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Civil Society Organizations urge Georgian Government to Strengthen Humanitarian Aid for the Region of Abkhazia

Signatory Civil Society Organizations urge the Georgian Government to further strengthen humanitarian and medical aid in Abkhazia in the context of an abrupt rise of COVID-19 cases in the region.

Yesterday, de facto Health Ministry of Abkhazia made a [public statement](#) addressing the abrupt rise of corona virus cases and called for the support of the local population. According to him, there is shortage of medical personnel in the health care system, a large portion of doctors are worn out and some of them are infected, therefore, the Minister called for volunteers and support of fellow citizens.

For the majority of the local population, the main source of income is tourism, and

during the pandemics, harsh social conditions arose for the region already on the verge of economic crisis.^[1] Precisely in the context of social protests, on August 1, de facto government of Abkhazia was compelled to open the so-called border with Russia unexpectedly and without preparation.

On August 1, after the region opened for tourists, abrupt rise in infection cases was observed. Only on August 16, 26 cases of COVID-19 infection were identified, three times higher than the previous highest number of cases identified within a 24-hour day. By August 17, 189 persons were infected with corona virus, out of which three died and 69 were cured.

It is noteworthy that in medical circles, criticism of the decision on the opening of borders was already voiced, however, political establishment did not share self-criticism of the health ministry about shortage of medical resources and insufficient preparedness.

Signatory organizations believe that it is crucial Georgian government and our society clearly displays solidarity to support the region of Abkhazia in response to the crisis there. Beyond paramount value of human life and distinct humanistic purposes, these steps have a valuable political potential for reconciliation and transformation of conflict. It is crucial that people and citizens living in the region of Abkhazia constantly see readiness of sharing their concerns and needs and supporting them.

Although we recognize that the Georgian Government has already taken steps in response to such serious humanitarian situation to support occupied regions, we believe that this process requires more visibility and strengthening. Among others, it is important that Georgian Government provides additional medical resources to the population in Abkhazia in response to the statement of the de facto Minister of Abkhazia. Agreement on forms of support requires agreement with de facto government and it can be reflected in organized transportation of patients and/or sending of medical personnel and appropriate resources.

In view of the statements made by the newly elected prime-minister and other members of the government in the last period (including regarding improvement of human rights situation of Georgians living in Gali, and direct dialogue with the Georgian Government), we believe that the existing context enables the development of more open political relations and processes of reconciliation. It is significant that

the Government and the society appropriately realize this context. Unfortunately, despite peace and reconciliation rhetoric and fragmented attempts, these policies of the Georgian Government are less public, visible, and firm. This is when rhetoric of reconciliation and restoration of trust and public, open messages have inherent transformational value.

Signatory organizations believe that open support of the local population in crisis will be a significant and historic step in the direction of reconciliation and restoration of trust.

Signatory Organizations:

- Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC)
- Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)
- Caucasian House
- Center for Peace and Civic Development (CPCD)
- Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts (ISNC)
- Democracy Research Institute (DRI)