighboring villages.

One day we watched Robinzon Demetrashvili's house burn, probably it was on 23 August.

Before we left village was almost entirely torched. We watched from the forest how they emptied the houses and then put them on fire. Fire was flaring up suddenly, they would throw in something, and then fire would burst".³¹⁴

VILLAGE DISEVI

Inhabitants of village Disevi, who are accommodated in the Gori IDP camp, also tell the stories of raids, looting, cruel treatment, and killings.³¹⁵

"On 9 August the Russian army entered our village on numerous tanks and opened up military check points. Representatives of Ossetian paramilitary units followed them and started looting and burning the houses. They pillaged the entire village.

They used to come almost every day. As far as I know, only 20-25 houses out of 300 in our village survived torching. They burned 3 more houses even yesterday (meaning 10 September; author's remark).

For the first time Ossetians entered in the evening on 9 August. Approximately 20 Ossetians were roaming from yard to yard. For the first two

³¹⁴ Interviews with Jemal Rtveladze and Zinaida Sabanova were recorded by the GYLA on February 8, 2009 in Gori,

³¹⁵ In the fall of 2009 we were not allowed in village Disevi. Disevi is interesting in this respect as well. If at the start of the project one year ago our researchers were interviewing people in the village, taking pictures, documenting conditions, now boundaries have been shifted and no Georgian is allowed on the territory controlled by the Russians. For clarity, officially on paper Disevi is outside occupied territory and is considered to be under Georgian control.

days they were not stealing anything, only burned houses one after another. For instance my house was not looted, it was torched straight away.

However, three days ago the Ossetians returned to my garden, collected 150 boxes of peaches and took them away.

My house is located within 200-300 meters from the Russian military check point and of course they saw everything, but they allowed marauders to do anything. They themselves burned down the house near the military check point. They would control nothing. **Only now, when 90-95 percent of houses are torched, they started patrolling**".³¹⁶

Valiko Khelashvili, another resident of the same village who did not leave it, and who presumably is the only Georgian inhabitant of the village, recalls:

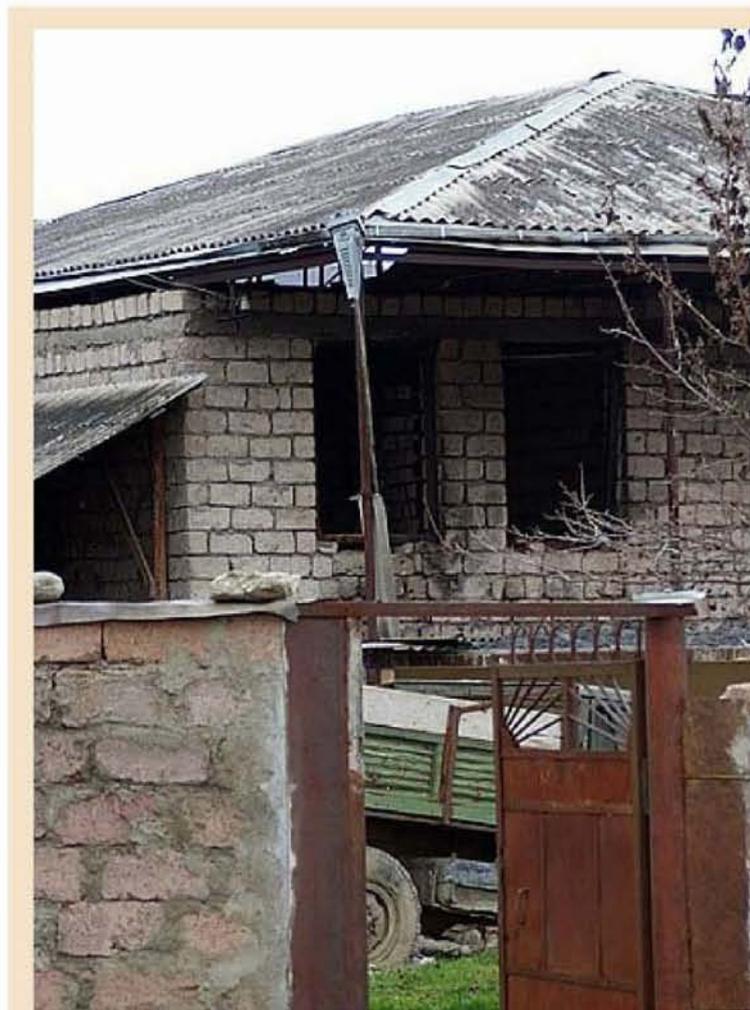
"I was building my house with my own hands for 20 years. I haven't left the village even for a day and watched with my own eyes how the entire village was in flames. I don't remember figures and I don't care about the calendar.

One day Chechen soldiers came. They were murdering people in the village. They killed one old man and cruelly beat the man of approximately fifty years of age. They spilled gasoline on his clothes and put them on fire. He had a heart attack and passed away.

Nato Okropiridze was burned in her own house. Her husband watched this with his own eyes.

New houses were torched every day, or rather every night. They were shooting every night. My house is rather distanced from the village and people would come to me, seek shelter, tell me stories about the village, their murdered relatives, and torched houses.

By my calculations there should be only 4 houses in the village that were left untouched".³¹⁷



Burnt resident house, village Disevi, August 2008

³¹⁶ Interview with the inhabitant of Disevi, 51 year old Vakha Okropiridze was recorded by HRC, 11 September, 2008

³¹⁷ Interview with 52 year old Valiko Khelashvili was recorded by HRC in Disevi, 20 October, 2008

representatives of
Ossetian para-
militaries while
looting, village
Disevi, 2008



Interviews recorded with the inhabitants of this village currently in displacement evidence horrifying stories taking place in village Disevi. For instance, **Otar Razmadze** recalls the story of Nato Okropiridze's burning by man in uniforms and with white bands.

"On 13 August noise of shots was heard. He saw a man running towards the forest, and his house was burned down.

When he returned to his torched house he found the burnt corpse of his spouse. She was entirely burnt. Suliko Okropiridze, another neighbor and I helped him in burying her in the house yard".

Otar Razmadze himself was one of the most capable family heads in the village. He had 4 houses, 2 Belarus tractors, three small tractors, Kamaz, and two ZILs in the village. Further, they owned 6 buffalos, 2 cows, a lot of poultry, 4 trucks of firewood, and 2,500 wooden boxes for storing apple and fruits.

"On 12 August, when the Russians and Ossetians entered the village, they knew I was rich and came straight to me. We ran away. They burned my houses down and drove away the equipment. Next day they returned and torched the fourth house. Then they robbed my orchard and afterwards burned the yard and household. They cruelly beat my wife and her 98 year-old mother and threatened to kill me",³¹⁸

Shota Okropiridze, another resident of the same village Disevi recollects the story of torching his own and other neighbors' houses.

"In the afternoon on 12 August Russian tanks entered the village. Tanks had flags on them with white and red stripes. I was hiding in the forest and watching from there. I don't know whether Ossetians were with Russians or not. My house is near the forest. I was a kilometer

318 Interview with Otar Razmadze was recorded by HRC in village Mereti, 20 October, 2008

and half away from the house. From the forest I saw that red Ikarus-type bus stopped by the door of my house. 8 armed men in uniforms entered the yard. They wore the same uniform, green and parti-colored. Two among those wore white bands on their arms. These two brought items out of the house and then burned the house.

There was a milk processing factory near my house and the rest took everything out of there."

Witness Shota Okropiridze also remembered that he saw from the forest how the same people looted and torched houses of his neighbors - Shalva Okropiridze, Gela Tukhareli, Simona Okropiridze, Malkhazi Okropiridze, Elioza Okropiridze, Hamleti Okropiridze, Koba Begheluri and Elguja Okropiridze.

Otar Okropiridze left the village mid September. *"Prior to that I was hiding in the forest adjacent to the village and we ate whatever I had found there"*. He was at home when the looters came and made him watch the pillage and destruction of his own house under the threat of the guns. That's why he could identify the looters:

"Ossetian groups, headed by the Gobozovs, would go around. They burnt my house on 14 August. 5-6 men surrounded me. They put my house on fire. They were burning my house in front of my eyes and I could do nothing. They put machine-guns to my stomach and ordered



representatives of Ossetian paramilitaries in a resident house, village Disevi, September 2008.

me not to move. They said that territory was theirs, not ours, and that they could do whatever they'd like. And that we all should have left.

Having burned whatever was burned, they then took the rest with them to their village. They even dissembled the gates and took them with them. I had 5 cows and 2 bulls and they drove them away. I watched with my own eyes how they looted the village".³¹⁹

VILLAGE ATSRISKHEVI

It will not be strange to state from start that Stories told by witnesses from Atsriskhevi resemble the other villagers and each other as well. When in the morning on 9 August helicopters appeared above the village, of greenish color and with Soviet symbolics, it was no secret to anyone that the Russians had invaded. Helicopters flew very low and reconnoitered the surroundings. Here and there they dropped bombs. **Asiat Bichenov** remembers that morning very well:



Helicopter of Russian armed forces with the soviet symbolic over the Georgian villages, August 2008

"When the helicopters entered deep into the gorge towards Tsipori, I heard several powerful blasts. There were approximately three helicopters. I was hiding in the 'tone' (Georgian bakery). Helicopters turned around and almost touched the roof of our house. First one of them and then the second. Then the third one flew and they dropped bombs at the Zonkari reservoir. Our village is on the height and it is seen well".³²⁰

Russian soldiers followed the helicopters, together with the armed Ossetians wearing greenish uniforms. Ossetians wore armbands. Afterwards everything happened just like in other Georgian villages: intimidation of the people, shooting, persecution, and then pillage of their houses, plundering of cattle and poultry, and torching of households.

An inhabitant of the village Atsriskhevi, **Gocha Askilashvili**, recollects:

"Being 100 meters away from the village, we saw well how the Ossetians drove my car out of my house, as well as two other cars of my friend Valeri Galashvili, "NIVA" and "VILIS", and Givi Askilashvili's "UAZ". On the same day on August 11 they burned my house. We also stood there when I saw my house smoking. At this time Vepkhia Askilashvili's house was on fire as well.

They escorted my mother, father, and my brother out of the house and made them watch everything this from the yard. They hit my father several times and insulted him physically also. My family members were there

³¹⁹ Interview with Otar Okropiridze was recorded by HRC in Gori, on 18 December, 2008

³²⁰ Interview with Asiat Bichenov was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, hotel "Kolkheti"

*also when they burned the house of my neighbor Givi Askilashvili”.*³²¹

Marauders stole and destroyed everything – residential areas, orchards, equipment, and consumer items, everything that could have been bought and sold. Same witness **Gocha Askilashvili** recalls how they have stolen his bees:

“I glanced over our village from the mountain ridge and I saw “Gazel” standing by my hives and 3 persons putting bees in it. It was evening time, we watched them for a while, we had no weapons to go down there, and plus we were hungry and exhausted”.

Looting and torching of houses accompanied the insult and intimidation of Georgians. Most of the witnesses avoided talking about insult and degrading treatment. However, villager **Ilia Askilashvili** remembered during the interview how Russian and Ossetian military were treating him:

“They put me up and shot bullets in front of me.

*There was pig slush in front of my house. They made me lie in there. At least now you should say where the people are. They kept shooting in this slush. Then one of them told me in Georgian I would die and that my death wasn't in their interest”.*³²²

Another inhabitant of the village, **Jemal Vazagashvili**, went through the same story. He remembers that he met the Russians and Ossetians at the center after they had entered the village.

“At this point he shot machine-gun in my feet. Splinters hit me in legs and in stomach. I started bleeding and I wanted to look down at it but he didn't give me a chance to. He took me away to forest. They put one house on fire immediately.

They were looking for women.

A second house was already on fire when we came back. They sat me down nearby, within 15-20 meters. They collected 6 cars from the village. One of them took out the gun and shot in my direction. There were 2 pigs in front of me and they killed one.

*Afterwards they left, setting another 3 houses on fire. I went up over the mountains and looked down at my house. It still stood but was blazing. It was twenty minutes to three when they set it to fire and in an hour it was burnt down”.*³²³



Bombarded village Atriskhevi, August 2008

321 Interview with Gocha Askilashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, at the hotel “Kolkheti”.

322 Interview with Ilia Askilashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, at the hotel “Kolkheti”.

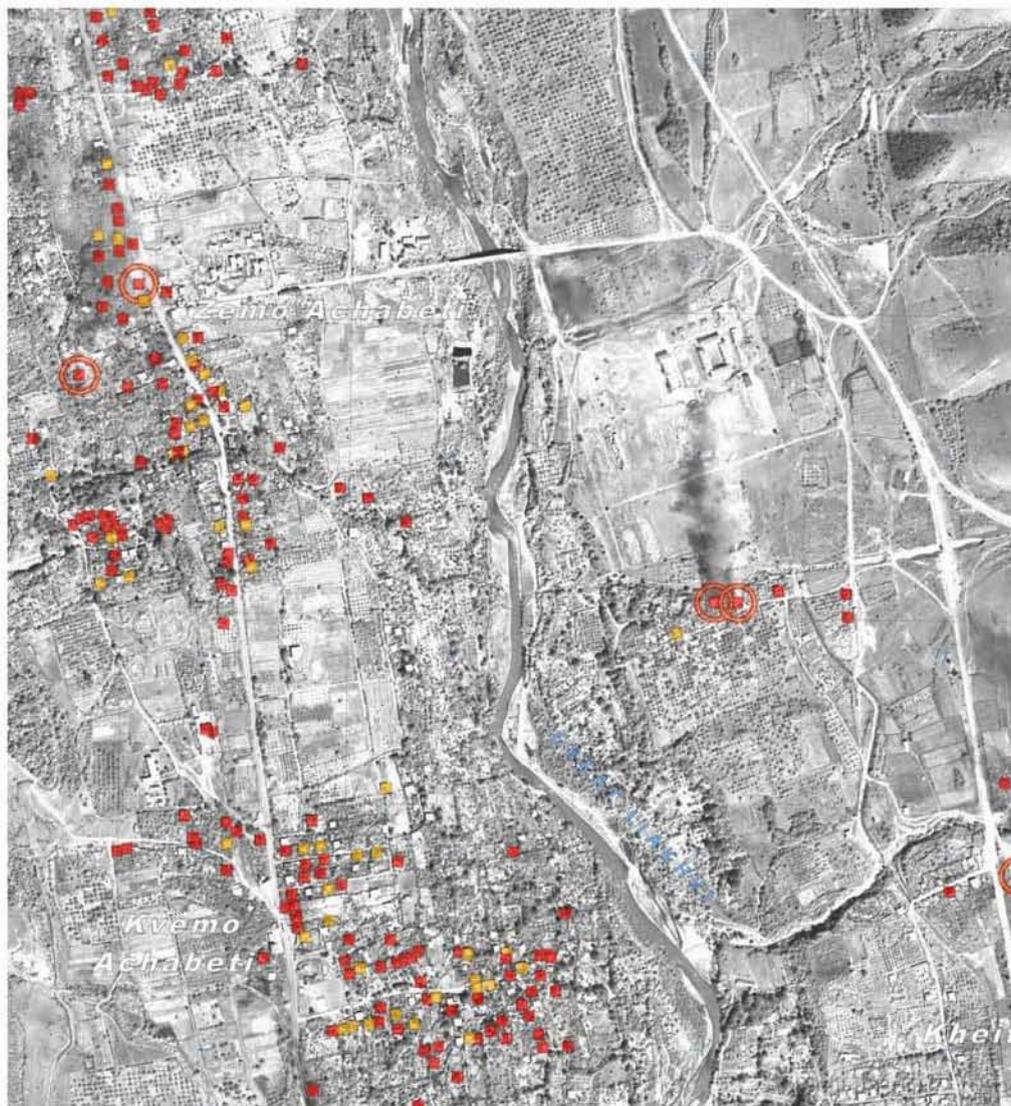
323 Interview with Jemal Vazagashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, at the hotel “Kolkheti”.

ZEMO AND KVEMO ACHABETI

Both Georgian villages Zemo and Kvemo Achabeti were turned into debris after the 2008 August war. Achabeti was first destroyed by bombing, then burnt down and finally, as the witnesses say, razed to the ground by special equipment.

UNOSAT satellite imagery evidences a grave and brutal picture of damage inflicted on Zemo and Kvemo Achabeti. Images taken on 19 August demonstrate clearly not only the damage inflicted on these villages, but also the fact that on 19 August, i.e. after the halting of hostilities and signing of the cease fire agreement, the houses were still on fire. There are 5 places highlighted on the image as active fire spots, which provide corroboration of the witnesses' stories that torching of houses continued long after the formal end of the war.

19 August 2008. village Zemo and Kvemo Achabeti, satellite image (satellite 10)



The objects highlighted in red on the photo taken on 19 August 2008 were destroyed by that time, while the objects in yellow - were severely damaged. Fire spots are highlighted in red. In total 199 objects.

Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 19 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

Initial analysis of UNOSAT indicates that the imagery clearly demonstrates that 199 buildings are entirely or partially destroyed. It should not be forgotten that the torching of houses still continued after 19 August, 2008.

Under the 2002 data, there were 175 families registered in village Kvemo Achabeti, and 160 families in Zemo Achabeti. A greater part of the population was Georgian. These statistics prove that by 19 August a majority of the houses were already destroyed. Almost one month after taking these images, representatives of the human rights organization “Memorial” stated that village Achabeti, along with other Georgian villages, was entirely torched.³²⁴ There are several photos and videos accessible on-line proving total demolition of Achabeti.³²⁵

Resident of Zemo Achabeti, **Alexi Chlaidze**, told us amazed, “*Georgian troops have not entered our territory at all*”, that’s why he was so astonished by the activity of Russians and Ossetians in the village. Mr. Alexi Chlaidze, same as the other residents of Achabeti emphasized that Russians took part together with Ossetians in looting and torching of their villages.

VILLAGE ZEMO ACHABETI

Events in Zemo Achabeti started taking place earlier than in many other Georgian villages. **Ilia Chulukhidze** witnessed a lots of brutality, and finally went through captivity as well. He told his story to our researchers in great detail. Other residents of the same village have later confirmed his story.³²⁶ He recalls that “*there was the Georgian army and the police in the village, but when the Russians invaded on 7 August, there was neither army nor the police*”. Russian soldiers raided his family for the first time on the very 7th of August, at half past six in the evening. They also searched for the weapons and the soldiers. Mr. Ilia Chulukhadze confirms that they were only Russians who entered his house.

“They put weapons to my mouth and urged me to tell them where were our weapons. They battered everything there. They were Russians, wearing uniforms of greenish color. Their look and manner of talk gave them away as Russians. I speak a bit of Russian. They told me they wouldn't have killed me but the Ossetians were following and they might have had killed us”.

Ilia Chulukhidze's also tells us the story of Russian army entering the village.

324 See, Special press-release by the Memorial HRC: “A Month after the War, Violations of Human Rights and Norms of Humanitarian Law in the Conflict Zone in South Ossetia”, September 11, 2008

325 See videos at http://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=277990; also at, http://www.myvideo.ge/?video_id=338027

326 Ilia Chulukhidze's evidence coincides with Zemo Achabeti resident Neli Mchedlidze story, whose house was also burnt and who had been kept prisoner in Tskhinvali. There are ;pts of similarities with his neighbor Givi Chulukhidze. The same is confirmed by Besik Maisuradze, a resident of the village, who left the village on 8 August together with Georgian troops and the police. Zeinab Basishvili also recalls that Russian troops invaded the village on 8 August. She confirms that Georgian troops were no longer in the village on 8 August.



Bulldozed village Zemo Achabeti, September 2008

"All kinds of jets, helicopters, tanks: all flying Russian flags. They had all kinds of weaponry. I thought they wouldn't fit in the Georgian territory. I saw that from my yard. Part of the column, 2-3 tanks stopped by the bridge at the corner, others drove towards Tskhinvali. They drove continuously day and night, followed above by the jets. Jets and helicopters flew at the height of houses, bombarding".³²⁷

Many houses were damaged during these very air bombardments. Bombardments were carried out constantly.

A resident of the village, **Besik Maisuradze**, stated the reasons for leaving the village:

"On 9 August Achabeti was bombarded once again from the air. At around noon on 9 August my neighbor and I were standing by the cellar door in my house, when something hit the house and my neighbor and I broke the cellar door under pressure and ran inside. The roof was off the house entirely. The glass was broken".

After that Besik Maisuradze left the village.

Mamuka Maisuradze told us also that on the 9th, at around 1 pm he entered the village to take the parents out, and saw destroyed village:

"A bomb fell on the house of Zura Maisuradze (30 meters away from my house). Babutsidze's house is also approximately 50 meters away and a bomb fell on it as well, just like on the house of Giorgi Khetaguri also. two other bombs were dropped in the orchard, approximately 50 meters away from my house.

I went towards Gori through a by-pass road. On that road I saw how Khviti, Achabeti, and other villages - Dzartsemi, Kurta, Kekhvi were bombarded. These were bombardments from mountains, not the air attack."³²⁸

Whatever was left undamaged from bombardments was torched purposefully, one after another.

Bagrat Khaladze spent the night of August 10 on top of the stairs.

"They came to my door - 7 Ossetians, and told me in Georgian to free

³²⁷ Interview with Ilia Chulukhidze was recorded by GYLA, 8 April, 2009, Tbilisi, Tamarashvili str. 9

³²⁸ Interview with Mamuka Maisuradze was recorded by GYLA, 17 April, 2009, in Tbilisi

the cattle with my own hands. They slaughtered a calf on the spot, in the afternoon they returned back and took everything out of the house, put in the car. At 5 pm they returned, sat me by the water tap and told me to watch my house burn. 7 guys with machine-guns stood at my head. I can recognize all of them if I see them. They entered the house and set some wire on fire. First the beds flared up and then they were totally burnt. I was there until the end, watching".³²⁹

On the same day Bagrat Khaladze and several of his neighbors were arrested and detained in the Tskhinvali prison until 23rd of August.

Zeinab Basishvili recalls that on 13 August Besik Maisuradze's house was burned down as well.

"On 13 August they burned Besik Maisuradze's house. A bomb fell on it before it was burned. There were 3 Ossetian guys of up to 22 years of age. They wore civil torn clothes. I haven't seen guns in their hands. They entered the house and took something out and put in a big car. I saw them holding 5 liter gas can in their hands. I approached them and told them in Ossetian: please do not burn the house. They replied in the Ossetian: get lost if you don't want to be burned yourself.

They first spilled the gas on a lower floor, and then set the second floor ablaze. They wouldn't leave the yard until the fire had become really strong. They stood in the yard watching.

This way they have torched the houses of Givi Guchmazashvili, Nugzari Otinashvili, and Zviad Karkusovi. This is what I've seen personally".³³⁰

Ilia Chulukhidze recollects also that on 8 August they already started walking around in groups. During the day various people would enter the houses of Georgians for several times, searching for the weapons.

"Various groups have entered for 5 times during a day. I asked one of them: Aren't you Russian? He told me he was Chechen. They beat me brutally because I did not have a gun. They wandered in mixed groups: there were Russians as well as Ossetians. They talked in Russian,



Burnt village Zemo Achabeti, August 2008

329 Interview with Bagrat Khaladze was recorded by GYLA on October 28, 2008 in Tbilisi

330 Interview with Zeinab Basishvili was recorded by GYLA in Tbilisi

Ossetian, and some of them even in Georgian. They had weapons, wearing similar uniforms of greenish and earth color. They differed from each other by appearance and accent. One Ossetian told me we should have all died, and that not even one Georgian was worth living.

*Two or three times they beat me so badly that I lost consciousness. Only the Ossetians beat me, not the Russians. **Russians stood there by and watched me.***

On 9 August the Ossetians started mass torching of houses in the village. They would take out whatever they'd like and then burned the houses down. They would spill the gas over and then put the matches on. I saw with my own eyes how they burned my neighbor Nodar Chulukhidze's house. They entered his house, spilled the gas and torched it.

Then they burned Tristan Chulukhidze's house. First they brought everything out and then burned it. They drove two big cows and a pig away.

They didn't leave even one house. Russians saw our houses burn, some of them even took pictures. We later saw the picture of our burned house online.

Something like a subdivision was allocated that burned the houses. They drove a car full of gas with them. They were five Ossetians in uniforms. These very people burned my house down on 11 August. After burning Tristan's house, they entered my yard. They told me in both Ossetian and Georgian to set the house on fire myself. All five of them were Ossetians. I recognized by appearance also they were Ossetians and they told me: you Georgians shouldn't live, no Georgian is worth living. One of them ringed someone and asked in Ossetian: there's one old man here, what should we do? I speak Ossetian. Respondent told him to take me along. That Ossetian who spoke on the phone told the rest to torch the house. They spilled the gas, lit the matches and torched my house in front of my eyes.

I was in slippers and they didn't give me a chance even to put on my clothes. They threw me in Vilis and took me to Tskhinvali".³³¹

Neli Mchedlidze remembers the story of burning the houses of her own and neighbor Irma Otinashvili. This story is significant because unlike many other villages, the Russians played a major role in raiding, looting, torching, and active marauding.

"When the sun rose on 10 August I went to my house. Two persons in military uniforms entered my yard. One of them should have been Russian: blond and pug-nosed, and the other was probably Kossack: flat nose and thinner higher up. They searched the house.

When these left I saw from the balcony others coming. Six armed

331 Interview with Iliia Chulukhidze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, Tamarashvili str. 9



One of the houses destroyed in Zemo Achabeti, August 2008. Photo shows Russian writing on the wall of the house: "Georgians did not want to live in peace!!! They got what they were looking for."

men in Russian military uniforms entered. Two of them were holding different machine guns, as if something was attached to the guns at the end (later I saw that the soldier who burned my neighbor Irma Otinashvili's house was holding the same machine-gun). They were swarthy, didn't look like Ossetians from Tskhinvali. I worked in Tskhinvali for 24 years and I recognize Tskhinvali-based Ossetians even by mimic. They spoke Russian.

They shot from guns when they entered the yard.

They brought out the TV, household items, and put them on the ground by the yard gate. At this moment my daughter called me on my mobile. The one standing beside me told me in Russian: give me the phone. I replied in Russian that everything they had taken was more than enough and threw the phone on the ground. He shot down and picked up the phone.

I asked I would take one small bag with the drug recipes in it. He refused, saying: "There is nothing here that belongs to you, everything is ours". They killed my 4-month German shepherd.

I heard talks from my neighbor Irma Otinashvili's house. I haven't seen how many of them were there. There was a noise of shooting and blasts and then the house flared up. When I turned to my house I saw it ablaze also".³³²

332 Interview with Neli Mchedlidze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, Tamarashvili str. 9

81 years-old **Alexi Chlaidze** told us:

"On 16 August I was in the house, when approximately 10 armed men in Khaki uniforms with white armbands speaking Russian had entered.

It was around noon. They inspected the house, summoned a car by radio transmitter, took everything out of the house and left (they took unpacked items with them). Three-shaft cars - "URALS" - stood outside and they loaded them. First they emptied the neighbor's house and then ours.

*They killed **Zhora Babutsidze** (friend, neighbor). His wife came out weeping that her husband had been killed. I left. That night they started shooting at me, I probably touched something when I dragged a man and they heard a noise and started shooting at me. I ran and hid in the gardens."*

Sograt Babutsidze, who left the village only on September 5, remembers he was in the yard of his own house on September 2 when armed Ossetians in military uniforms came by special cars.

"Tanks were still there. When Ossetians burnt my house Russians were standing there and said nothing".

Alexi Chlaidze's reply concerning the torching of the houses is short:

"None of the houses had a roof on it, windows were all fumed".



Russian military while burning the house in village Zemo Achabeti, August 2008

VILLAGE KVEMO ACHABETI

Residents of Kvemo Achabeti recall that since August 6, 2008 they were shooting in the village Kvemo Achabeti. Bombardments from the mountains took place after that. However, air bombardment began only on August 7, at about 11 p.m and lasted till the morning of 8th. According to **Manana Gelashvili's** information: *"At about 8 p.m of 8 August the bombardment began again and didn't cease until the morning of 10 August. To my mind, that bombardment had no intervals, it was uninterrupted. We didn't go out of the cellar till the morning of 10 August"*.³³³ On 9 August there were Russian tanks in the village already. Since the morning of 9 August neither Georgian police nor soldiers stayed in Achabeti any longer.³³⁴

Judging by the stories of the inhabitants of Kvemo Achabeti, Russian soldiers and Ossetian fighters acted by some premeditated system. They walked by groups and each had its own function. Some of them drove cattle away, others looted houses, the third group was busy taking remaining "trifles" out and, finally, quite other group would come, burn houses and oust the remaining Georgians out of the villages under the threat of the guns. Like others, **Sonia Lomsadze** also told us:

"When they entered my yard for the first time I opened the gate myself. I don't remember the date. There were three of them, armed, in military uniforms. They were Russians and probably there was Ossetian among them. They entered the house, smashed everything and searched. They looked for weapons.

They took away whatever they liked. They put them in the car.

*On the same day another group came also. They took the TV outside in my yard. There were three or four men in uniforms. There were Russians and Ossetians. **Not only Ossetians had entered my house.** When they saw me one of them referred to me in Russian: get inside, and he hit the butt on the ground. This group also took away everything it liked. I had two cows and they drove them away.*

My son Anzor Babutsidze lived nearby, 100 meters away, and I saw how they drove away the cattle from his house also. I saw them driving tractors out of the neighbors' houses.

One day five of them entered the house, in military uniforms. One of them told me in Georgian to leave as the house was going to be burnt.

When I looked back the house it was already in flames. They put the tone (Georgian bakery) and shed on fire also. One of them was holding something like a mop. He shot it from far away and the fire would come up.

333 Interview with Manana Galegashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tserovani settlement, Mtskheta region, 18th row, cottage # 15, 22 January, 2009

334 Residents of the village Sonia Lomsadze, Tengiz Razmadze, Shmagi Babutsidze, Giorgi Sherazadishvili gave similar testimonies to the GYLA



Village Kvemo Achabeti, August 2008

Then these people went towards the house of my son Anzori and burned it as well. I saw the house all in flames".

Tengiz Razmadze's house was looted and torched on 13 August:

"On 13 August I saw approximately 5 armed men entering the yard of my house. They were Ossetians, wearing leafed military uniforms, speaking in Ossetian. First they brought the things out of the house. After they got everything they wanted, one of them holding something in his hand pulled something, and suddenly an object crashed into the house, setting up the fire immediately".

Rolandi (Tsatsi) Babutsidze, just like many of his neighbors, witnessed torching of numerous houses, including the one of his son, Shmagi Babutsidze.

"On 12 August I saw six men in military uniforms setting Shmagi's house on fire. They wore Russian-type leafed uniforms. They burned many houses in these uniforms. There was one Russian among these six persons. Ossetians would not wander around alone.

They started burning houses down on the 9th.

They burned 24 houses while I was in village Achabeti, I had counted. In the morning on 14 August I left the village and later I was told they had burned my house that evening on the same day".³³⁵

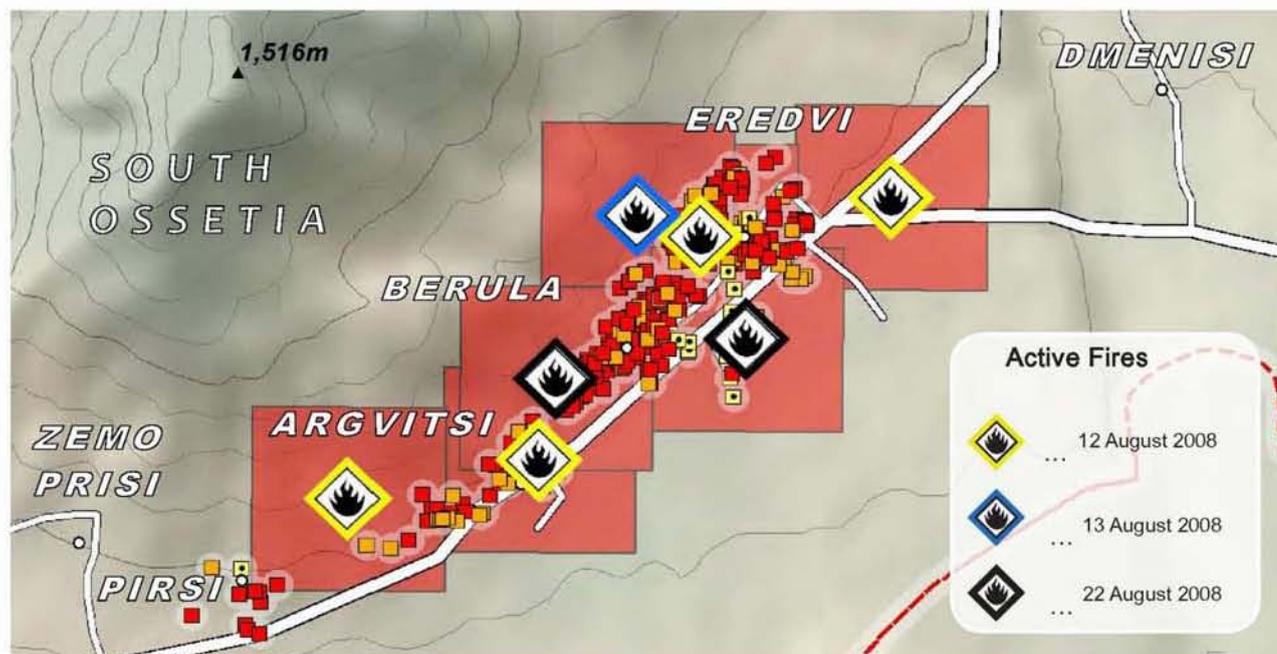
Eduard Babutsidze's house was destroyed under the bombardment of the village on 8 August.

"At around noon on 8 August my house was destroyed. Jets flew very low and I saw they were of green military color, decorated with Russian stars. A bomb was dropped in the yard, destroying three houses apart from mine: those of Nazi Babutsidze, Gia Khochishvili, and Vano Babutsidze. All of us were outside, watching our houses destruct."

³³⁵ Interview with Roland Babutsidze was recorded by the GYLA in Rustavi, on April 15, 2009

EREDVI - BERULA - ARGVITSI

1-13 August, 2008. Active Fires: Eredvi, Berula and Argvitsi villages (satellite 11)



Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 1-31 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

Nodar Kochishvili was sheltered in the kindergarten #149 in Tbilisi when we visited him. He left the village as soon as Georgian troops had retreated.

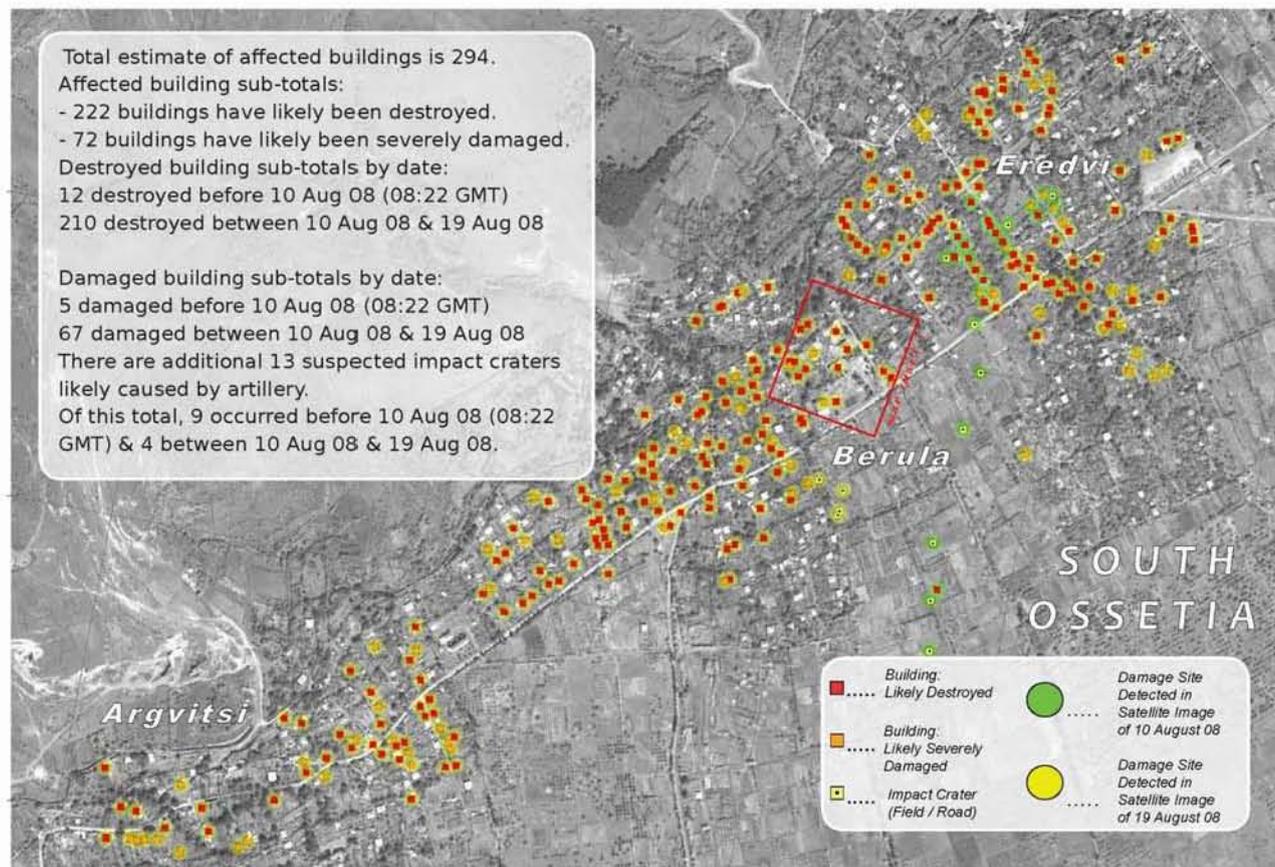
"I left by Kheiti road, Erdvi was being bombed. One jet was dropping bombs. A bomb was dropped on the Niva in front of me, Two men were killed".

Another resident of the village Berula **Gela Tsotniashvili** recalls:

"When I was back in Berula, on 10th of August, houses were not burned. Russians and Ossetians had not entered yet".

As a proof of Nodar Kochishvili's and Gela Tsotniashvili's stories, the data of satellite imagery depict the same grave situation. Under the data of the satellite imagery, 294 buildings were demolished by 19 August 2008 accordingly. Among them by 8 am on August 10 only 12 buildings were demolished and five buildings were damaged.

Analysis of satellite imagery of the three villages has manifold implications. Annex to the image is of extreme importance, which provides factual information on continuous fires. (see: *satellite 11*) In particular, active fires are covered for the period of 1-31 August, 2008. First fires that the satellite shows are dated by 12 August and are noticed from Argvitsi towards Eredvi in all of the three villages. Substantially fewer fires are exposed on 13 August. Afterwards, satellite practically does not show any serious fires until 22 August.

10 August, 2008. Eredvi, Berula and Argvitsi villages (satellite 12)

Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 10 & 19 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

Yet, imagery that we possess describes the situation only for 10 and 19 August and accordingly, damage inflicted to these territories after 22 August is not described. But it should be noted, that on the map there are indicated the territories (with black color) where new fires were noticed on 22-24 August. As for the fires on 10,12,13,17 and 19 August, they are highlighted on the image in different colors and are easily recognizable. UNOSAT received the information on fires from the materials of the Maryland University, based on information obtained from NASA (see: *satellite 1 and 11*).

A second source of information from the American Association for the Advancement of Science contains analogous information, where the damage inflicted on these three villages is analyzed in detail also. The present satellite image (see: *satellite 13*) demonstrates one small fragment of the territory of village Eredvi, disclosing the volume and degree of damage. Damaged buildings of the village are highlighted in red.

Though we have no satellite image-evidence of the damage inflicted in the village Eredvi after 22 August, the OSCE Human rights Assessment Mission, which visited the conflict zone in November of 2008, affirmed the stories of the witnesses concerning the total demolition of the village. In particular, the report says:

“The damage to the village from deliberate arson was so complete that one displaced person commented that “now, there is no village called Eredvi.” The HRAM visited Eredvi and confirmed extensive damage to the village.”³³⁶

Givi Khaduri left the village on 10 August, but occasionally he returned to see his mother. First on 22 September 2008, then on 26 September, he returned to the village with the help of Russian soldiers, and he tells us:

“The whole village was burnt down: Eredvi as well as Berula. Some of the houses were still smoking; they had been recently torched. My son’s, Zuriko’s, house was ablaze. My house was not torched yet. When I approached Elnar Vakhtangashvili’s house it was also in flames. His house was at the edge of the road.

We saw Gela Tsotniashvili’s house from the distance. The house was smoking. Three or four armed men in military uniforms stood at the house. They wore Russian military uniforms. In 50 meters from the road I saw Taniel Berushvili’s house was smoking”.³³⁷

4-5 days after that Givi Khaduri again returned to the village with the help of Russians. Exactly then he saw that his **house, which had been intact on 22 September, was already burnt down.**

Pursuant to the data of the 2002 census, 238 families were registered in village Eredvi and 209 in village Berula, while village Argvitsi, or Aragvisi (as mentioned in the 2002 census report) is relatively small and 141 families lived there. Data of the 19 August satellite imagery provide considerable information on the scale of tragedy, as half of the villages are already burned and destroyed. Thus, the information and satellite evidence on continued fires, supported further by the stories of witnesses and victim IDPs unfold another grave page in the history of ethnic cleansing of Georgian population from the villages of former Autonomous Republic of South Ossetia.



Ossetian wearing a white band, burnt village Eredvi, August 2008.

³³⁶ see, “Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia”, OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, p. 42

³³⁷ Interview with Givi Khaduri was recorded by the GYLA in Shaumiani, on June 17, 2009

19 August, 2008. Eredvi village, fragment (satellite 13)

Source: Figure 3C: Subset of Damage to the Eredvi-Berula-Argvitsi Region. Subset of August 19, 2008. High-Resolution Satellite Imagery and The Conflict in South Ossetia, Summary Report, October 9, 2008, AAAS, Science and Human Rights Program

VILLAGE EREDVI

The tragedy of the village Eredvi is told by numerous witnesses. Our researchers recorded interviews with 30 residents of the village Eredvi in various temporary settlements. These stories look like one other, sometimes they fill in the other, and specify the details. Bombardments, looting, torching, and killings of humans seen, felt, and told by these persons are hard to listen.

Davit Kristesashvili told us the following:

"In the morning on the 8th they bombarded the outskirts of Tskhinvali, where our army was located. In the first place silver jets bombarded village Eredvi, more by 6 pm on the 8th. The first bomb fell by the fence of the St. George Church from the 9th Century. My house is near the church and all of the glass was broken. Kitchen wear, chandeliers, and other items were spread on the floor from the pressure. I stood approximately 30 meters from the church's fence when the bomb was dropped. Probably in 15 minutes another bomb was dropped on residential houses. Next day, August 9, in the evening, they started bombardments from the silver jets. During the day dark green helicopter would fly over and bomb the villages".³³⁸

338 Interview with Davit Kristesashvili was recorded by the GYLA in the settlement of refugees, village Koda, build. 10

Similar to the stories of many other villages provided in the present work, it was possible to provide fragments of various testimonies of many witnesses here as well, but what the 83 years-old man, **Mikheil Vakhtangishvili** recalls creates more or less the full impression of the tragedy taking place in the village Eredvi during the month after 6 August 2008. Mikheil Vakhtangishvili left the village on 4 September together with some of his neighbors.

“During the bombardment the roof and glass of my house were broken. Aleksandre Maisuradze's house was damaged during the bombardment as well, its roof broken down.

The Ossetians entered along the Russian tanks. There were Ossetian women as well without uniforms. Women entered the houses first, brought out the items and then the Ossetians torched the houses.

They started burning the houses on the 13th.

They entered my house either on 12th or 13th, I don't remember exactly. There were 10-12 Ossetian men without uniforms. They said they were going to exterminate all Georgians and set the house on fire. They set on fire first the cattle-shed and then the house.

They killed my big pig and drove away my three cows. I was standing in the yard. They hauled out the table, chairs, bed, fridge, and took three TVs stolen from my son's house.

First they burned my son's house and then mine.

When they set my house on fire, one Ossetian took my shoes off and threw them in the fire. They told me to get lost or otherwise they would have killed me. Then they left from my gate and started torching other houses.

On the 2nd and 3rd days they burned Aleksandre Maisuradze's house. None of them were suitable for living anymore, only the walls remained.

I used to sleep in the orchard, with bare feet. I had vegetables and all sorts of fruit in the orchard and I ate them. After 5-6 days from burning the house the Russians came into the orchard and took away peaches, apples, and onion. I was there when five of them came. They were in uniforms wearing machine-guns. Russians treated me well. They asked me in Russian if they could have taken some fruit and vegetables. I agreed and they gathered the peach themselves. They didn't tell me anything wrong. I met many Russians while I was



Representatives of Ossetian para-militaries while looting village Eredvi, August 2008



Bombarded village Eredvi, August 2008

in Eredvi but they would not offend me. But I hid away from the Ossetians, as they would have killed me.

When my house was burned down Russian tanks stood nearby on the road. Russians saw my house burning. Once I was sitting on the chair by the fence crying. One Russian walked by to drink water and asked me:

- *Where do you sleep?*
- *In the orchard.*
- *I'll bring you bread tomorrow.*

The next day he brought me two loaves of bread. I ate them for almost 10 days. When he talked to me in Georgian I praised his knowledge of Georgian and he said his mother was Georgian.

On September 2 Ossetians gunned my chickens down and took them away.

When they burned my house they drove two tractors away. I blocked the road and told them to stop, but they kicked me and followed on.

On September 3 I was in the yard. 20 Ossetians came into the yard. One of them said he would cut my head off if he'd seen me again there tomorrow and put an axe to my head. They didn't wear uniforms but all of them had machine-guns. Eredvi is no longer yours, they said.

Everyone's houses are burned in Eredvi. I recognize Ossetians who looted my house by face. I could tell them who the robbers were.

*In the mornings I would go around checking the torched houses. Ossetians would not come up to Eredvi until 9 in the morning. I saw dead people. I saw these people dead in the yards of their own burned houses: **Niko Beruashvili, Jumber Beruashvili, Natela Kristesashvili, Tsiala Tarielashvili, Tengiz Tarielashvili.** The dogs ate Niko and Jumber, as they were thrown on the road. I could not approach the corpses. I saw them from the roads lying dead in their yards. Dogs ate the residents of the village who died. There was no one to bury them.*

On 4 September I left before the sunrise. Russians and Ossetians were still in the village. I no longer had a pig, neither cow, nor poultry, and I had nothing to do. I left on bare feet, with a crutch in the hand".³³⁹

339 Interview with Mikheil Vakhtangashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi.

The stories of village inhabitants are almost identical, but the volume of damage is different. Otherwise only the names and surnames could be replaced: **Lia Babutsidze, Maro Vakhtangishvili, Givi Grzelishvili, Samson Beruashvili, Mania Tuaeви-Beruashvili, Tristan Beruashvili**, and many other elders and the young told us with tears in their eyes about neighbors left unburied in the debris, life-time work and belongings turned into ashes, domestic animals killed with extreme brutality, etc.

Airplanes and bombs were followed by the Russian military and Ossetian para-militaries and than everything continued in Eredvi as in all other Georgian villages.

“It was 10th of August. I went up to the vineyard. From there I saw 4-5 men in military uniforms. They wore leafed uniforms, and one or two held something like a hand grenade launcher. They went into Nugzari’s yard, shot that launcher at my brother’s house and it was immediately set on fire.

I went down towards my house. Approximately from 80 meters away I saw 3-4 persons in military uniforms entering the house of my neighbor Kolia Ozgebishvili. They held the same grenade launcher. Kolia’s house was ablaze soon after they had entered.

*I walked towards the Municipality. Municipality and the police were on fire as well”.*³⁴⁰

Venera Arbolishvili was watching village being ruined hiding in her son’s house:

*“On 12 August my spouse and I went up to the house of our son Guliver. Guliver’s house is on the ascent, in the outskirts of the village. When we looked down from there we saw that entire village was on fire. In the evening on 12 August the tanks entered in the village from the upper side. **They stopped in the outskirts of the village, by the graveyard and started shooting towards the village from there.** On the sunrise of 13 August we left by the outskirts of the village and stayed in the field. Tengiz told me he should have seen with his own eyes whether our house had been burnt or not. When he returned he told me to be strong as they had torched the house. When*



bombarded village Eredvi, August 2008

³⁴⁰ Interview with Vaja Kristesashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, on 30 April, 2009.

*I saw it, I fainted”.*³⁴¹

House burning was only the start of Ms. Venera Arbolashvili’s personal tragedy. Her husband, Tengiz Tarielashvili, was killed on the same 13 August.

Resident of the village **Gaioz Bortsvadze** witnessed the destruction of burned households in Eredvi.

“Only in our district five houses were demolished due to bombardments. Mainly the elder remained in the village. I myself stayed. On 12 August they started torching the village. Raids in the village continued from 12 to 21 August. My house was pillaged around 12 August. They stole everything that could have been taken away. They burned the house down on the 12th as well.

Before noon on 21 August I was visiting my former household and heard the noise that the car was approaching. I was afraid and went to the garden. Three men came in. One skinny guy in a military uniform told me in Georgian with a strictly expressed Ossetian accent: “Get out of there”. And he pointed a pistol at me. I crawled towards my house, which at the time was entirely demolished. Since the fire could not do it, they collapsed it by towing cables.

*I saw a big military vehicle, which had towing cables on it. It seems they hauled the roof while using the cables. The house was wiped out of the earth. Down the road there were other vehicles destroying the houses of my neighbors”.*³⁴²

Maro Vakhtangishvili, 84 years old:

“A jet was bombarding over the Mtskhetsjvari forest. Then it flew towards us. The first bomb was dropped on the police building, second on the culture house, and then the residential houses followed. The bomb was aimed at the bus standing in front of the culture house. The bus was coming from the Big Liakhvi Gorge, it was transporting fleeing people from Kekhvi. The bomb fell on the spruce and did not explode.

After noon it started to crack. They came to my yard door, cut a rope on the gate with a knife. When I heard Russian talking I hide in the cell. A cell has a window and from there I saw four armed soldiers. Once they had opened the door, they would first shoot and then enter. They probably thought someone was in the house. They torched it entirely. The smoke came into the cellar. I ran to the house of my second son. I was hiding in the grapes and watched how they burned his house as well. Then they moved to another house and torched it too.

They drove away the cattle while I was hiding. It was impossible to

341 Interview with Venera Arbolishvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, public school # 142

342 Interview with Bagrat Bortsvadze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, Nadzaladevi district, Sanerge str. 8, in the presence of his daughter-in-law Gulnazi

spend the night in the house any more. There was a shed behind the house, where I kept corn and I spent the night there. For one week I ate Chanchuri (plum) and Tkemali. The Ossetians roamed around and stole. Then they brought out a 200 liter container. They stole hives, honey, and cement from Samson".³⁴³

Next day the old men left the village.

VILLAGE BERULA

For some period of time Berula remained hope for old people, however in the beginning of September there were no more Georgians in the village left like in other Georgian villages. Hunger, fear of death, hundreds of houses burnt to ashes before their own eyes – all these compelled them to leave their household and share hard life of IDPs in their own homeland. **Givi Grdzelishvili** did not expect he would have to leave his house, but when there was neither house nor shelter any longer he had to seek hope first in Gori and then in the temporary settlement.

"Ten persons entered my house. They were armed and wore uniforms like Russians. I had a cow and a calf, which I was too fond of. Ossetians wanted to drive them away. One of them hit the calf. I cursed at him and he hit me with a butt, I fainted. When I came to mind Ossetians were no longer there. I came to myself probably 2-3 hours later. Cattle were driven away.

Next day I walked garden by garden. When I came to my house it was burned down, even crystal was welded. I felt bad. First I saw my house, then one of Tereza, then Ksenia, all of them were torched".

Tamar Khaduri, 82 years old:

"I watched them loot the population. There were Ossetians, Russians, and Kossacks, people with narrow eyes. They stole property by cars. I was hiding in the cattle-shed of my grandchild. I was afraid of burning the house down and was spending the night in the cattle-shed. One day they entered the yard of my grandchild Zuriko Khaduri. They were driving the cattle out. I watched them from the cattle-shed how they drove the car near and pillaged my house".³⁴⁴

Tamar Khaduri's son **Givi Khaduri** recalls that

"Berula was first bombarded from the air around 1-2 pm on 8 August. 3-4 jets flew over. Houses were damaged during the bombardment. Approximately 20 people died in all from the Big Eredvi".¹⁰³

He left the village on 10 August, but he returned periodically to care after the mother and checking out the updates. When he returned to the village in

343 Interview with Maro Vakhtangishvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, on 28 September, 2008

344 Interview with Tamar Khaduri was recorded by the GYLA in village Shaumiani, on 17 June, 2009

the end of September he found out that the villages were entirely torched: both Eredvi and Berula.

"I saw from the body of the car that the Ossetians, including the women, children, and men, were raiding the village. Some of them gathered tomatoes in the gardens, some of them corn, apples. I saw three persons loading hay on a three-shaft car".

With the assistance of Russian soldiers, another inhabitant of the village **Elnar Vakhtangishvili** saw in one month the torched houses of his own and his neighbors. He also recalls that the village shops were burned down as well.

Elene Beruashvili was one of the last to leave the village Berula, and she remembered the last day 28 August.

"I walked garden by garden and stopped in the garden of Lizo Turashvili, because I saw a huge blue truck standing by the house of Elguja Beruashvili and five men in uniforms were loading the furniture in it. When the car left two men stayed. They were Ossetians and spoke in Ossetian. One of them had a cable fixed to his arm, similar to a mobile, and he was holding something with an antenna, he pushed something and the house was already on fire. Elguja's house was torched just like mine".³⁴⁵

VILLAGE KHEITI

Giorgi Kulichishvili remembers well that *"On 6 August at night the village Kheiti was bombarded from the land. On 8 August air bombardment of the village was carried out. 4 silver jets flew simultaneously, they flew low".³⁴⁶*

The residents of the village whom we met don't recollect additional Georgian troops entering the village. Moreover, *"Since 8 August neither local militia nor Sanakoev's security were any longer in the village"* - recalls **Ushangi Sherazadishvili**.

Nonetheless, the village was still being bombarded. On 9 August the village was invaded by Russian troops. *"A column of tanks with three-colored Russian flags came in. Some of them got located in the village Kheiti. They entered the building of Sanakoev's administration",* Mr. Ushangi tells us. Russians were followed by Ossetians and on the same day they began torching the village. *"Since 9 August they began torching houses. I was hiding in my garden. It is on the upland. On 9 August in the evening, when it was getting dark, I saw from my garden Giorgi Kulichishvili's house ablaze".³⁴⁷*

Tamaz Kulichishvili spent 42 days in the village after hostilities had begun. He witnessed and endured everything personally. He was seriously

³⁴⁵ Interview with Elene Beruashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, Tamarashvili str. 9

³⁴⁶ Interview with Giorgi Kulichishvili was recorded by Georgian Young Lawyers Association

³⁴⁷ Interview with Ushangi Sherazadishvili was recorded by the organization "21st-century" in February, 2009

beaten up and taken out by the Red Cross in the end of September.

“Since August 8 I was hiding in my parents’ gardens some 200-300 meters from the residential district. The garden is on the upland and the whole village is well seen from there.

My house was torched after 10 of August. I watched it from my brother’s house. Several men, some of them in uniforms and others without it, would enter houses and take everything. A Russian military truck was outside and they put everything in it. I saw the house already in flames.

I witnessed how many other houses in my district were torched. They would come in groups, women with them.

I don’t remember the day, it was after 20 August, the morning. I saw them taking beds and other things out of Zaur Zubalashvili’s house. A Russian truck was at the house (covered with a parti-colored canvas). Ossetians have not got such trucks. Some time later I saw smoke coming out of Mr. Zauri’s house. They had some little firearms filled with gas, that would whiz and set fire to everything.

*Russians were interested only in jewellery. They would come first and then were followed by Ossetians, who pillaged and torched everything. All kinds of people came, some looked for an iron door, some – for a cattle and others wanted products etc”.*³⁴⁸

Tamaz Kulichishvili tells us about the violence exercised on him.

“On the 4th day after coming Ossetians beat me. There were three of them, armed and in military uniforms. They asked, “Are you Georgian?” I said “yes”. They pushed me down and hit me with the gun handle. I fainted. I was recovered by rain at night. My eyes were so swollen I could see nothing.

I returned to my house in Kheiti. I had my iron door locked. An UAZ stopped and some people got out. Armed soldiers rushed in. Ossetians. They didn’t say anything, just began beating me mercilessly, spitting at me and kicking and rolling me to and fro. The cursed me with bad words asking how many Ossetians had I killed”.

VILLAGE KARALETI

Similar to other Georgian villages, village Karaleti was bombarded starting on 8 August for four days. **Tamaz Tibilashvili** left the village on the 12th, escaped from “*fire flames coming from the sky*”. Besides torching of houses and loss of living means, each victim has his own story. A small detail in a common, vast tragedy, which makes their life even more sever. At the outbreak of hostilities, Mr.Tibilashvili had been just operated on after

³⁴⁸ Interview with Tamaz Kulichishvili was recorded by GYLA



Bombarded village Karaleti,
September 2009

the car accident and the disaster experienced in August posed a serious risk to his health and life.

"In May 2008 I was operated on a leg and I shouldn't have walked for 6 months. Owing to these events I had to walk around without crutches. After the doctor has examined me it turned out that my bone is being decomposed".³⁴⁹

The house of resident of village Karaleti Bidzina Sukhitashvili, just like houses of many of his neighbors, fell under the brutality of armed men without uniforms.

"On 12 August, armed groups warned the population to leave the village and started looting. On the 13th they burned my house and I left the village. I was departing and could still see the smoke from far away".³⁵⁰

Izolda Tedliashvili

"On 13 August, Wednesday, strangers drove by in a car after the sunrise. They shot at fences, probably to scare us. First they put on fire Tazo Sukhitashvili's house. Then they moved in a white-cream-colored Zhiguli towards the house of Vala Sukhitashvili,³⁵¹ and then they put neighbor Gela's house on fire also and finally went up to Bidzina Sukhitashvili's house. This house is several meters away from us. I went out in the garden and watched in hiding. A cream-colored Zhiguli stopped by Bidzina's house. Four men went out. They weren't in uniforms, they were Ossetians, as at that time no Russians had entered our village yet.

The house burnt down to ashes, splinters did not spread here and then, everything just blew off. When Bidzina arrived he saw that prior to setting the house on fire they had taken the icons out and put them by the tone (Georgian bakery) near the house".

A mother witnessed the torching of **Vladimer (Vala) Sukhitashvili's** and his brother **Vepkhvia's**

houses. The victims told us about it:

"My mother saw with her own eyes how they burned my house down.

349 Interview with Tamaz Tibilashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, public school # 100. The interviewers affirm that Tamaz Tibilashvili is a disabled person

350 Interviews with Bidzina Sukhitashvili and Izolda Tedliashvili were recorded by HRC, 4 December, 2008

351 Is implied Vladimer Sukhitashvili, Vala by nickname. Mother witnessed burning of his house.

My father is blind and couldn't see that my house was on fire. He didn't know for approximately two weeks that my house and that of my brother were torched. He learned about it by accident, had a stroke and died in a week. According to my mother, there were three cars driving around, approximately 15 people in them. First they entered my neighbor's house in front of us, then ours, and they kept entering and leaving. They raided both houses simultaneously. Then suddenly huge smoke burst out of our house. They haven't robbed anything, debris of furniture were still there when we later got up. They probably searched for valuables. Big fire followed the smoke. My neighbor's and my house were set on fire simultaneously. Our house was put on fire on 13 August".³⁵²

VILLAGE GUGUTIA NKARI

Gugutiantkari is the last village, where Georgians sometimes are given the right to enter. Just through it passes the conditional administrative border and it is formally controlled by Georgian authorities. However, in October 2009 local residents advised us not to go in dark to the village due to the security concerns.

In August 2008 Russian Federation troops got located in village Gugutiantkari, like in many other neighboring villages men with white armbands looted and torched there.

Tina Bidzinashvili:

"On 13 August the Ossetians and Cossacks entered the village Gugutiantkari. A majority of them wore military uniforms. My sister-in-law bumped into them and they started beating her with butts of machine-guns: tell us where are your gunmen! At the same time they pulled her somewhere.

*We were hiding in the garden. We saw from the end of garden that the houses were on fire. Ossetians captured my neighbor **Dato Chalauri** and when they drove him by my house Dato had seen 5 guys in my yard. Two of them were blonds and three of them were Ossetians from Khelchua. I even know their names and surnames. There was something fixed to their machine-guns and they shot it at houses, which blazed them up. This group has torched other houses as well. They burned 4 houses in my district. All houses were torched on the 13th.*

We spent the nights in houses that escaped burning. I would go over to my torched house. Once it was the beginning of September and I went over to my house and saw two Ossetians. They were stealing something from my house. When they saw me they pointed a knife at me: don't you get that you Georgians shouldn't be here any more? -

³⁵² Interviews with Vladimer and Vepkhia Sukhitashvili were recorded by HRC, 26 January, 2009

they told me".³⁵³

Tina Bidzinashvili is still a refugee, a year and a half after the war ceased. Today it is impossible to return to Gugutiantkari due to the absence of the minimal conditions for security.³⁵⁴

British newspaper "Daily Telegraph" reported on 15 September, 2008 about torching houses and beating Georgians in Gugutiantkari. There are described facts of beating five Georgian men.³⁵⁵

Such threats, torching of houses, beating of staying elders and taking people as hostages were used to force Georgian population to leave their households.

VILLAGE KSUISI

Ksuisi residents spoke with the "USA Today" about the Georgian-Ossetian life in South Ossetia during soviet times:

"In Soviet times, Ossetians and Georgians lived harmoniously in the prosperous village surrounded by corn fields, grapevines and orchids with peaches and apples."

The journalist after visiting Ksuisi and surrounding villages gives the following description:

"Now the some 400 homes in the hamlet's Georgian quarter appear to have been burned and looted. Of about 700 Ossetian houses, a small number - including a school - bore the marks of damage from Georgian artillery fire.

Many Ossetians say their ethnic Georgian neighbors bear collective guilt for Tbilisi's assault.

"Georgians should lie next to my son," Yekaterina Doguzova, 70, said bitterly as she grieved alongside her daughter-in-law Zemfira Doguzova, 34.

Pavel Panikaev, 73, angrily recalled how Georgians beat him with rifle butts. "We have a right for revenge," he said. "We will not leave Georgian houses, orchards, nothing. We will erase them from the face of earth."³⁵⁶

353 Interview with Tina Bidzinashvili was recorded by Tinatin Khidasheli, on 24 October, 2008 in village Mereti

354 We took several attempts to get to Gugutiant Kari in autumn of 2009, but, unfortunately, it turned to be unrealizable. As the local residents say, sometimes people in Mereti manage to go to the village by paths, though due to frequent cases of taking Georgians prisoner the security measures are more restricted and, therefore, breaking the conditional border carries serious risk

355 "British police to join EU peace force in Georgia" by Bruno Waterfield, Daily Telegraph, 15 September 2008

356 See, "AP IMPACT: Georgians uprooted in South Ossetia", By Yuras Karmanau, on 29 August, 2008 at http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-08-29-3937720385_x.htm

The Shoshitashvili family:

"When you enter the village, the very first house is burned and it goes on like that to the end. Kristepore told me that when they started in the morning on 10-11 August, they went on and torched every house".³⁵⁷

Ophelia Shoshitashvili left the village on August 10.

"The most massive attack started during the night of 7 August, all of us were hiding in the cellars. The Georgian army entered the village in the morning on 8 August and on the same day jets appeared, started bombarding. Three jets would fly in, make a circle, go around Ossetian villages and start bombarding our villages. Then they would fly back to Tskhinvali and bombard there. Those jets were of a mustard color, flew very low, some of them were grey and all of them had stars on. Bombs would blast in the air, split into pieces and fire was coming down, some of it would hit the ground and blast afterwards. On the very first day of bombardment, two houses were burned on 8 August: those of **Paata Javakhishvili** and **Olegi Shoshitashvili**. Something also hit the house of Ramaz Shoshitashvili and it was destroyed".

Despite her request, father and brothers were not leaving the village and saw the torching of their houses with their own eyes. Ms. Ophelia Shoshitashvili returned to the village in two weeks and saw the burned houses of her own and cousin Kristepore. Russians mocked the lady walking around the torched village weeping: "is it your first time?".

One could see very well from the house of Ophelia Shoshitashvili's brother **Ioseb Shoshitashvili** how the shells were dropped in the village. "Missiles fell 40 meters from my house and hit my neighbor, 75 years old Salome Shoshitashvili in the back".³⁵⁸ Ioseb Shoshitashvili was assisting the wounded



Bombarded village Ksuisi, December 2008

357 Interview with Ophelia Shoshitashvili was recorded in Tbilisi, Gldani IV m/r, house III

358 Interview with Ioseb Shoshitashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 9 August, 2009, in Tbilisi, Gldani m/r, house III

and was taking the people out of the village during the whole day.

As he recalls himself, on the 8th there were particularly many wounded from the bombardments in village Charebi and he spent the whole day aiding them.

"When I entered Charebi, I saw the house of the Lapachis burning. Charebi was already bombarded. They told me Vakho Razmadze was wounded. When I entered Vakho's house, one bomb was there as well. The house was destroyed and Vakho was lying in the bed wounded. It hit him on the left side in the head, by the chest, and I sat him in the car, took him out and then he ended up in the Gori hospital. Then I returned to Charebi and brought Kakha Lapachi with me".

On the next day his house in Ksuisi was also burned and he left the village together with the neighbors. He returned there only on 25 August. He found the village to be totally torched.

VILLAGE ZARDIAANTKARI

Residents of the village Zardiaantkari know very well that the Georgian army and the peacekeepers were not located in their village. The village did not even have local militia and the Tkviavi militia was covering them by necessity. Village inhabitants told us that the Georgian army appeared at the entrance of village Ksuisi on 7 August. Ksuisi is a kilometer and a half away from Zardiaantkari. Nevertheless, this Georgian village still could not escape from shootings and violence.

"On 7 August intense shootings started from the Ossetian villages - Dmenisi and Khechua - towards village Zardiaantkari. They shot at us from machine-guns. They shot at us massively in the following days also: on the 8th, 9th, and 10th of August".³⁵⁹

On 12 August the village almost emptied from the locals, but after the ceasefire people started returning. **Giorgi Gablishvili** returned to the village on 12 September.

"I stayed there until 22nd of September. At the time part of population had also returned to the village, but by the end of September all of those who had returned fled once again. Ossetians raided the houses whenever they liked. The population wasn't protected. I was guarding my house so that they couldn't burn it. They torched the houses in the neighboring villages also.

I was at home at 11:30 pm on 22 September. I heard noise of shots from the Mereti side. I went out and hid in the valley of river Charebula. I watched my house from there, about 60-80 meters away. I saw approximately 6 gunmen in military uniforms. They spoke in Ossetian. All 6 went into the house. Immediately after they entered the house

³⁵⁹ Interview with Giorgi Gablishvili was recorded by the GYLA on 6 September, 2009, in Tbilisi

was flaming up. Afterwards they stood in the yard for approximately half an hour. They didn't leave until the fire became quite strong.

*Then they went to the house of my cousin **Gela Gablishvili**, which is behind my house approximately 60 meters away, and set that house on fire as well.*

When I saw them entering my cousin's house, I ran down to the river. I started putting out the fire in my house. They probably saw me collecting water from the river and started shooting at me. I ran only afterwards. I can't return to Zardiaant Kari since then".

According to Giorgi Gablishvili, by the end of September there was only one mixed Ossetian-Georgian family remaining in the village.

VILLAGE SATSKHENETI

Residents of the village assert that Georgian army has not been ever present in the village. There was no check-point of the peacekeepers in the village, they even had no police of their own and were served by Vanati police. After the first war the situation in the village was always tense, since, unlike many other Georgian villages, Satskheneti is situated in the lowland surrounded by the Ossetian villages located on the highland. These villages are: Gvria, Ortevi, Marmazeti, Eltura and Dmenisi. Due to such location the village often was in the thick of shooting.

Goderdzi Khaduri recalls that since the beginning of August 2008, shooting got more intensified.

"They shot every day and from all sides. It would start at 6 am and last 20 minutes, then it would repeat in the evening."

Though nobody was surprised at hearing the shooting, people were hiding in the cellars hoping that in some days everything would revert to its routine. But on 8 August jets started air bombardment and the population left the village. Goderdzi Khaduri stayed in the village to look after household and cattle.

On 9 August Ossetians came up to his house. During the search they



*Village Satskheneti, August 2008
It is well visible on the photo that the house of the Ossetian is intact. The fence of the house has white band on it.*

found some cartridge and that's why they first beat him severely, then detained him after he fainted. They took him to Dmenisi school and kept him locked in the classroom four days. During captivity they neither interrogated nor asked him anything, and released on 13 August as speechless as they had captured him. After being released Goderdzi Khaduri didn't return to the village, since Russian army was already there and the village was entirely occupied by Ossetian marauders. However he knows from his neighbors that both his houses were burnt.

"Nino said she had seen my both houses burnt. Only bare walls remained. While being in captivity I was told by my Ossetian guard Bibilov that my both houses had been burnt down".³⁶⁰

Georgi Bidzinashvili stayed in the village for a long time trying to save neighbors' houses, but couldn't manage.

*"I was sitting on the balcony of my house. Three Ossetians opened the yard gate and entered. I knew them, they were Ossetians from neighboring village Dmenisi. Two of them wore civil attires and one of them military striped uniform. They were armed. One of the Ossetians told me in Georgian: Why are you still here? Why don't you leave? I told him I was sick and therefore couldn't go and he said: **Go and die on your Georgia's land, why should you die here?** And then he kicked me out. Those two were upstairs. They smashed everything around. When they came down I saw them spilling gas on the house and setting it on fire. Then they went on and burned down the houses of neighbors Mtvarisa Janashvili, Loka Kobaladze, Gela Chiotashvili, Zura Chiotashvili, and Gogita Khaduri.*

The next day they returned and drove the cattle away".³⁶¹

They first robbed the house of 78 year-old Nina Janashvili also. "They stole even pans", drove away the cattle, and finally did not even pity the old woman. "They hit me in the head with a chair. I had my head and nose broken, I was all in blood". And before leaving they threatened her to leave or otherwise she'd be in a worse trouble. When her house was burned, there was nothing for her to do in the village and she left in displacement for Tbilisi via Gori.³⁶²

360 Interview with Goderdzi Khaduri was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, 10 July, 2009

361 Interview with Georgi Bidzinashvili was recorded by HRC in the settlements of refugees, village Koda, house #10, 1st floor, fl 11

362 Interview with Nina Janashvili was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, Chubinishvili str. 27, the kindergarten #139, September, 2008

VILLAGE TORTIZA

Georgian English language newspaper "*Georgian Daily*" was reporting about bombardment of village Tortiza on August 12th, 2008.³⁶³

Lali Gogidze fled the village on 9 August. She ran away from death and fire. There were victims in Tortiza right after the first bombardment, which Lali has witnessed. She did not want to stay in the village any more. All of her belongings, including the house were burned and she faced death numerous times. Her neighbors died from shell fragments similar to those that fell in her yard also in great numbers. Therefore she left the village on 9 August.

"On 8 August, right after the launch of bombardment, one of the first bombs hit my residential house. The house first was destroyed and then entirely burned as a result of emerging fire. The second bomb hit the main gate in the yard of my neighbor Eter Merabishvili. Eter at this moment was in the yard and died on the spot as a result of a shell blast. The third shell hit the house of another neighbor, and my neighbor Kristine Merabishvili was wounded, while the other neighbor Maksime, I don't remember his last name, who was talking to Kristine Merabishvili at the time, died on spot. One of the shells hit the house of my neighbor Nugzar Akhalkatsi, and there his sixteen year-old grandchild Nugzar Akhalkatsi died. This bombardment lasted for approximately half an hour, three jets were bombarding the village simultaneously".³⁶⁴

After this village Tortiza was bombarded for several days, and just like in many other instances, here Georgian population left the village almost entirely and joined the doubled IDP army in its own country.

VILLAGE KARBI

Intensive bombardments started in village Karbi¹²² on 8 August. The bombardment killed many people, and wounded heavily even more, killed domestic animals and poultry, destroyed houses, orchards, hectares of crops, alleys, and the village infrastructure. Shells were dropping everywhere, in the house yards, places of collective gathering, shops, outskirts, on the road.

Nugzar Bibiluri:

"From the morning of 9th of August shells exploded in the village for three times, killing and wounding the residents. We didn't leave the family, regardless of the threat".

Bombardments destroyed Mr. Nugzar's house and orchards. However, the worst was still to come. Nugzar Bibiluri's spouse "had a stroke on

363 See, „Village of Tortiza is being Bombed" by InterpressNews, on 12 August, 2008, at http://georgiandaily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=5720&Itemid=1

364 Interview with Lali Gogidze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, public school #100



23 August as a result of nervousness and fear, today she is paralyzed, can't talk and move and gets around in a wheelchair".

Tsiala Tevdorashvili also talks about the damage incurred as a result of 9 August bombardments.

"Our house was destroyed as a result of bombardments."

She still lives with a relative. The bomb fell approximately 20 meters from the house, when Tsiala and her husband were hiding in the cellar. They spent the next four days and nights in the very cellar of their destroyed house. Victim had two houses in the yard and both were demolished under the bombardments in August 2008.

Mzia Chemia and **Sopio Giorgishvili** told us about the fear reigning in the village during the bombardments.

"Shots were heard constantly. Jets were flying and bombarding us. There was a panic and fear in the village".

Women lost everything, their households built on their toil were destroyed and burned. Sopio Giorgishvili was wounded in the arm during the bombardment.

Tengiz Tevdorashvili and his spouse **Eter Tevdorashvili** were severely wounded as well. 70 years old Tengiz Tevdorashvili was wounded along with other people during the blasts in the Bidzinaant district. Many of his fellow villagers died beside him.³⁶⁵ His wounds were aided first in the Tkviavi and then in the Gori hospitals, but afterwards he underwent treatment for three months at his daughter's place, and then immediately returned back to the village to deal with house and farming. He found his house already destroyed. *"Only walls were remaining. The entire harvest, alley, vineyard, crops were destroyed. My cow and pig were killed, slaughtered"*.

80 years old **Otar Mariamidze** lived under the stairs of his demolished house for months. He was wounded during the bombardments in the right leg. He underwent treatment in Tbilisi and returned immediately back to the village. He cannot abandon his own torched household and a grave of his spouse.

Now homeless **Vladimer Unapkoshvili** was healing for three weeks the wounds received during the bombardments in village Atskuri, at a friend's place.

"I was wounded in the right front armpit. I still have a piece of shrapnel remaining in the body".

Many people were killed during the bombardment in Bidzinaant district. Details are given in the chapter on annihilation of life.

³⁶⁵ See the information on people having died during the bombardment in Bidzinaant district of the village Karbi on 9 August in corresponding chapters

VILLAGE ERGNETI

On 7 August **Tariel Kasradze** took his family to Gori and stayed himself alone in the village to look after the household and cattle. Residents of Ergneti tell us their village was entirely Georgian, only a few mixed families lived there. They suppose that it is the very reason why the whole village has been burnt and destroyed.

The shooting got intensive in Ergneti on 7 August.

*“Bombardment started at about half past eight at night and lasted till eight in the morning. Missiles were shot as well. Jets didn’t appear in the village on that day, but we heard frightful and loud sounds of blasts”.*³⁶⁶

That is why the village was almost entirely abandoned by the inhabitants. The local residents recall:

*“Only the old people remained in the village”.*³⁶⁷

On 12 August Russian troops came in from Tskhinvali side, followed by Ossetians in civilian clothes and with white armbands. A lot of Russian tanks and military machines were in the village and, according to the stories of the witnesses, they aimed shots at houses.

*“I saw how Russian soldiers in tanks and BTR-s approached my house. They shot a shell from one tank at my house. The whole house got in flames. I don’t know whether Ossetians were there at that time. I remember for sure that the tanks had Russian three-color flags on them”.*³⁶⁸

Pursuant to the stories by the residents of Ergneti, the pillage and torching of the village began on 12 August, as **Meri Dvalishvili** tells us, and by 17 August the majority of the houses had already been burnt.

“The houses of my neighbors Jemal Doijashvili, Gocha Doijashvili, Nugzar Doijashvili, Nodar Doijashvili, Zaur Doijashvili, Ivane Dvalishvili and Gaioz Dvalishvili were burnt down. Their houses were also



Tamar Doijashvili has not left village Ergneti during hostilities. Village Ergneti, October 2009

³⁶⁶ Interview with Mery Dvalishvili was recorded by the GYLA on 22 July, 2009, in village Ergneti

³⁶⁷ Interview with Jemal Doijashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 8 February, 2009, in village Ergneti

³⁶⁸ Interview with Tariel Kasradze was recorded by the GYLA on 10 September, in village Ergneti



Bombarded houses, village Ergneti, September 2009

smoking. It was 17 August, we moved from the Doijaant district to the Tseretliant district. We met nobody on our way, the entire village was empty. In the Tseretliant district we stopped for having a rest at Maia Tsereteli's house. Nearly all houses were burnt in that district too, among them those of Maia Tsereteli and Davit Jokhadze".

Her house itself was torched on 12 August.

"The soldiers approached Gocha Doijashvili's house. A bit later I saw the flame burst out of the roof of Gocha's house. Then those soldiers entered our house yard. A few women were among them. One of the women said in Georgian with an Ossetian accent that she had been in this house before. I wanted to go out and have a look at her, but my spouse didn't let me. Suddenly a black smoke burst out of the roof of our house. Then Ossetians tuned to Ossetian songs and began dancing".

Even a year after the destruction of her house she remembers the sharp emotion having overwhelmed her and her husband at seeing their ashed house.

"My house was a dreadful sight. It was totally burnt down. The house was still smoking. My heart nearly broke when I saw the house in such condition. I began weeping. At the sight of the house my husband lapsed in even worse state, he nearly got mad, was roaring, weeping and shouting, "my house is on fire, bring me water, let me go to put the fire out". I could hardly calm him down".

In September of 2009 the editor of this report personally visited the village Ergneti and the best evidence of cruelty is the present state of the village. The remaining houses in the village can be counted by fingers. Once a quite big and solid Georgian village has turned into debris and ash. Besides, the village has split and one of its districts remained in the occupied territory, therefore,

Georgians, who have returned to the village, live in constant fear.

However, pillage and destruction of the houses was not the only breach of the law, committed by having come soldiers or members of military units.

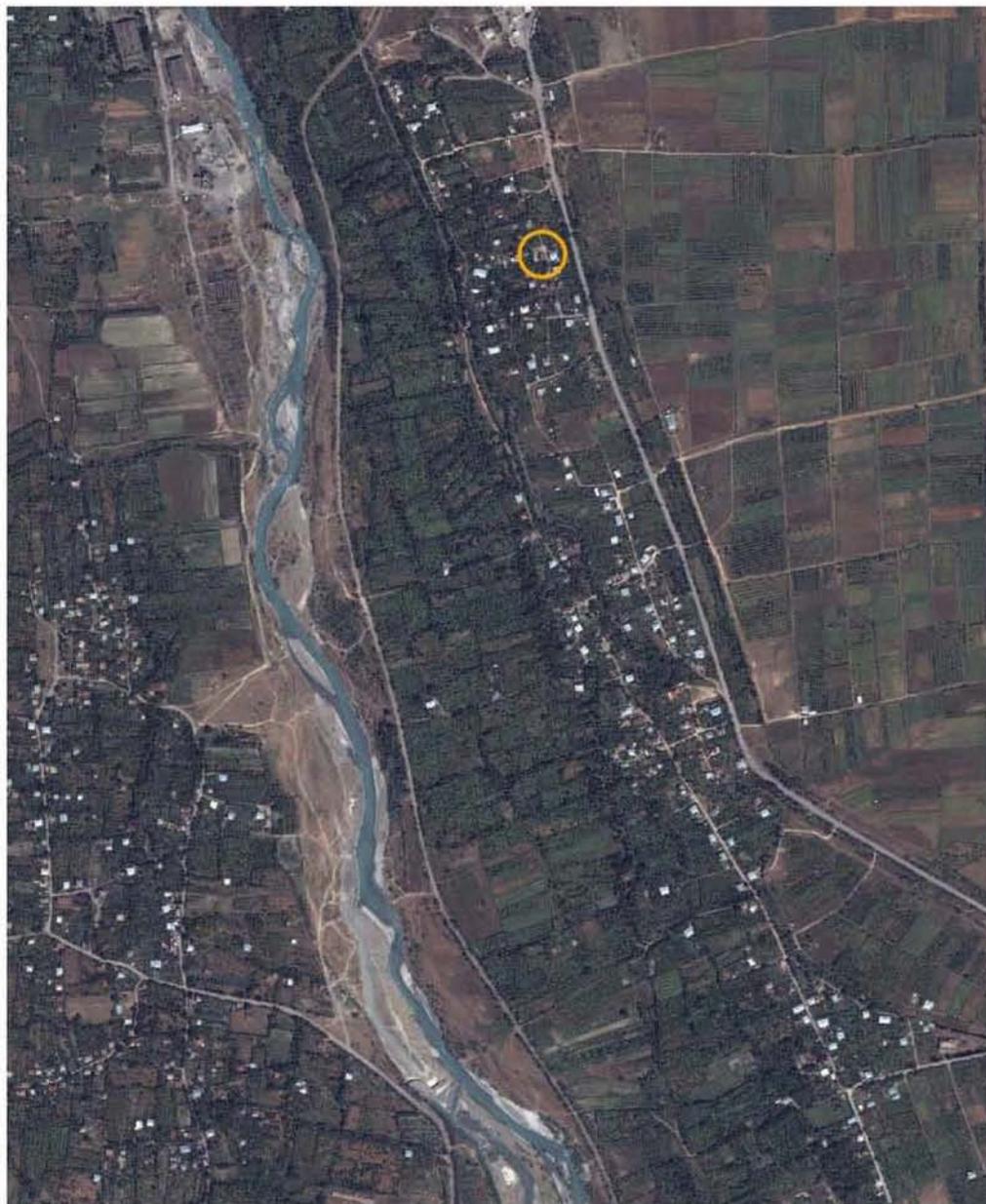
Mery Dvalishvili recollects that she was at her neighbor Zaur Doijashvili's place at about noon on 11 August.

"We stood in Zaur's house yard when suddenly heard sound of whizzing. I felt sharp pain in my left leg and arm. I glanced down and saw my thigh bleeding. My arm also bled. Zaur was not hurt, but his spouse and daughter got wounded, Natia in ribs and Nanuli in her head. Wounded, I went straight home. I found my husband wounded as well. Having not found me at home he went to look for me. He walked towards the highway. There was a BTR, soldiers in uniforms sat on it shooting aimlessly. My husband asked why they shot and they replied in Russian "it is a war, uncle". Guram turned round and suddenly felt that his left arm was bleeding".³⁶⁹



Bombarded house, village Ergneti, September 2009

³⁶⁹ Interview with Mery Dvalishvili was recorded by GYLA on 22 July 2009, in village Ergneti

10 August, 2008, Ergneti village (satellite 14)

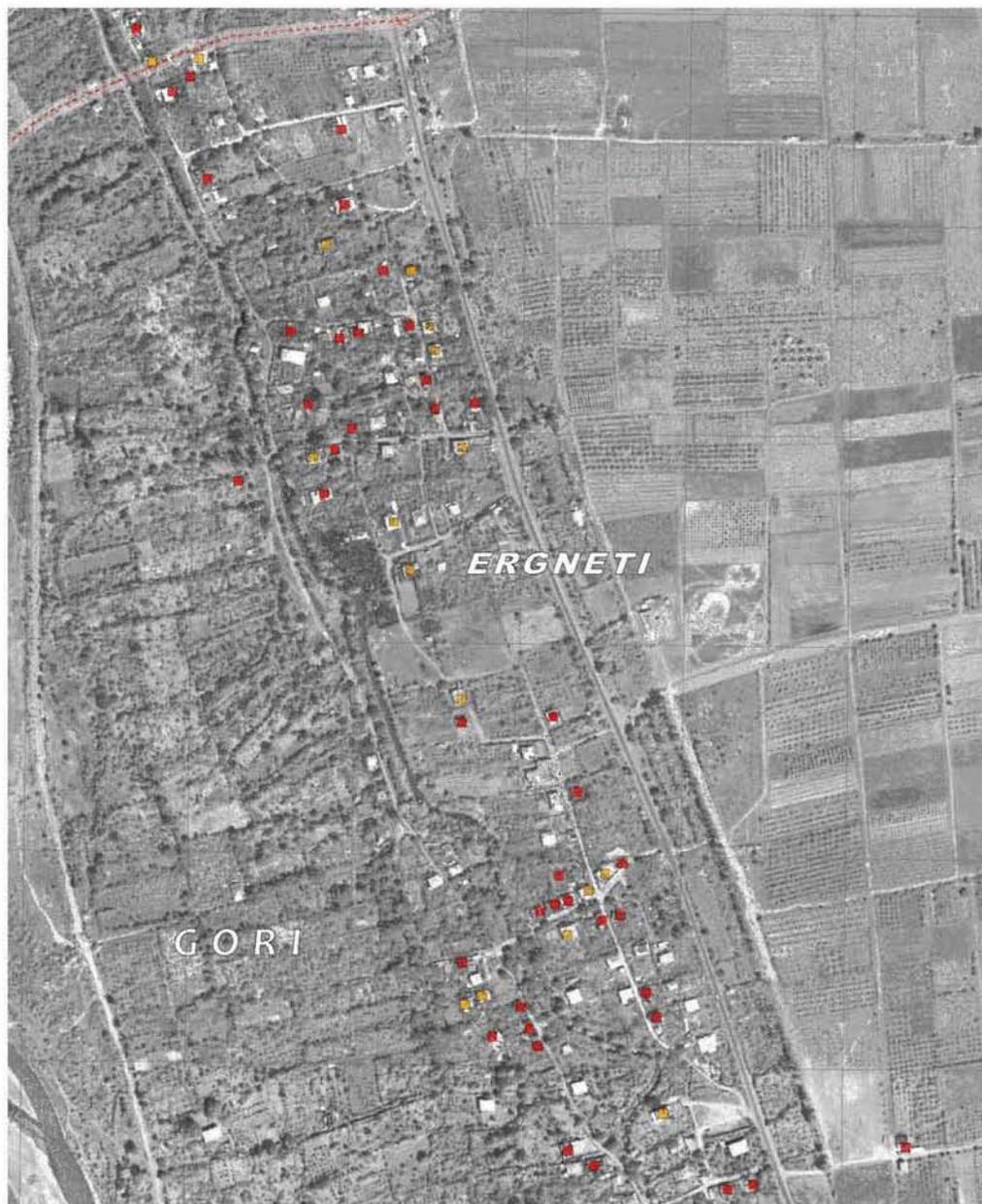
The photo clearly shows that only one building is damaged in the village

Source: High-Resolution Satellite Imagery and The Conflict in South Ossetia, Summary Report, October 9, 2008, AAAS, Science and Human Rights Program

Documents published by the Amnesty International clearly show that by August 10, 2008 only one building has a damage in village Ergneti (see satellite 14).

The statements of the residents of the village confirm the content of satellite images that no particular violence, fires or burnings have occurred in Ergneti before August 11, 2008.

Later on, according to the material published by the UNOSAT, situation is dramatically changing in village Ergneti. On the satellite image from August 19, 2008 it is evident that 58 buildings are damaged. Among them 41 are

19 August 2008, Ergneti village (satellite 15)

The objects highlighted in red on the photo taken on 19 August 2008 were destroyed by that time, while the objects in yellow – were severely damaged. In total 58 objects.

Source: South Ossetia, Georgia. Damage Assessment with WorldView-1 & Formosat-2 Satellite Imagery recorded on 19 August, 2008; UNOSAT, Satellite Solutions for All

fully destroyed, and 17 severely damaged (see satellite 15).

According to the information provided by the witnesses burning of houses has continued after the August 19 and in September as well. The current state of village Ergneti can be seen by all interested parties, as the village is under Georgian control and easily accessible.

Nowadays, there are only 6-7 houses left in Ergneti unharmed. All the others either do not exist or have serious damage.

|CAPTIVITY|



- 4.1 Civilian Detainees
- 4.2 Prisoners of War (POWs)



4

"We begged them to let us ring on the phone. In return they turned up the volume of the TV, which stood on the first floor, and told us: "your people don't need you. Look at your state here and listen, they are holding a concert over there." We endured big misfortune during the first week."

Neli Mchedlidze, Georgian detainee

„Dozens of people were taken hostage, including people who could certainly not be classified as soldiers - women, children and the elderly. The 'lucky' one were kidnapped, exchanged for Ossetian militiamen and held in a Tskhinvali detention centre. At least we know the exact number of these people. These hostages were used to remove and bury the bodies of Georgian soldiers who had been lying in the August heat for over a week.“

*Varvara Pakhomenko**

* See, Varvara Pakhomenko "South Ossetia: fear and loathing in the buffer zone", 15 November 2008, at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/russia-theme/south-ossetia-fear-and-loathing-in-the-buffer-zone>

4.1. CIVILIAN DETAINEES

According to the official data of the government of Georgia there were 163 Georgian civilian detainees on the territory of South Ossetia in August 2008. Public Defender of the South Ossetian de-facto authorities has released different data. In an interview with USA Today on August 29, 2008 he said "a total of 182 Georgian civilians were detained for their own protection".³⁶⁹

International media was constantly writing about the civilian detainees of the August war, during and after the conflict. For instance, on August 18, 2008, UK based newspaper "Telegraph" was writing about the 130 hostages of Georgian nationality kept at the building of the Ministry of Interior of South Ossetia. "A 12-year-old girl is amongst the 131 captives who include 'guest workers' who were living in the city when it was attacked on August 7. Roughly half of the captives are women."³⁷⁰ Another British newspaper "The Guardian" was referring to the violation of international law:

"The taking of civilian hostages by warring parties is prohibited by Article 3 of the Fourth Geneva Convention."³⁷¹

Despite suffering torture, insult, and violence, former Georgian detainees recall the days spent in captivity in detail. They all have been taken captive differently. These stories have no common characteristics except the national belonging of humans. Taken into captivity were ethnic Georgians or Ossetians living in mixed families and remaining in the villages.

Taking of ethnic Georgians in captivity and ill, degrading, and often cruel treatment towards them is widely discussed also in the **OSCE** 2008 report, however, because we are not aware of names and surnames of persons whose stories are told in the report, it is difficult to identify whether these are the same persons, as we have interviewed, or not. Regardless of anonymity of victims important information is contained in the **OSCE-ODIHR** report "Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia". Report includes broad variety of accounts on inhuman and degrading treatment and violence.³⁷²



Georgian civilian detainees, among the others Temur Lazarashvili is on the photo

369 See, "AP IMPACT: Georgians uprooted in South Ossetia", by Yuras Karmanau, on 29 August, 2008 at http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-08-29-3937720385_x.htm

370 See, "Georgians held hostage by South Ossetia", 18 August 2008, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/europe/georgia/2576779/Georgians-held-hostage-by-South-Ossetia.html>

371 See "South Ossetia holds civilian Georgians hostage", by Tom Parfitt, The Guardian, Monday 18 August 2008, at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/aug/18/georgia.russia>

372 See "Human Rights in the War-Affected Areas Following the Conflict in Georgia", OSCE-ODIHR, Warsaw, November 27, 2008, pp. 37-40.

84 years old **Ilia Chulukhadze** told us about his bitter old age with utmost fervor and emotion.

*"I was in slippers and they didn't even allow me to put on the clothes, threw me in Vilis and took me to Tskhinvali. They brought me directly to the militia building. It was 11 August. I stayed in captivity until the 23rd. The following people were held with me in the cell: **Sograt Khaladze and his wife, Neli Mchedlidze, Andro Gogidze and his wife Shura Khabareli, Asmat Babutsidze, Aliosha Chulukhadze, Givi Chulukhadze, Aleksandre Khetaguri, Enver Babutsidze, Ivane Babutsidze and others.**"³⁷³*

His fellow villager detainee **Neli Mchedlidze**, who was together with Ilia Chulukhadze, was taken from the neighboring house.

"I went up to the road and saw they had gathered people. I went down to the Khabarelis (family name, author). As soon as I entered, people with machine-guns followed in. They were mixed: Ossetians as well as Cossacks, talking both in Ossetian and Russian. They threw us out of the house and took us to the crowd of people. Then we headed towards Tskhinvali on feet. While we were on the way a white "soviet jiguli 07" would drive up and down the road, with young men sitting inside and cursing us from the car either in Russian or Ossetian, and spitting at us. They would open fire from machine-guns at our feet, the elderly would lie on the ground screaming, and then we would help the elderly somehow to stand up and continue walking. They brought us directly to Tskhinvali, in the KPZ (pre-trial detention, author) facility."³⁷⁴

Another detainee **Davit Dzadzamia** left Tamarasheni together with his mother on 10 August and planned to arrive in Gori via Achabeti. There were Russian soldiers, military equipment and Ossetians with white armbands around. Therefore, they were hiding on the way so that no one could have seen them. In Achabeti they stopped over in Ilia Khabareli's house, where they met his spouse Salimat, their daughter Nato Khabareli and neighbors, Asmat Babutsidze, Neli Maisuradze, Marusa Chulukhadze and Asmat Chulukhadze. Later Ramaz Mindiashvili and Givi Mindiashvili from Tamarasheni joined them, who tried to leave the village as well. However, they could not make it.

"In a while 2 Ossetians entered Ilo's house. They pointed weapons at us and took all of us outside. There were four other Ossetians outside. All of them were in military uniforms but of different types, some wore black, some wore only black t-shirts and camouflaged military pants, some wore light green Russian military uniform and some - the

373 Interview with resident of village Achabeti Ilia Chulukhadze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi on 8 April 2009, 9 Tamarashvili St.

374 Interview with resident of village Achabeti Neli Mchedlidze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi, 9 Tamarashvili St.



Georgian civilian detainees, Gogita Kotuashvili and Nikoloz Darbuashvili

so-called OMON (emergency platoon). They all wore white stripes on their arms. They brought all of us outside: me, my mother **Valentina Aidarashvili**, **Tasiko Lashkhi**, **Ilo**, **Salimat Khabareli** and **Nato Khabareli**, **Asmat Babutsidze**, **Mariam Chulukhadze** and **Asmat Chulukhadze**, **Ushangi (Shio) Chulukhadze** (very elderly). Shortly after brothers **Giorgi Chulukhadze** and **Vigenti Chulukhadze**, and **Zhuzhuna Chulukhadze** were brought to the same place."

Detainees were made to walk towards Tskhinvali, but soon a car caught them up with four other detainees in it - mother and son **Anastasia (Tasiko) Khetaguri** and **Levan Khetaguri** and their neighbor, **Ketevan Chulukhadze**, and all of them were

brought to militia in Tskhinvali.³⁷⁵

Levan Elbakidze and **Vepkhia Lapachi** from Kurta were detained during their attempt to leave the village.

*"They took us to Tskhinvali by neighbor's car, a Volkswagen. They threw us in the trunk. When they opened the trunk door and threw us out, I saw we were in the militia building. Prior to getting us into the cell, they beat us right in the corridor, yelling: **we beat you because you're Georgians**. They didn't even give us a respite, beating us cruelly. I wore a t-shirt that had "Italy" written on it. **Now let Italy and America help you**. My ribs hurt and my lip and nose were broken. Then they threw us in the cell. I think it was 11 August."³⁷⁶*

Although **Sonia Lomsadze** and **Rezo Babutsidze** escaped death and captivity from their own village Achabeti, the Ossetians found them on 12 August in the basement of one of the burned houses and brought them to the Tskhinvali militia just like other Georgians.

"They brought us downstairs to the cell by stairs. There were so many people that cells were crammed. Rezo and I were brought into an open room. There were bars from above, one could see the sky, it was like a small yard. It was jammed with people so much that there was no space to put your feet somewhere. I spent entire three days and nights there. There was no room to sit down, nothing saying about sleeping."³⁷⁷

375 Interview with Davit Dzadzamia was recorded by the GYLA on 30 January 2009 in Tbilisi. He was released from captivity together with others by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg on 27 August 2008. Ombudsman of the South Ossetian de-facto authorities Davit Sanakoev attended the release also.

376 Interview with resident of village Kurta Levan Elbakidze was recorded by the GYLA on 8 July 2009 in the IDP settlement in village Koda. He was released from detention on 27 August by the Red Cross.

377 Interview with resident of village Achabeti Sonia Lomsadze was recorded by the GYLA on 16 April 2009 in the IDP settlement in Tbilisi, Department of Geology, 24 Mosashvili St. Grandson Shmagi Babutsidze attended the

Givi Chulukhidze, who was together with Iliia Chulukhidze in the cell, was in his brother's house on 9 August and watched the looting of the village from there. Right then the Ossetians with white armbands had entered: **"Gather at the bridge, there will be others and we'll take you."** At the bridge in the heart of the village Givi met several of his fellow villagers, Davit Dzadzamia was among them. **Ilo Khabareli, Salimat Khabareli, Nato Khabareli, Maro Khetaguri, Shota Lapachi, Sograt Khaladze, Marusa Chulukhadze** and others. They took them to Tskhinvali via Achabeti.

*"On the way we were transferred into the white OAZ type of minivan and brought to Tskhinvali. It was seen from the windows that Tamarasheni was on fire. We were brought to the militia building of the town. When we got out, we met a lot of people in front of the building: soldiers, police officers. **At the entrance of the building, by the stairs they unfolded the Georgian flag and told us to wipe our feet. They made us stand in the line and thus on the flag.**"³⁷⁸*

Bagrat Khaladze managed to escape from Ossetians on 9 August, but the next day they got him at home. First they drove the cattle away, then they made him watch his own house burn and finally he was taken to the police building in Tskhinvali together with his neighbor by a stolen car. Right there, he saw his spouse **Darejan Khaladze** in jail, who was taken captive by the Ossetians on the 9th. Darejan Khaladze recalled being taken into captivity:

*"On 9 August they gathered 15 of us, brought us to Achabeti on feet, people had gathered there as well, 20-25 of them. They sat us in the three RAF type cars and took to Tskhinvali, in the militia building. We were brought inside, **unfolded Georgian flag in front of us and told us to wipe our feet, calling us pigs.** They wore weapons and drove us in the building to tramp the flag. They themselves stood on the stairs and laughed at us, saying clap to Saakashvili, that's what he has done to you."³⁷⁹*

They virtually forced every detainee to tramp the flag. **Davit Dzadzamia** recalls that when he was brought to the temporary detention cell in



interview. It was the grandson who told us that grandmother was in detention for 10 days and on 22 August she was released by the Red Cross.

378 Interview with resident of village Achabeti Giorgi (Givi) Chulukhadze was recorded by the GYLA in August 2008; additional information was recorded on 26 June 2009 in the IDP settlement in Tbilisi, 9 Tmarashvili St.

379 Interview with residents of village Achabeti Darejan Khaladze and Bagrat Khaladze was recorded by the representatives of union "Article 42" on 27 October 2009. The couple was released from captivity by the Red Cross on 23 August.

Tskhinvali, they here as well unfolded the Georgian flag on the ground and demanded from detainees to **"first spit and then walk over."** There were approximately 30 people together.

"Due to refusal they first broke my head with a butt and then beat me terribly. Their Minister of Internal Affairs Mindzaev attended all of this, observing quietly."³⁸⁰

When the detainees were brought into the building, they were selecting the young and taking them to a separate room, they were checking whether they were soldiers or reservists. 31 year-old **Davit Dzadzamia** was among them.

*"They brought me outside the building and threw the flag of Georgia at the bottom of stairs. Mindzaev was still there. Ossetian told me: **"Go on, piss on it"**, and I told him **"I couldn't"**. Then he kicked me in front between the legs. I crumpled and they hit me with a machine-gun butt from above. I only thought not to lose consciousness."*

Another detainee **Ana Datashvili** also recalls Davit Dzadzamia's beating.

"Ossetians were forcing young Georgian detainees to wark. Guys were coming back beaten. They were all in bruises. Dzadzamia, who was working at the municipality was beaten up so badly that we could not see his eyes."

On 13 or 14 August, 77 years old **Nikoloz Kakhniashvili** from Kekhvi was on his way to Gori at midnight after his house was burned when the Ossetians detained him and took to Tskhinvali. There were 50 other detainees with him in the punishment cell (as they themselves called it). Ossetians were among them, those who had mixed families with the Georgians. Police officers were telling the Ossetians:

"Why did you marry the Georgian, if you're on the side of Ossetians, you wouldn't have married the Georgian then."³⁸¹

Aslan Jioev was one of such detainees, who had a Georgian wife and was detained with other fellow villagers in village Kekhvi. Aslan Jioev told us that owing to the very fact that he lived in the Georgian village with the Georgians, he was sure they'd kill him. Therefore, when he was brought in Tskhinvali to the police, he concealed his surname and registered as Nebieridze. Cossacks and Ossetians detained Jioev and his four neighbors on 12 August. *"Tanks stood right there, with the Russian soldiers in them."* They started beating them immediately after detention, hitting machine-gun butts in the head and threatening to kill them. During two days from detention Jioev and others with him were forced to load the furniture stolen from the

380 Interview with Davit Dzadzamia was recorded by the GYLA on 30 January 2009 in Tbilisi.

381 Interview with resident of village Kekhvi Nikoloz Kakhniashvili was recorded by the representatives of union "Article 42" on 10 September 2008 in Tbilisi, kindergarten #150. Nikoloz Kakhniashvili, together with 15 other detainees, was brought on 24 August to Gori by the Ossetians to be exchanged in Ossetian detainees.

families. Two days later all four of them were taken to Tskhinvali by a truck and brought to the yard of the police building, on the Khetagurov Street.³⁸²

The 92 years old eldest of the village Tamarasheni Nikala Papa (grandpa Nikala) could not escape detention either. In the village everyone called **Nikoloz Elbakidze** Nikala Papa and in the interviews with us fellow villagers called him this way. When the Ossetians entered his house and ordered to follow them to Tskhinvali, the old man resisted.

"They forced him to leave. They broke his head and clavicle. He had been just operated on and had a probe installed in. It fell off in the concentration camp. He was suffering from pain. They were fooling him for two days and didn't bring the doctor."³⁸³



Civilian detainee Nikoloz Elbakidze

Nunu Gogidze was taken to the Tskhinvali detention facility from her house yard as well.

"On 10 August I saw three armed men in the yard, and one had already entered the house. There were Russians and Ossetians. A Chechen was standing in the door and didn't come into the yard. They ordered her to leave the house and follow them, as there was no place for Georgians.

I argued with them as to why should I have followed them, I told them that the house had hosted more Ossetian guests than Georgians, and that they should have been ashamed. He said he didn't care and shot at my feet from machine-gun, laughing that I've been scared."

*When we went out on the road we met my Ossetian relative **Nadezhda Gogidze** who told them in Ossetian to leave me alone. In return they hit her with the butt and took her with us. On the road they picked up another man, **Kristo Khetereli** as well."³⁸⁴*

Davit Dzadzamia recalled other detainees also, who were with him in the cell:

*"From the start we were about 10 people in the cell. When I was brought there, three people were already there: father and son **Ushangi Tegashvili** and **Gia Tegashvili** and **Giorgi Datashvili** - all three from Tamarasheni. Other men detained with me in Achabeti and I were brought in that cell together, and next day father and*

382 Interview with resident of village Kekhvi Aslan Jioev was recorded by the representatives of union "Article 42" on 10 September 2008 in Tbilisi, kindergarten #150. Aslan Jioev was released from detention on 27 August.

383 Story of Nikala Papa (grandpa) was told to our researchers by Davit Dzadzamia.

384 Interview with Nunu Gogidze was recorded by the GYLA on 9 November 2008 in Tbilisi, in the temporary settlement; additional clarifying information was recorded on 30 June 2009 in Tbilisi.



Reuters

Georgian detainees Rezo Shavkani and Gogita Kotuashvili near the de-facto Ministry of Internal Affairs building in Tskhinvali. 15 August 2008

son **Tengiz Melanashvili** and **Otar Melanashvili** were brought in. They were from village Kekhvi. Afterwards **Roman Kasradze** from Tskhinvali and **Mikho Razmadze** from Ksuisi (they'd caught them in Tirdznisi) were brought in – the latter was a 26-year old boy, bitterly beaten. He was released from jail earlier than us, several days after releasing the women, because he was terribly beaten. Finally they brought in **Akaki Basishvili** (father of MP from the Liakhvi Gorge) and **Aslan Jioev** (who registered as Nebieridze not to disclose his Ossetian origin). There were total of 15 people in the cell. Next day I saw two other guys from Tbilisi, **Giorgi Monaselidze** (22-23-year old) and **Nika Kharadze** (19-year old), both of them were beaten. They'd brought them before us. There were also **Koba Kakhniashvili** from Sachkhere and his **12-year old boy Giorgi. Temo Barbakadze** was also there, who was a worker in Tskhinvali."

Giorgi Monaselidze is from Tbilisi. On 8 August he went to Tskhinvali as a volunteer with his friend Nika Kharadze, but at the reservists' base they could not receive weapons and were hitchhiking. By 9 p.m on the 8th he was already in Tskhinvali. The Ossetians caught him and first locked him up in a private house in the town, and then transferred him to the Tskhinvali detention facility together with other Georgian detainees, where he stayed until 27 August. Throughout this entire period Giorgi and Nika were subjected to



Arkadi Babchenko

Civilian detainees Tamaz Gogishvili and Zaza Gogishvili from the village Zemo Khviti

physical insult most frequently.³⁸⁵

Tamaz Gogishvili from Zemo Khviti was detained also. He was in the village on 11 August during the bombardment and that is when they had detained him.

"A tank was on the way. I made way for it. They stopped. There were ten of them in uniforms, all of them wearing white armbands. They told me in Russian to raise my hands and made me lean against the nearby wall. They searched me and found the reservist's token on the neck. They told me I was a disguised guardsman. One of them beat me and broke my nose and a brow. I was all in blood. [...] Shortly after they brought all of us outside. They took Zaza and me to the field. They told us to put our hands on the head and run. They chased us from behind. Tank was waiting up there."³⁸⁶

385 According to information available to him, in that house together with Giorgi Monaselidze were Tamaz Barbakadze and his nephew Koba. Following them, Gio Khunashvili, Lasha Patarkalishvili, and Gogita Beridze from Tbilisi were brought in. All of them were beaten, and Gio's head was broken. Next day all of them were transferred to the Tskhinvali detention facility.

386 Interview with Tamaz Gogishvili was recorded by the GYLA on 30 May 2009.



Georgian civilian detainees in Tskhinvali Detention Center

A) IN DETENTION

In detention there were conditions degrading human dignity and posing a threat to human life. Interviews of all detainees attest to this. Our archive contains numerous photos and video materials providing objective information on the condition of the cells and detainees. Regardless of the location of detainees, their stories resemble each other like an apple cut in half. Insult, lack or non-availability of food and drinking water, crammed cells, ignorance of minimum conditions of sanitation, mixing of men and women in the cells, and degrading labor and beatings prevailed. For weeks, Georgian detainees became victims of unprecedented cruelty in the Tskhinvali detention center, the so-called isolation ward and other places of detention. Treatment was even graver and unbearable in the cells where the soldiers and reservists were held. Many of them have eye-witnessed the death of their fellow combatants, while they themselves have spent days and nights under constant fear of dying. Based on the stories told by the detainees we will attempt to restore more or less a full picture of the conditions existing in the so-called Tskhinvali "concentration camps".

From the stories of eye-witnesses it is difficult to delimit various forms of a criminal offence or cruelty, for instance, to draw a straight line between the insult and beating. Therefore, in various sub-chapters deviations from the main topic are obvious. Nevertheless, we still tried to introduce a more or less conditional system in our work and systematize those pieces of information and stories at our disposal, which had been provided by our respondents under with considerable pain, but with the hope of receiving answers to the major questions.

virtually every Georgian starts his story of captivity with similar words:

"They started abusing us verbally at the entrance of the building: You Georgians are fascists, we should kill you. In front of the building

there were many of them standing in the military uniforms, wearing something like a yellow round emblem on their arms. They were mixed by appearance: there were Ossetians, Cossacks, and Russians also. Then they brought us down to the basement, six stairs below the ground floor, and threw us in the cells."³⁸⁷

According to the stories told by persons interviewed by us, volunteers from Tbilisi **Giorgi Monaselidze** and **Nika Kharadze** were one of the first detainees of the camp of detainees in the basement of the Tskhinvali police station building. They were detained late night on 8 August and were transferred to the cell already in the morning on the 9th.

*"Our cell was the first located left to the corridor. There was no one in the cell but I remember it smelled terribly. We did not interact with other cells, no noise was even heard, we were left to ourselves, everyone being in his own despair. We didn't even talk to each other. **We were the first detainees**, there was no one before us. Later at least 20 people gathered in our cell.*"³⁸⁸

Another former detainee **Neli Mchedlidze** describes the conditions in detention in the following manner:

"We were 40 women held in one small room. We were sweating and couldn't breathe anymore. There was a terrible smell: some of them had diarrhea and some had urinated from fear. The steel door had a tiny window and they left it open for us. Being disturbed in the cell, some of us shouted to let us go and some just cried."³⁸⁹

B) OWCROWDING

Ilia Chulukhidze remembers well that "there were total of 9 cells, all nine crammed." **Givi Chulukhidze** recalled that "**a cell was approximately 8 sq.m., with no window. The door had a small sliding window**", and when the supervisors were too disturbed from the crying and shouting of the detainees, they threatened to shut this very only source of air. "**Shut up or we will shut this window as well and kill you so that no one will know**", Neli Mchedlidze remembers this threat very well.

"There were two rows of bunk boards with no covers on them. Those who could not fit on the board were lying on the floor. The floor was made out of wood. In the beginning women and men slept in separate cells, but when they brought detainees during the following days we couldn't fit anymore and all of us used to lie down together. Moreover,

³⁸⁷ Interview with resident of village Achabeti Neli Mchedlidze was recorded by the GYLA on 16 July 2009 in Tbilisi, 9 Tamarashvili St.

³⁸⁸ Interview with Giorgi Monaselidze was recorded by the GYLA on 24 January 2009 in Tbilisi.

³⁸⁹ Interview with resident of village Achabeti Neli Mchedlidze was recorded by the GYLA on 16 July 2009 in Tbilisi, 9 Tamarashvili St.

when we couldn't fit they opened the cell doors and we used to get outside into a narrow corridor. There was a staircase in the corridor leading up to the yard, if one could call it so. It was rather an open room. We were in that yard like animals are in the cage. It was covered by the bars from above. One could see the sky from the squares between these bars. At least we could breathe."³⁹⁰

C) SLEEP

Ilia Chulukhidze:

"There were no beds, neither mattresses to lay them on the ground. If I were quick enough I would sleep on the cement in the cell, otherwise on the pebbles outside the cell. I spent five nights like this, my entire body was bruised from pebbles. Then the women felt sorry for me and laid me down at their feet on the cement."

Ilia Chulukhidze was disturbed also that - *"Women and men were together. Approximately 12 people in one cell. It was crammed and overcrowded."*³⁹¹

Regardless of the cell that they stayed in, stories of detainees are no different. Conditions were equally grave everywhere.

Givi Chulukhidze:

"There were no beds in the cells, only two bunk boards. These bunks were 2 meters in both length and width. There were old mattresses on the bunks, stinking, but later they took these away also. There were five of us lying on each bunk. Under the bunks three people lay on the cement. That night, on 9 August, there were 8 people in the cell. On the second and third days (on 10th and 11th) they brought the detainees in and there were fourteen of us in one cell, sleeping by shifts."

A mattress was a big rarity and wherever they had at least one or two, they made them throw those away.

Davit Dzadzamia:

"On 22 August, when they released the women, the bailiff made us throw away everything from the cells. They told us we were about to be released. They made us clean all rooms, then didn't allow us back in, and we spent the night in the corridor under the staircase. Next day we returned to the cells."³⁹²

390 Interview with resident of village Achabeti Neli Mchedlidze was recorded by the GYLA on 16 July 2009 in Tbilisi, 9 Tamarashvili St.

391 Interview with resident of village Achabeti Neli Mchedlidze was recorded by the GYLA on 16 July 2009 in Tbilisi, 9 Tamarashvili St.

392 Interview with Davit Dzadzamia was recorded by the GYLA on 30 January 2009 in Tbilisi.

D) AIR

Lack of air was one of the biggest problems of the detainees. Virtually every one of them recalled that the cells had no windows.

"None of the cells had a window with daylight in it. The cell was adjacent to the corridor, which was lit by one bulb only."³⁹³

"It was hard to breathe. It was terribly hot and cramped. People felt sick. I felt bad as well. People went to the door shouting for help. Supervisors came, said where the hell would we have gone and opened the door."³⁹⁴

However, this door led to the corridor, which, on its part, did not have a window.

E) FOOD

Nutrition of detainees was not foreseen in the camp. **Neli Mchedlidze** told us:

"First week they gave us only water and bread. We had neither cups nor plates. After the visit of the Red Cross they gave us buckwheat cereal once a day and brought us plastic plates and cups. Red Cross visited us on 16 August."

Nunu Gogidze also remembers the days when they did not have food and water at all:

"There were approximately 25 women in our cell. We had neither food nor water for four days."³⁹⁵

There were similar conditions in the men's cells as well. **Levan Elbakidze** told us:

"During the first week they fed us only bread. They would bring one loaf of bread per 4 people. Then they added dry buckwheat cereal and tea with no sugar, they gave that to us once a day. We didn't have plates and forks. We ate buckwheat cereal from the plastic bottles cut in half and drank water from there also. They would throw cigarettes from above."

Other detainees also remember adding of the buckwheat cereal. **Ilia Chulukhadze:**

"In the mornings and evenings they brought buckwheat cereal, tea with no sugar and a small loaf of bread. I haven't eaten anything

393 Interview with Davit Dzadzamia was recorded by the GYLA on 30 January 2009 in Tbilisi.

394 Interview with Nunu Gogidze was recorded by the GYLA on 9 November 2009 in Tbilisi.

395 Interview with Nunu Gogidze was recorded by the GYLA on 9 November 2009 in Tbilisi. Nunu Gogidze was released on 22 August.

except the buckwheat cereal. When they would bring the food they'd call us "eat you pigs". In the beginning we ate on the paper cartons, and then they brought disposable plates."

Situation in the cell of **Givi Chulukhidze** was similar:

"They would bring one loaf of bread per five people, dry buckwheat cereal, tea, sometimes with no sugar and sometimes slightly sweet. For the first two days they fed us twice a day, and then once a day."

Levan Giguashvili from Tkviavi shared with us his emotion:

"They would throw food at us like at cattle."

Ossetians from neighboring villages served as supervisors in the detention facility. Many detainees had recognized them. They even know their names and surnames.

"Davit Tedeev was a bailiff. He would bring bread in the sack, kick it with his leg, saying "eat you pigs."³⁹⁶

F) DRINKING WATER

Situation was even graver in respect of the drinking water. All former detainees and current IDP Georgians recalled that they gave them to drink water brought directly from river Liakhvi. **Neli Mchedlidze:**

"Water was so dirty that I couldn't even drink it. I was afraid of being infected with dysentery. I would only cleanse my mouth with it and spit it out."

Tina Nebieridze from Kekhvi also talked about a yellow, dirty water:

"Drinking water was terribly dirty and yellow, probably from the river."

Detainees did not have any cups or glasses and they had problems even with drinking such water. **Ilia Chulukhadze:**

"When you would go out of the cell there was a small area for moving around, and that's where the water cistern stood, you should have poured water from there. We didn't have cups. We drank if we managed to get the bottle. Later they brought disposable cups."³⁹⁷

Davit Dzadzamia:

"Water was in two barrels, one was a rusty iron barrel and other was a plastic one. They brought yellow water by a fire-engine, probably from river Liakhvi. We could see the fire-engines, as they would park them outside the fenced yard and then pour the water by pipes into the barrels. These barrels stood by the toilet. We should have washed

³⁹⁶ Interview with Davit Dzadzamia was recorded by the GYLA on 30 January 2009 in Tbilisi.

³⁹⁷ Assistance brought by the Red Cross is implied, when they brought disposable plates, cups, several mattresses and other items of primary use to the places of detention.

our hands in it as well as drink from there."

G) SANITATION

Terrible sanitary conditions aggravated the unbearable conditions even further.

Givi Chulukhidze:

"There was a toilet 3-4 meters away. It was a common toilet for both men and women. It didn't have a door. When there was a queue, women would wait for their turn right there. We didn't even dare about it anymore. There was one toilet only."

Neli Mchedlidze:

"There was one toilet for 160 detainees. There was a filth and stink in that toilet. It didn't even have a door. One thin plastic sheet was put up. You had to wash hand and face by the toilet. If you were quick enough you would wash your face, otherwise there virtually was no water. They would bring water with a cistern and pour it wherever they wanted."

H) FORCED LABOR AND CRUEL TREATMENT

All more or less able-bodied detainees were forced to work constantly. On August 16, 2008 *USA today* was reporting in an article "Georgan doing forced labor in South Ossetia":

"On Saturday, three teams of ethnic Georgians were seen cleaning the streets of Tskhinvali. When approached, one worker confirmed that he was being forced to work. One group of about two dozen men was escorted through the streets by armed Ossetians and a Russian officer. "Labor even turns monkeys into humans," the Russian officer said. He threatened to arrest an AP photographer if he took pictures, and would not give his name."³⁹⁸

Detainees were subjected to forced labor in absolutely inhuman conditions and environments. **Aslan Jioev** recalled in an interview with us that during the day detainees were subjected to forced labor (were made to bury the dead, clean streets from debris with shovels). He himself was made to bury 50 dead in one day. During the work the Ossetians armed with machine-guns supervised them and threatened to kill them in case of disobedience to their orders. Every day it continued like this. Neither food nor rest was foreseen during the work process.

Davit Dzadzamia:

"They would take us to work at approximately 10 a.m and return depending on when we would have completed the work, mainly at

³⁹⁸ see "Georgan doing forced labor in South Ossetia", *USA Today*, August 16, 2008 at http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-08-16-Georgia-forced-labor_N.htm

around 6 p.m. During the work they haven't given me food or rest. Only once, when they finally took me out to work, they fed us with bread and tinned fish."

Giorgi Monaselidze:

"Whoever they liked they would take out to work. Often Nikusha, others from Tbilisi and I were taken out to clean the offices and the town. Almost everyday, we would leave at 7 a.m. During the cleaning they would either beat us with butts or kick us with legs. Drunk Ossetians would stop the car, curse at us, kick us and leave."

Rezo Shavkani:

"Young man were taken to the city for work. We were cleaning up destroyed buildings. Some of us were burring corpses. I have done it once as well.

We were taken for work everyday from the very morning to late evening. Some detainees were taken separately. A person would've come saying that his house was destroyed and we were forced to follow him and help.

I was sent to private housing several times. I was cleaning destroyed builindg one, than a factory. Sometimes they would give us some food, in other cases none. Some people hated us so much that they were denying even the water not to talk about the food."³⁹⁹

Givi Chulukhidze confirmed also that the young were taken out to work more often, including the women.

Neli Mchedlidze:

"They would take young women out and make us work. We cleaned streets, and the Ossetians supervised with machine-guns so that we couldn't run away. The population spit and cursed at us. Some of them even threw stones at us. We worked from the morning until the afternoon."

During the forced labor detainees were often beaten and insulted. Or rather we should say that no occasion has occurred without a physical insult and degrading treatment.

Davit Dzadzamia told us that on the second day of detention he was taken to clean the second floor of the same building for the first time.

"They made us kneel and wipe the floor. We found Giorgi Monaselidze there already, he was cleaning the floors and they beat him at the same time, he was kneeling and they kicked him. At that point 5 men went out from one of the rooms, wearing uniforms, talking in Russian and Georgian. They asked me some things. Then they started

³⁹⁹ Interview with Rezo Shavkani was recorded by the GYLA in Gori, Kakhktasvhilli st #3

beating me. They beat Levan⁴⁰⁰ as well, telling him he was a soldier for sure. All three of us were kneeling and all five of them were kicking us. **Mindzaev** appeared here as well - "labor turned a monkey into a human and you Georgians are still the monkeys. Work and maybe you'll save yourselves." **Hamlet Guchmazov**, head of the pre-trial detention facility, pointed his boots at me kneeling to clean them. When I hesitated, he hit me strongly, broke my nose and I started bleeding. I was bleeding since then approximately for a week."



The head of the Tskhinvali Isolator Hamlet Guchmazov on the photo

Giorgi Monaselidze also told us about this incident:

"There were 6-7 men in military uniforms. They beat me with butts and kicked me. Once they hit me in a left eye. It was swollen then. When they hit me I fainted and they called me an "actor" and started beating me even stronger. I was lying on the floor. Then they told me to clean and made me wipe my own blood. When I cleaned the floor, they brought Levan Elbakidze and Davit Dzadzamia up as well. All three of us cleaned and they beat us at the same time. They started beating Dato especially hard."⁴⁰¹

Cleaning the town was especially difficult for the Georgian detainees. Ossetians would then put up a real show of insulting, humiliating, and cruelty.

Davit Dzadzamia told us about one of such "journeys":

"On 17 August I was taken to work, they made us walk almost for two kilometers and brought us to Tskhinvali in the building of an old mill. We were approximately 30 people. Shortly after the Ossetian women came by and started throwing stones at us, calling us pigs and fascists. The bailiff stood there doing nothing. That evening I started bleeding. I had to go out to clean the town for several times, I believe a total of four times. They would take 8-10 of us. In the streets the passers-by would throw bottles and stones at us."

Giorgi Monaselidze and **Nika Kharadze** had to walk through the town where everyone considered them to be deadly enemies.

"When the Russians recognized the independence of South Ossetia on 26 August, we were out cleaning the town. We were gathering broken glasses and branches in the Heroes Street. People had already been returned to Tskhinvali, even the cars moved around. Nikusha was working on the other side of the street, and I was working

400 Levan Elbakidze was also taken out from the cell with Davit Dzadzamia, and the respondent told us about the fact of his very beating. Giorgi Monaselidze also confirmed the beating of Levan Elbakidze.

401 Interview with Giorgi Monaselidze was recorded by the GYLA in Tbilisi on 24 January 2009.



Georgian detainees Davit Dzadzamia, Nika Kharadze and Giorgi Monaselidze while cleaning the Heroes street in Tskhinvali

on this side, there were 10 by 10 of us on each side. Suddenly they started shooting and yelling "independence - independence". We walked around and cleaned, and didn't look in anyone's eyes as we were afraid. They drove around in the cars and shot blindly. One bailiff told us they had become independent. At that point I had tears in my eyes and when he saw it he threatened to kill me."

However, Georgian soldiers taken into captivity recall even graver episodes of taking a walk in the town. Their stories can be read below, in the chapter on the prisoners of war.

Georgian detainees were obliged to collect and bury the dead. **Givi Chulukhidze** explained:

"We would wrap the dead bodies in the plastic sheets and lay them in the coffins. Those dead were mainly Georgian soldiers. When I touched them I sometimes would end up holding a hand or sometimes a leg in my hand."

Davit Dzadzamia was part of numerous such burials together with his fellow captives.

"On 15 August they made us carry the coffins. The coffins were empty. Towards village Nikozi, in the so-called "Shanghai" settlement they made us collect the corpses. They were totally nude, even without underwear, all black from the burns. All of them were men, didn't have even hair. They were extremely distorted - some of them had no legs, and some were broken in the back. We couldn't even distinguish whether they were Georgians or not, they didn't wear uniforms, but the Ossetians themselves told us they were

Georgians. Our group⁴⁰² collected 17 corpses. Ossetians cursed at us saying that Georgians didn't need the dead."

1) **INSULT**

As already noted numerous times, beating and insulting of the detainees whether in the cells or outside them was a common occasion. It is difficult to draw a categorical line between beating and torture, beating and insult, but to present a complete picture we tried to systematize a little and pick from hundreds of stories the details that would make drawing the complete picture more or less possible.

Neli Mchedlidze:

"One evening we were in the yard. I was going up the stairs from the yard to the first floor of the police building. From the stairs the Ossetians would look at us sarcastically, calling us pigs. That evening women were out in the yard to breathe fresh air. Two drunk Ossetians stood on the stairs and talked in Russian so that we could have heard. One told the other: "take whoever you want and have her." The other replied: "I would be pity even for a dog to have these."

Despite such a reply, detainees were under constant fear, increasingly expecting the worse. Especially when, as **Darejan Kheladze** recalled, "one woman Shorenna was numerously taken out" of her cell and "raped by the Ossetians."

Tina Nebieridze told us that although old women were not taken to work and they had not suffered many misfortunes experienced by the men, enough of insults had taken place on the spot.

"They humiliated us constantly. They would throw at us cigarette stubs, items for single use and even razors from above. They threw the food from above also, mainly dry bread, spit at us and called us "eat pigs."

Men related about the humiliation and insult taking place mainly outside the cells.



Gathering corpses of Georgian militaries by civilian detainees, Tskhinvali, August 2008

⁴⁰² According to his account, Zaza Maisuradze, Ushangi Chulukhadze, Levan Khetaguri, man from Rustavi (does not know name and surname), Davit Jarmelashvili and others attended that day the burial of the dead together with Davit Dzadzamia.

Levan Giguashvili:

"When taking us out to work, local Ossetians tried to hit us with the car and injure us, but as our heads had been counted, the bailiff protected us not to lose the count. Yet, they didn't object them in insulting us, and they spat at us and kicked us."

The bailiff put **Davit Dzadzamia** in a permanent trouble, as he had recognized him.

"Davit Tedeev, the bailiff, stood on the stairs. He was holding the "butterfly" knife in his hand. He had two passport pictures put up on the stair rail and he was putting holes in them with a knife. He asked me whether I knew persons on the pictures and I replied I didn't. He told me I was a pig and those were pigs as well. He put both pictures with a knife in my mouth and told me to eat them or otherwise he would have cut my ears off. He stood there waiting for me."

J) BEATING

Beating was an usual phenomenon in the detention facility. **Darejan Kheladze** told us:

"They would beat the young men, they'd take them out in a separate room and a sound of footfall and beating was heard. We heard them shout. There was one boy from village Tkviavi. I saw he was bleeding from the head. Several young men were taken out couple of times, beaten and brought them back in. As they later said, they would throw them on the ground and then beat them. They didn't even have the right to lift their heads. Those were Ossetian policemen in camouflage uniforms who did it."

Tina Nebieridze remembers the beaten young men well:

"Young men and those in their 40s and 50s were cruelly beaten. From time to time they were taken to the upper floor and we could hear a terrible sound of beating and shouting from there. Even after the work they would usually return beaten and injured."

Levan Elbakidze was one of the young men beaten on a regular basis.

"They would take three or four of us to the police building and beat us. They would tell us to clean and when we'd started cleaning they would beat us at the same time. We were beaten quite seriously, as sometimes the nose and sometimes other parts of the body were broken. Some would just kick us, and some would just hit us with a hand when walking by. Russians were in the building. They saw we had been beaten, but they didn't prevent them."

Beating represented a constituent part of interrogation as well. Interrogation itself is a rather conditional notion, as the detainees themselves told us, nothing was recorded anywhere and no official documentation had

been drawn up, except for several video recordings made by the Russian journalists.

Giorgi Monaselidze told us several episodes from his interrogations.

"They brought me to interrogation. There were two Ossetians in the military uniforms. They totally stripped me, checking whether I was a soldier or not. They tore my t-shirt on me. They asked me what was I doing there if I hadn't been a combatant. I had a cross, icon, and a ring hanging on a string. Why did you come to kill us if you're Christian, they told me. One of them put a gun in my mouth. Then they slid a knife on my neck, pushing me with a point on the back. Finally they put my head on the table and hit me with a butt at least 10 times."

They beat Nika and I for a week because we couldn't make our testimonies coincide. They beat us at every session either with a butt or kicking us. There was no medical aid at all.

"They brought me to Hamlet's office, the jail chief. I had to transfer money from one Magti number to the other. It was a stolen phone and I had to transfer an amount to Hamlet's number. But the transfer service wasn't switched on. He told me I was cheating him and started beating me. He hit me with a weapon butt at least five times. Then they showed me Kokoity's picture and asked whether I knew him. I said no and was hit for that additionally."

4.2. PRISONERS OF WAR

Pursuant to the data of the **Amnesty International**, small numbers of prisoners of war were held by both the Russian and the Georgian forces during the August 2008 war. According to the Georgian authorities, Georgia detained only five Russian POWs, 27 members of South Ossetian armed forces, and one combatant from the Russian Federation, whilst 39 Georgian servicemen were taken captive by Russian and South Ossetian forces.⁴⁰³

According to the report of the **Amnesty International**, they are not aware of any allegations that soldiers taken captive by Georgian authorities were treated cruelly. Authorities of the Russian Federation refused to provide any kind of information in respect of this topic. Russia sent the same refusal to OSCE, and accordingly the OSCE report is also silent on the POWs detained by Georgia. Nevertheless, South Ossetian authorities often talk about the persons detained by Georgia after the conflict and numerous occasions of cruel treatment towards them. The largest piece of information that we could identify about the prisoners detained by Georgia is available in the HRW report,⁴⁰⁴ the latter being accessible on internet to all interested parties.

As for the facts of torture and violence towards Georgian POWs, **Amnesty International** confirmed these not only based on stories

told by them, but based on the traces of torture on the bodies of prisoners as well. The following is read in the report:

"Amnesty International delegates spoke to several Georgian soldiers who were recovering from injuries in a hospital in Tbilisi. **The index fingers of their right hands had been burnt to the bone.**"⁴⁰⁵

Stories of Georgian POWs are most fully and clearly told by the former prisoners themselves. We offer you their very stories related in brief.

Kakhaber Zirakashvili⁴⁰⁶ and **Davit Malachin**⁴⁰⁷ were taken captive in Tskhinvali together. Both soldiers had been wounded during the



Georgian prisoners of war Malkhaz Meladze, Murman Dumbadze and Giorgi Ramazashvili on the day of the release.

The photo shows that the right fingers of all three militaries are injured.

403 See "Civilians in the Line of Fire, The Georgia-Russia Conflict", Amnesty International, 2008, p. 48.

404 *Up in Flames*, Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia, Human Rights Watch, January 2009, p. 79-84.

405 See "Civilians in the Line of Fire, the Georgia-Russia Conflict", Amnesty International, 2008, p. 48.

406 Kakhaber Zirakashvili provided an explanatory statement to the GYLA on 5 May 2009 in connection with the individual application to be submitted with the European Court of Human Rights.

407 Davit Malachin provided an explanatory statement to the GYLA on 1 August 2009 in Tbilisi, in the GYLA office.

bombardment of the so-called "Shanghai" settlement by the Russian jets on 8 August.

Kakha Zirakashvili:

"I was wounded in the right arm, in the shoulder and a wrist area. I almost couldn't move the right hand because of the wounds, and I couldn't raise my hand at all. Davit Malachin was wounded as well, but lighter. He was wounded in the leg."

Davit Malachin recalled that despite wounds they were assisting the other wounded together with Kakha and sending them to Gori by cars. However, in parallel with intensification of the bombardments, it was becoming impossible to remain in one place. They attempted to hide right there, as the jet was flying on a second round. Soldiers ran towards Nikozi. That is where they had been taken captive by the Ossetians laying an ambush. There was another soldier **Kakhaber Khubulovi** with them.

"Malachin, Khubulovi and I were thrown into the hiding trench. They took everything away from us. Then they beat us, but this beating was nothing compared to the beatings that followed in the coming days."

*We met four other Georgian POWs in the trench - **Imeda Kutashvili, Giorgi Ramazashvili, Ushangi Sopromadze and Malkhaz Meladze**. Among them was the one who was forced to call us that we were besieged and had to lay the arms."⁴⁰⁸*

They brought all seven of them to Tskhinvali crawling. As POWs themselves recall, wounded detained soldiers had to move so at least for one kilometer.

Davit Malachin recalled:

"Ossetian soldiers took us over there to the trench near the plane trees. There we saw up to additional 20 Ossetian soldiers. Every one of them wore a white armband and was armed. They talked among each other in Ossetian, while they talked to us in broken Georgian. We saw there four captured Georgian soldiers - Meladze, Sopromadze, Kutashvili, and Ramazashvili. I met these guys in the captivity. I didn't know any of them before."



Georgian prisoner of war, Kakhaber Zirakashvili in the cell



Georgian prisoner of war, Davit Malachini in the cell

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with Kakhaber Zirakashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 5 May 2009 in Tbilisi, in connection with the individual application to be submitted with the European Court of Human Rights.

We crawled through the trench until Tskhinvali. It was a quite long trench, up to a meter in depth. This trench led directly to Tskhinvali, by the residential buildings. First we crawled and then they ordered us to walk. We crawled for approximately 10 minutes and took up about the same time to walk to the residential building. Ossetians had some bags and boxes in the trench and they made us carry those. Around 15 people had followed us."

Soldiers spent the first days of captivity in the basement of a residential building. **Kakha Zirakashvili** recalls this very period of captivity.

"In Tskhinvali the Ossetians brought us in the yard of a three or four-storey building. It was a residential building. We were first held in the yard. Then they brought us in one room and locked us up in there. In the evening they brought us down in the basement of the same building.

Next day (on 9 August), when they learned that Georgians had been held captive, people started coming from various agencies. 10 people would come in, ask about our whereabouts, and beat us. Different people would come. Some were dressed in the black OMON (emergency platoon) uniforms, some were soldiers, and some from the police. Some of them spoke fluent Russian, but I don't know whether they were Ossetians or Russians.

Everyone who came beat us and cursed at us.

They asked us why had we waged the war. They threatened by killing us, beating us with butts and sticks.

*In the evening on the 9th and early morning of the 10th two other Georgian POWs were brought in. One of them, **Zaza Kavtiashvili**, was severely wounded in the leg and was unable to walk. He apparently had been hiding in the same building where we were and the Ossetians caught him right there. **Murman Dumbadze** was brought early next morning. Murman wasn't wounded."*

Our researchers held several interviews with **Zaza Kavtiashvili**, who recalled being taken captive on 9 August in detail. In the outskirts of Tskhinvali, the so-called "Shanghai" district, his unit directly bumped into the Russian military column.

"There were hundreds of soldiers. Tanks and infantry fighting vehicles were leading the column. Soldiers sat on the tanks, wearing greenish camouflaged uniforms. Tanks bore two flags, a white one and the second Russian three-color flag. Several tanks had an inscription "MC" (peacekeeping forces) on the top. Peacekeepers' tanks led



Georgian prisoner of war, Murman Dumbadze in the cell

*this column, followed by the tanks with two flags. We didn't fire as there was an order not to fire at the peacekeepers. We let part of the column, approximately up to 10 infantry fighting vehicles and tanks with the inscription of peacekeepers, pass. They drove towards Nikozi (south), but, as soon as they had passed us, returned immediately and opened fire at us from the rear. The rest of the column opened fire from the front. At this point the Ossetians had attacked us from the residential buildings on our left and we were besieged accordingly."*⁴⁰⁹

Soldiers wounded as a result of these clashes found a shelter in the building next to them. Zaza Kavtiashvili had severe wounds in the leg and had trouble moving. That is why he remained in the building, until his friends would have found a way out. Unexpectedly for him, in the basement of this building he "bumped into the Ossetian soldiers and civilian persons. There were up to 15-20 persons. Some of the soldiers wore Russian camouflaged military uniforms, and some were in civilian attire. I think they wore white armbands, I don't remember exactly. All of them were armed."

The same evening, another group of Georgian POWs was brought to the basement of the same building, among who were Kakha Zirakashvili and Davit Malachin. That night, 9th of August, everyone spent together.

Zaza Kavtiashvili described the conditions at the place of detention in detail:

"There was damp and wet around the basement, in which we were. There was no lighting. There was a small window only, through which the light barely sneaked. Basement didn't have a door. Next to the basement there was a corridor, where the Ossetian soldiers stood, guarding us. Once the Ossetians even offered us food. They brought us two packs of "dry rations". It included the buckwheat cereal, small cookies, tinned veal, boiled rice and the mixing juice. They handed to us one bottle of water as well."

Next morning POWs were transferred to Tskhinvali via a bypass road. Soldiers recalled that they had been severely beaten along the way.

Kakha Zirakashvili:

"They came in the morning on the 10th. There were at least 30 people. They brought us out of the



Georgian prisoners of war Imeda Kutashvili, Malkhaz Meladze, Murman Dumbadze, Kakha Zirakashvili, Davit Malachini and Giorgi Ramazashvili

⁴⁰⁹ Interview with Zaza Kavtiashvili was recorded by the GYLA on 13 June 2009 in Tbilisi.

basement and made us walk for two kilometers in the streets of Tskhinvali. We had to pick Zaza Kavtiashvili up, as he couldn't walk. Until we walked through the town, Ossetian civilian persons cursed at us, beat us and spit at us. Two or three cars drove by as well, armed Ossetians went out, hit us with the butts and left. We saw dead Georgian soldiers. One of them was alive, one could hear him roar, but no one would help him."

Zaza Kavtiashvili:

"We were at the small hill by the Tskhinvali turn, when they had beat us for the first time. There were too many of them around, all of them wearing greenish military uniforms and holding machine-guns in their hands. First several men started beating us and then others joined also. They hit us with butts and kicked us. During the beating all of us had fallen on the ground. I started bleeding from head. Others were too beaten also. Then one man said in Russian to stop and they ceased beating us.

They made us stand up and we continued walking towards Tskhinvali. I was carried by the Georgian soldiers again. On the way I noticed that they were shooting us with mobile phones. Then I watched these trailers in Tbilisi online. It is seen in the video how the guys carry me. Meladze stands left to me, and Ramazashvili stands in front of him. Next to Ramazashvili there are first Khubulovi and then Kutashvili. Behind me there are Sopromadze, Dumbadze, and Malachin standing. Right from me is Zirakashvili. This video was shot after this beating, all of us are too beaten."

Davit Malachin:

"Majority of them wore greenish military uniforms. I remember the image of a Russian flag on some of them. When we were taken to that hill, several soldiers approached us. They started beating us. I was hit with a butt in the right ear and close to the eye, as a result of which right side of my face was entirely bruised and bloody. I fainted for a second during the blow, as if I was losing consciousness, but fortunately it hadn't happened. At this point we were carrying Zaza in the hands and he would have fallen down should I have fainted. Then other soldiers came to beat us as well and all of them started beating us together. We fell to the ground, and they were still kicking us and hitting us with the butts. During this beating a butt hit me on the right side in the ribs, and broke one of my ribs as a result. They cursed at us



Interview of Georgian prisoner of war Malkhaz Meladze given to Russian journalists at Tskhinvali School #6 described by Kakha Zirakashvili

The third from the left is executed Prisoner of War Ushangi Sofromadze

and insulted us during the beating."

We obtained the described video material on the Internet.⁴¹⁰ It depicts well the traces of beating by the soldiers. Almost all of them have their faces bruised and blood-stained. Apart from this, there is a continuous insult of soldiers on during the filming itself. Beating and degrading treatment had been carried on long after.

Kakha Zirakashvili:

"Ossetians got us in the Gazel type car and brought us to the center of the town. There were approximately 200-300 people, soldiers, local population, irregular army, all of them armed. Whoever wanted they beat us with butts, steel pipes, chairs, sticks, everything that they could have grabbed. When we had fainted or fallen down, they pissed on us and then continued beating. I lost consciousness several times during this beating. We were probably there for an hour. Afterwards, if I'm not mistaken, they brought us to another place, where we were beaten additionally, although I don't remember that exactly.

Then they crammed us again in the car and brought to some building. As I was told later, this was the **Tskhinvali School #6**, which the Ossetians used as a temporary military base. There were hundreds of soldiers there. They beat us again outside, right by the building. Then we were brought inside the building, where the journalists had come, I believe, from the Russian television. They put eight of us up against the wall, while Meladze had to talk in Russian. Meladze said that we all had been the reservists, and that we had known nothing about the war and had possessed no information whatsoever. They beat us again after the interview. In general, everyone who wasn't lazy in the school had beaten us.

Then they brought into one tiled room, it was like a bathroom. They beat us bitterly there. Then they moved to another room. This was a small room, without windows. They threw us on the floor. We spent two days and two nights in that room. During these two days in the school we hadn't been given either food or water, and a doctor had not been brought either. We hadn't been taken to the toilet, or elsewhere.

On the same day, 10 August, five soldiers came in. They asked whether there had been any member of a tank crew or artilleryman among us. They checked our hands and established that one of us, **Ushangi Sopromadze**, was a tank driver. They brought Ushangi out of the room. **In five minutes we heard the sound of firing from an automated weapon."**

Davit Malachin:

"They checked the hands of each of us. One of us, Ushangi Sopromadze, was a tankman. I believe he was a tank driver. They recognized

⁴¹⁰ See online media at, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBE54oks2AU&NR=1>; as well as, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L88ctqSQboU&NR=1>



Garden next to the Tskhinvali School #6 and the corpse of executed prisoner of war Ushangi Sofromadze (was identified by his cellmates)

him because of his horny hands. They told Sopromadze in Georgian to follow them and took him out of the room. We couldn't see where he had been taken, but in approximately 1-2 minutes we heard the sound of shooting from an automated weapon. We heard the sound of shooting extremely close, as if they'd fired right in our room."

Kakha Zirakashvili:

"In several minutes after the shooting they took Malachin, Kutashvili, Ramazashvili and I out right there in the corridor, which was in the tiles.

In the corridor we saw Ushangi Sopromadze, who was lying on the floor with his head split in two. Sopromadze was

lying on a cloth with his face down, he'd been shot in the head from the back and his head had been split in two.

Malachin, Kutashvili, Ramazashvili and I were forced to wrap Sopromadze's body in the cloth and bring it down to one of the gardens located downstairs by the school. This garden was in approximately 30 meters from the school building, followed afterwards by the private residential houses. Next day they took four of us to dig the grave near the railway. We dug in shifts, first Malachin and I and then Dumbadze and Ramazashvili. When we stopped digging the grave, it was very dark already. We simply wrapped the body in the cloth, tied a rope to it and left it there."

Zaza Kavtiashvili confirmed the fact of murder of Ushangi Sopromadze. Video material depicting the digging of Ushangi Sopromadze's grave is also accessible online.⁴¹¹ In the shots one can very well see as Georgian soldiers digging the grave, as well as their supervising Russian soldiers with the guns pointed at them.

According to the soldiers, **Kakhaber Khubulovi** was also shot dead during the captivity. Although none of them has eye-witnessed this fact, but that was how the Ossetians had explained his disappearance. Zaza Kavtiashvili and Kakha Zirakashvili remember very well the day when the Ossetians took Khubulovi out.

Kakha Zirakashvili:

*"The guy who was taken captive with me and Malachin, with surname **Khubulovi**, had the Ossetian mother. When they learned about the nationality of this guy in the school building, people had been coming*

411 see online media at, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JNKweCyOhw&feature=related>.

especially to see him. On 11 August Ossetian soldiers beat him again, calling him a traitor and they took him somewhere on the same day. We haven't seen him ever since. **One of the soldiers told Zaza Kavtiasvhili that they had murdered that guy, because he had been a traitor. This happened in the morning on the 11th.**"

Zaza Kavtiasvhili:

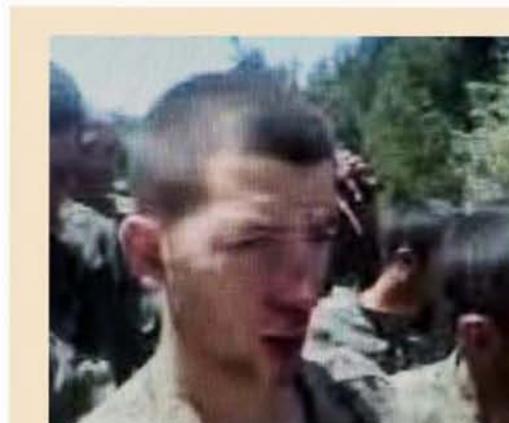
"On 11 August several soldiers came in and took Khubulov out. If I'm not mistaken they told him in Russian that the chief had called him for interrogation. Khubulov's mother was Ossetian and therefore they constantly cursed at him, telling him how could he have fought on the side of the Georgians, they called him a traitor and cursed at him and beat him. We haven't seen him since then, he hadn't come back to us. The same evening I asked a bailiff in Georgian about Khubulov's whereabouts, and he replied that they'd cut his head off and that we shouldn't have waited for him anymore."

HRW was concerned with Khubulov's case as well. Unfortunately, they confirm gunning down Khubulov. In particular, the 2008 report of the organization contains an interview with the South Ossetian police representative, who stated in the interview with HRW that the Chechen fighter could not hide his indignation when he learned about ethnically Ossetian in the service of the Georgian army.

"He said that traitors had to be punished, and took him out in the yard and just shot him."⁴¹²

Georgian POW Zirkashvili recalls also that the civilians had been brought to them. Later, by comparing other interviews we found out that these old persons were husband and wife **Andro Razmadze** and **Manana Galegashvili**, as well as **Natela Mchedlidze** and **Suliko Kakhniashvili**. We managed to verify with them the period described from the soldiers, which they had spent together. The elderly tell the similar stories.

Oppression and threats against POWs intensified gradually. Sopromadze's murder has given rise to a special fear.



Executed Georgian Prisoner of War Kakhber Khubulovi while taking in hostage.



Georgian prisoners of war, Murman Dumbadze and Kakhber Zirkashvili in the cell

412 *Up in Flames*, Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia, Human Rights Watch, January 2009, p. 190.



Georgian prisoners of war, Imeda Kutashvili and Davit Malachini in the cell

Kakha Zirakashvili:

"After the murders of Sopromadze and Khubulov we had been told that they would have murdered one man every day per each day of our additional stay there. But in the second half of the day on 11th the chief of one of the special squads came upstairs to us, Gazaev, who had been taken captive previously. He appointed the guard for us at night and warned them not to let anyone in. Gazaev bandaged Zaza's wound and gave him soothing drugs. Then he was flown to the military hospital of the Russians in Vladikavkaz. We saw Zaza on the 18th in Tskhinvali, when Georgian POWs had been taken there for an exchange.

We spent two nights in the school #6. In the morning of 12 August the Ossetians took us to another place. They interrogated us and then severely beat. There is a video where Meladze is interrogated and beaten. It was shot in one of the police departments. I believe it was the Ossetian special squad. I was taken for interrogation separately also and during the interrogation one of the Ossetians pointed a revolver at me several times and pulled the trigger, but no bullet had been shot."⁴¹³

"In the police I was put in the cell with Dumbadze. There were total of 5 or 6 cells, I believe. They didn't feed us anything in the police. They gave us 100-200 grams of water. Once they even brought bread to Ramazashvili and Meladze. There was no toilet in our cell, but we virtually didn't need it as we hadn't eaten anything for almost a week. We used a small plastic bottle, with which they'd brought water, for urination several times. There were two wooden bunks in the cell. We didn't have a window and the cell was entirely dark.

If we had thought before that we'd been beaten severely, that was nothing compared what we've suffered through at that place. There were Ossetians wearing identical stars on the belts. They were from the special squad. We had to stay in these cells until 17 August. Ossetians beat us systematically. We were in horrible conditions, they were torturing and beating us always when they had had a possibility. Several people would come into the cell, beat us, then get tired, leave, and come back after the rest. They beat us until loss of consciousness; they hit us with hammers and butts. They hit us especially in the joints of arms, fingers, and elbows.

They beat us in the cell itself. I personally had teeth broken by the butt on both sides; they hit me with a hammer at numerous occasions in the chin, nose, forehead, and index finger of the right hand. When they hit me with a hammer in the forehead I even lost consciousness. On the right hand my fingers are broken by the hammer, and joints on the middle and index fingers had been damaged. I have burns from

413 see online media at, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmoHP5KRTHQ&feature=related>

cigarette stubs on the face. They burned our index fingers on the right hand with a lighter so that we could never take up the arms in our hands again. I remember two Ossetians standing on my arm and holding my hand, while the third had been burning the fingers. Then they told me that even if I'd been released, I would have never used my fingers for shooting the Ossetians again. From beating I had my right ear membrane break, when they had hit me with a butt of a gun."

Davit Malachin:

"We were horribly tortured. Approximately five-six people had entered the room. All of them were in uniforms. They hit us in the joints, beating us with the steel pipes. They put plastic buckets on our heads and hit with hammers on the top. They put the bucket on my head twice.

They burned fingers of several of us. They burned my finger as well. First they had been burning the index finger on the left hand. But then they stopped and burned the index finger on my right hand. One soldier put a foot on my finger, the other held a lit lighter and the third had pointed a gun at me and would hit me as soon as I had moved. They have held a lighter at the finger for approximately 1 minute. They stopped when the skin had started smelling. My finger was burned to the extent that a bone was already seen.

This torture continued for a very long period of time. They hit us on the feet and soles with the steel bars, they hit me with a steel bar until it had broken. My feet were in terrible condition, swollen, and I could hardly walk."

Beating and torturing continued day and night. POWs tell endless stories about insult and torture. They used all kinds of weapons during the torture: hammers, belts, butts, even chairs. For instance, **Davit Malachin** told us that "as a result of beating Kutashvili even lost consciousness, and had cramps."

The case of Giorgi Antsukhelidze

Another Soldier and former POW **Roland Nakashidze** recalls that Russian peace-keepers have opened fire in Tskhinvali on August 9th. He was together with 35 other Georgian soldiers and **Giorgi Antsukhelidze** was one of them.

"Suddenly we have noticed Russian infantry with the sign "MC" (peacekeepers). We had an order, not to shoot, as they were peacekeepers. They have opened fired. I was shot in hand. 14 of my soldires have died."

Roland Nakashidze has seen Giorgi last time there "he was lying on the



*Torture of Georgian Prisoner of War
Giorgi Antsukhelidze. Photos from Video*

ground, about 6 meters away. I think he was wounded in leg, but I am not sure. He was not moving".

Next day Roland Nakashidze was arrested by the locals and has not heard anything about Giorgi Antsukhelidze since then. After release he saw video on internet and talks to us about it:

"There is one Georgian soldier, sitting on the ground and people in military uniforms are beating him severely." Nakashidze is confident that the soldier in video is Giorgi Antsukhelidze.

The mentioned video has been shown all over the world, by most of the media outlets as a proof of torture and ill-treatment of the Georgian POW by the Russians. Giorgi Antsukhelidze's sister Khatuna Antsukhelidze was trying to find more information about the video and its full / original version. She told us:

"Journalist told me that she has a video of soldiers being tortured. I have asked how she knows he is Giorgi. She referred to the statements of soldiers from the 4th brigade of the Georgian army. The same brigade as Giorgi served in. All of them have recognized Giorgi and only after that was the video named."

Later, after re-burial and DNA analysis, one of the bodies was identified as Giorgi Antsukhelidze. "According to the official papers Giorgi was killed on the 9th of August in Tskhinvali. Reason of death - "killed in war" - says Khatuna Antsukhelidze.

Exchange of Prisoners of war

On 17 August the Russians transferred the POWs to the former school building right there in Tskhinvali. Soldiers met other Georgian POWs there, among them **Kakha Makhatadze, Nakashidze, Megrelishvili** and others.

This was a very moment when the Russians gave the POWs an opportunity to have a bath and shave. There they rendered them medical assistance, cleaned and bandaged their wounds, and even permitted to wash the bloody clothes. After the almost 10-day hunger, it was for the first time on 17 August that the Russians provided them with more or less normal food.

In an interview with us, **Davit Malachin** had especially grave feelings when recalling the story of 17-19 August.

"One Russian soldier came and told us that we had to be taken

somewhere, and that we had to be exchanged in Russian POWs. We flew by a helicopter in the mountains, where a lot of journalists had been awaiting us. One of the Russian soldiers told us that Saakashvili had abandoned us and refused to receive us. This was the Russian officer, probably 35-40 years old, he had two stars, which indicated his military rank. He gave an interview to journalists and talked to them about us and Saakashvili. One of the journalists was an American probably. All others were Russians.

When we stood by a helicopter, journalists took pictures of us. In the picture it is seen that we guys are standing by a helicopter. Besides soldiers, there are Georgian civilians standing also. This was a greenish military helicopter, which had a big red star on it. These pictures were taken on the 18th of August, the journalists had not attended the exchange on 19 August."⁴¹⁴

However, the exchange took place the next day, 19 August 2008. This group of POWs was flown by helicopter to Igoeti. That day total of 13 POWs had been exchanged in five Russian servicemen, two out of who were pilots and three soldiers.

"I remember they had left two Georgians with them, one civilian and the other a soldier, whose ear had been cut off. I believe his last name was Megrelishvili. They had been exchanged on the second or third day."



The exchange of Georgian Prisoners of War on 19 August 2008

The photo shows that the right fingers of all POWs are injured.

414 Interview with Davit Malachin was recorded by the GYLA on 1 August 2009 in Tbilisi, in the GYLA office.

ATTACHMENT #1**Questionnaire for the systematization of the information provided in interviews with victims conducted for the aim to describe damages sustained by population due to the conflict in August 2008**

The information in the questionnaire is based only on the evidence existing in already conducted interviews

1. Questionnaire number -----
2. Name -----
3. Surname -----
4. Patronymic -----
5. Date of birth -----
Day/ Month / Year
6. Gender (please, circle)
 - 1 Female
 - 2 Male
 - 99 Information not available
7. Attained level of education (please, circle one appropriate option only)
 - 1 Incomplete secondary education
 - 2 Secondary education
 - 3 Vocational secondary education
 - 4 Incomplete higher education
 - 5 Higher education
 - 99 Information not available
8. Family status
 - 1 Unmarried
 - 2 Married
 - 3 Divorced
 - 4 Widow
 - 99 Information not available
9. Living address prior to the conflict
 - 9.1. District -----
 - 9.2. Settlement -----
 - 9.3. Address -----
 - 99 Information not available
10. Current living address
 - 10.1. District -----
 - 10.2. Settlement -----
 - 10.3. Address -----
 - 98 Address is the same
 - 99 Information not available
11. Total number of family members (prior to the conflict)

Please, write in -----

- 99 Information not available
12. Damage sustained personally by respondent as a result of military actions (circle as many options as apply)

Code	Type of sustained damage	Measurement unit	Quantity of units	Value of damage (approximate, in GEL)
Destruction of real estate				
1.	Destruction of house			
2.	Burning of house			
3.	Destruction of other building			
4.	Destruction of orchard			
5.	Destruction of seeds			
6.	Destruction of vineyard			
7.	Destruction of other agricultural arable land			
Robbery / destruction of crops				

8.	Grains			
9.	Alcoholic beverages			
10.	Fruit			
11.	Vegetable			
12.	Honey			
13.	Robbery / destruction of other product			
14.	Unreceived income			
Destruction of means of transport				
15.	Robbery/destruction of motorcar			
16.	Robbery/destruction of truck			
17.	Robbery/destruction of minivan/bus			
18.	Robbery/destruction of other means of transport			
Robbery/destruction of agricultural machinery				
19.	Robbery/destruction of tractor			
20.	Robbery/destruction of combine harvester			
21.	Robbery/destruction of manual tractor/ rototiller			
22.	Robbery/destruction of other machinery			
Household items				
23.	Robbery/destruction of electrical appliances (TV set, mobile phone, computer, tape recorder, etc.)			
24.	Robbery/destruction of furniture			
25.	Robbery/destruction of housewares			
26.	Robbery/destruction of other domestic items			
Jewelry				
27.	Robbery/destruction of gold, silver, jewels			
28.	Robbery/destruction of money (in respective currency)			
29.	Robbery/destruction of antique items			
30.	Robbery/destruction of other precious items			
Robbery/destruction of domestic animals and fowl				
31.	Cow			
32.	Pig			
33.	Sheep			
34.	Poultry			
35.	Hive			
36.	Robbery/destruction of other domestic animal/fowl			
Health injuries				
37.	Torture			
38.	Wound			
39.	Beating			
40.	Fracture			
41.	Bruise			
42.	Mental disorder			
43.	Other			
Unlawful detention				
44.	Restriction of freedom			
45.	Captivity			
Other damage				
46.	Rape			
47.	Intimidation, threat, offense, psychological pressure			
48.	Forced labour			
49.	Destruction of life			
50.	Bombing			
51.	Opening of fire			
52.	Torture/inhumane treatment			

99 Information not available → 14

13. When does the incident happen?

13.1. 1st incident

13.1.1. Codes corresponding to sustained damages from question 12

- | | | | |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 13.1.1.1. — | 13.1.1.6. — | 13.1.1.11. — | 13.1.1.16. — |
| 13.1.1.2. — | 13.1.1.7. — | 13.1.1.12. — | |
| 13.1.1.3. — | 13.1.1.8. — | 13.1.1.13. — | |
| 13.1.1.4. — | 13.1.1.9. — | 13.1.1.14. — | |
| 13.1.1.5. — | 13.1.1.10. — | 13.1.1.15. — | |

13.1.2. Place of incident (write in) _____

13.1.3. Date ----/----/-----/-----/

Day/ month / year time (hour)

13.1.4. Who were the offenders? (circle one appropriate option only)

- 1 Military men
 2 Civilians
 3 Representatives of de facto government (governor, administration employees....)
 4 Illegal paramilitary groups
 5 Police officers
 6 Other _____ (write in the name of victim if you know it)
 98 Not identified
 99 Information not available

13.1.5. What was the ethnicity of offenders? (circle one option only that is appropriate to this specific incident)

- 1 Russians
 2 Ossetians
 3 Abkhazs
 4 Chechens
 5 Cossacks
 6 Georgians
 7 Other north Caucasians
 8 Russians and Ossetians
 9 Russians and Abkhazs
 10 Russians and Chechens
 11 Russians and Cossacks
 12 Russians and other north Caucasians
 13 Russians and Georgians
 14 Not identified
 99 Information not available

14. Damage sustained by other members of a respondent's family (circle as many options as apply)

		Number of persons	Information not available
Destruction of real estate			
1.	Destruction of house		99
2.	Burning of house		99
3.	Destruction of other building		99
4.	Destruction of orchard		99
5.	Destruction of seeds		99
6.	Destruction of vineyard		99
7.	Destruction of other agricultural arable land		99
Robbery / destruction of crops			
8.	Grains		99
9.	Alcoholic beverages		99
10.	Fruit		99
11.	Vegetable		99
12.	Honey		99
13.	Robbery / destruction of other product		99
14.	Unreceived income		99
Destruction of means of transport			
15.	Robbery/destruction of motorcar		99
16.	Robbery/destruction of truck		99
17.	Robbery/destruction of minivan/bus		99
18.	Robbery/destruction of other means of transport		99
Robbery/destruction of agricultural machinery			
19.	Robbery/destruction of tractor		99
20.	Robbery/destruction of combine harvester		99
21.	Robbery/destruction of manual tractor/ rototiller		99
22.	Robbery/destruction of other machinery		99
Household items			
23.	Robbery/destruction of electrical appliances (TV set, mobile phone, computer, tape recorder)		99
24.	Robbery/destruction of furniture		99
25.	Robbery/destruction of housewares		99
26.	Robbery/destruction of other domestic items		99
Jewelry			
27.	Robbery/destruction of gold, silver, jewels		99
28.	Robbery/destruction of money (in respective currency)		99
29.	Robbery/destruction of antique items		99
30.	Robbery/destruction of other precious items		99
Robbery/destruction of domestic animals and fowls			
31.	Cow		99
32.	Pig		99
33.	Sheep		99
34.	Poultry		99

35.	Hive		99
36.	Robbery/destruction of other domestic animal/fowl		99
Health injuries			
37.	Torture		99
38.	Wound		99
39.	Beating		99
40.	Fracture		99
41.	Bruise		99
42.	Mental disorder		99
43.	Other		99
Unlawful detention			
44.	Restriction of freedom		99
45.	Captivity		99
Other damage			
46.	Rape		99
47.	Intimidation, threat, offense, psychological pressure		99
48.	Forced labour		99
49.	Destruction of life		99
50.	Bombing		99
51.	Opening of fire		99
52.	Torture/inhumane treatment		99

15. When the incident happened?

15.1. 1st incident

15.1.1. Codes corresponding to sustained damages from question 14

15.1.1.1. _____ 15.1.1.6. _____ 15.1.1.11. _____ 15.1.1.16. _____
 15.1.1.2. _____ 15.1.1.7. _____ 15.1.1.12. _____
 15.1.1.3. _____ 15.1.1.8. _____ 15.1.1.13. _____
 15.1.1.4. _____ 15.1.1.9. _____ 15.1.1.14. _____
 15.1.1.5. _____ 15.1.1.10. _____ 15.1.1.15. _____

15.1.2. Place of incident (*write in*) _____

15.1.3. Date ----/----/-----/-----/

Day/ Month / Year Time (hour)

15.1.4. Who were the offenders? (circle one appropriate option only)

- 1 Military men
- 2 Civilians
- 3 Representatives of de facto government (governor, administration employees....)
- 4 Illegal paramilitary groups
- 5 Police officers
- 6 Other _____ (write in the name of victim if you know it)
- 98 Not identified
- 99 Information not available

15.1.5. What was the ethnicity of offenders? (circle one appropriate option only)

- 1 Russians
- 2 Ossetians
- 3 Abkhazs
- 4 Chechens
- 5 Cossacks
- 6 Georgians
- 7 Other north Caucasians
- 8 Russians and Ossetians
- 9 Russians and Abkhazs
- 10 Russians and Chechens
- 11 Russians and Cossacks
- 12 Russians and other north Caucasians
- 13 Russians and Georgians
- 14 Not identified
- 99 Information not available

16. Are other incidents known where members of other families also sustained damage? (circle one appropriate option only)

- 1 Yes ↓
- 2 No complete

17. If known, how many people became victims of each type of violence?

		Number of persons	Information not available
Destruction of real estate			
1.	Destruction of house		99
2.	Burning of house		99
3.	Destruction of other building		99
4.	Destruction of orchard		99
5.	Destruction of seeds		99
6.	Destruction of vineyard		99
7.	Destruction of other agricultural arable land		99
Robbery / destruction of crops			
8.	Grains		99
9.	Alcoholic beverages		99
10.	Fruit		99
11.	Vegetable		99
12.	Honey		99
13.	Robbery / destruction of other product		99
14.	Unreceived income		99
Destruction of means of transport			
15.	Robbery/destruction of motorcar		99
16.	Robbery/destruction of truck		99
17.	Robbery/destruction of minivan/bus		99
18.	Robbery/destruction of other means of transport		99
Robbery/destruction of agricultural machinery			
19.	Robbery/destruction of tractor		99
20.	Robbery/destruction of combine harvester		99
21.	Robbery/destruction of manual tractor/ rototiller		99
22.	Robbery/destruction of other machinery		99
Household items			
23.	Robbery/destruction of electrical appliances (TV set, mobile phone, computer, tape recorder)		99
24.	Robbery/destruction of furniture		99
25.	Robbery/destruction of housewares		99
26.	Robbery/destruction of other domestic items		99
Jewelry			
27.	Robbery/destruction of gold, silver, jewels		99
28.	Robbery/destruction of money (in respective currency)		99
29.	Robbery/destruction of antique items		99
30.	Robbery/destruction of other precious items		99
Robbery/destruction of domestic animals and fowls			
31.	Cow		99
32.	Pig		99
33.	Sheep		99
34.	Poultry		99
35.	Hive		99
36.	Robbery/destruction of other domestic animal/fowl		99
Health injuries			
37.	Torture		99
38.	Wound		99
39.	Beating		99
40.	Fracture		99
41.	Bruise		99
42.	Mental disorder		99
43.	Other		99
Unlawful detention			
44.	Restriction of freedom		99
45.	Captivity		99
Other damage			
46.	Rape		99
47.	Intimidation, threat, offense, psychological pressure		99
48.	Forced labour		99
49.	Destruction of life		99
50.	Bombing		99
51.	Opening of fire		99
52.	Torture/inhumane treatment		99

18. When the incident happened?**18.1 1st incident****18.1.1 Codes corresponding to sustained damages from question 14**

15.1.1.1. _____	15.1.1.6. _____	15.1.1.11. _____	15.1.1.16. _____
15.1.1.2. _____	15.1.1.7. _____	15.1.1.12. _____	
15.1.1.3. _____	15.1.1.8. _____	15.1.1.13. _____	
15.1.1.4. _____	15.1.1.9. _____	15.1.1.14. _____	
15.1.1.5. _____	15.1.1.10. _____	15.1.1.15. _____	

18.1.2 Place of incident (*write in*) _____**18.1.3 Date** ----/----/-----/-----/

Day/ Month / Year Time (hour)

18.1.4 Who were the offenders? (circle one appropriate option only)

- 1 Military men
- 2 Civilians
- 3 Representatives of de facto government (governor, administration employees....)
- 4 Illegal paramilitary groups
- 5 Police officers
- 6 Other _____ (write in the name of victim if you know it)
- 98 Not identified
- 99 Information not available

18.1.5 What was the ethnicity of offenders? (circle one appropriate option only)

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1 Russians | 9 Russians and Abkhazs |
| 2 Ossetians | 10 Russians and Chechens |
| 3 Abkhazs | 11 Russians and Cossacks |
| 4 Chechens | 12 Russians and other north Caucasians |
| 5 Cossacks | 13 Russians and Georgians |
| 6 Georgians | 14 Not identified |
| 7 Other north Caucasians | 99 Information not available |
| 8 Russians and Ossetians | |

