



**Women, War, and Displacement
in Georgia**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AED	Academy for Educational Development
CBIHA	Georgia's Coordinator Bureau for International Aid
CDIE	Center for Development Information and Evaluation
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IDW	Internally Displaced Women
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISAR	Institute for Soviet-American Relations
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JCC	Joint Control Commission
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NUWC	NIS-US Women's Consortium
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
QA	Quadripartite Agreement
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
WCRWC	Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the Georgian conflicts and their effects on women. From 1991 to 1993, three violent waves of civil war racked the nascent Republic of Georgia. Beginning in the region of South Ossetia, soon to be followed in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi, in western Georgia, and in the autonomous republic of Abkhazia, political and social stability vanished as ethnic-based conflict engulfed the country and brought the Georgian state to the edge of collapse.¹ Though the fighting was localized in the western and northern regions, the populations in these two regions suffered heavily. The primary victims of the wars were the civilian populations of the regions. The fighting led to massive, panicked displacement, as upwards of 270,000 ethnic Georgians fled Abkhazia while more than 60,000 Georgians and Ossets left South Ossetia, almost all for other regions of Georgia (see the map on the following page for a geographic overview of these areas). All told, 5 to 6 percent of Georgia's population were forced from their homes.

Women were particularly affected by the violence and displacement. As in Bosnia, Guatemala, and other recent conflicts throughout the world, a majority of Georgia's internally displaced people (IDPs) were women and children. Much of the violence experienced by the civilian populations was in fact aimed at women. This paper assesses the situation of women during the Georgian conflicts and in the postconflict environment. While permanent peace agreements have yet to be negotiated in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the various Georgian war zones have been largely free of large-scale conflict, with the exception of a May 1998 flare up in the Gali region of Abkhazia. The political and economic environments in Georgia have also improved since the wars ended. In spite of the relative calm, IDPs and in particular internally displaced women (IDW) continue to live in miserable, unsustainable conditions, unable to return to their homes and largely unwilling or unable to integrate into the Georgian regions to which they relocated. In this difficult atmosphere for displaced communities, women's organizations have emerged as important actors in assessing and addressing the various needs of IDP communities.

The paper is divided into eight parts. Section II discusses the critical historical foundation to the Georgian conflicts, helping to elucidate why displacement was such a logical consequence of ethnic conflict in the country. Section III outlines the conflicts themselves, while Section IV details the resulting massive displacement. Sections V and VI examine the effects of war on women, both in general and in Georgia. Finally, Section VII charts the rise and roles of IDW's organizations and the various problems facing these organizations as they struggle to meet the needs of their communities.

¹ The Ossetian region of Georgia is often called Tskhinvali, Samachablo, or "Inner Kartli" by Georgians, many of whom believe the name and political borders of South Ossetia to be a Soviet invention. For the purpose of this paper, I will continue to use the geographical term of South Ossetia.



Map of Georgia

II. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO CONFLICT AND INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

The Republic of Georgia is tucked on the Caucasian isthmus between the Black and Caspian Seas. Despite its small size and a population of just 5.4 million people, modern day Georgia has long been ethnically heterogeneous. Minorities comprise 30 percent of the Georgian population and include Armenians (8 percent), Russians (6 percent), Azeris (5 percent), Ossets (3 percent), and Abkhaz (2 percent) (Fane 1993). By the time Georgia won independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, ethnic tension had become a part of the political discourse. The first post-communist government of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia embraced nationalism as its core ideological tenet and thus alienated many non-Georgians within the population. Full-fledged conflict quickly followed Georgia's break from the Soviet Union. Like Bosnia and Croatia in the former Yugoslavia, Georgia came to represent, even symbolize, the difficulties posed by a country, in this case a Soviet republic, attempting to reinvent itself as a nation-state (Nodia 1997).

Conflict itself had long been a part of the political and social fabric in Georgia. Known to Georgians as Sakartvelo (literally "Land of the Georgians"), the region occupied a historically strategic space as a critical link in the major trade route between Asia and Europe. Surrounding powers—the Persian, Ottoman, and Russian Empires—sought for centuries to gain economic advantage by annexing the Georgian kingdom. Following almost six hundred years of brutal, fratricidal feudal war among pretenders to the Georgian throne, Russia finally succeeded in absorbing nearly all of modern day Georgia in the 1800s. Georgia broke free of Russia after the October Revolution in 1917, but independence was crushed three years later by the invading Red Army (Jones 1994).

The Russian and Soviet legacy in Georgia, as elsewhere in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, was one of ethnic manipulation. In the nineteenth century, Russian administrators expelled large numbers of Abkhaz, whose adherence to the Islamic faith was perceived as tacit support for the Ottoman enemy to the south (Gachechiladze 1995). This expulsion policy substantially reduced the Abkhaz population in the region and instilled a profound "sense of cultural insecurity" towards Georgians, thought to be complicit with the Russian policy (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996, 14). The Christian Abkhaz who were allowed to remain in Georgia were subject to a gradual process of "Russification," in which the elite and intelligentsia were raised in the Russian language and culture and effectively cut off from the ethnically Georgian population (Gachechiladze 1995, 30).

The Abkhaz sense of insecurity towards Georgians only deepened with the rise to power of Joseph Stalin, himself Georgian by ethnicity. While it had been a Soviet republic during the Soviet Union's first decade of existence, Abkhazia was fused back into Georgia as an "autonomous republic" by Stalin in 1931, thereby launching a policy termed "Georgianization"

by the Abkhaz and scholars² (Kvarchelia 1998). Thousands of Georgians were resettled in Abkhazia, further eroding the total population of ethnic Abkhaz (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). By the dawn of Georgian independence, the Abkhaz had become a minority in their own region at just under 18 percent, while the Georgian population had increased from 6 percent in 1886 to 45 percent in 1989 (Kvarchelia 1997). Resentment towards Georgian authorities for past policies and a perceived demographic threat drove Abkhazian political interests for years to come. Indeed, Abkhazian demographics became the critical issue leading to the mass expulsion of Georgians during the 1992–1993 conflict.

The background to the Ossetian conflict differed from the Abkhazian case. Unlike the Abkhaz, the Ossets were never demographically threatened by Georgian resettlement patterns.³ Tension between Georgians and Ossets instead dated to the first independent Georgian republic, during which Ossets were widely perceived by Georgians as having collaborated with the Bolshevik revolutionaries during their conquest of Georgia in 1921 (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). Sharing cultural attributes like the Russian Orthodox Church, Ossets had long been champions of Russian interests in the Caucasus (Cornell 1996). The Soviet leadership rewarded Ossets for their allegiance with the creation of the Autonomous Region (oblast) of South Ossetia within Soviet Georgia. Georgian nationalists disparaged this new autonomous unit as a Soviet invention for a people who had migrated to the area from their north Caucasus homeland not many years previously (Gachechiladze 1995). Like the Abkhaz, most Ossets never identified with the Georgian identity, instead remaining loyal to Moscow and the Soviet leadership. In the waning years of the USSR, the Ossetian and Abkhazian leaderships began to declare openly their intention to break from Georgia and join the Soviet Russian Federation.

Soviet nationality policy exacerbated Georgian interethnic relations on several levels. Most basically, the Soviets promoted the development of ethnonational identity with both majority and minority populations throughout the USSR. This was particularly the case in the Caucasian region. In their attempts to dilute nationalist movements and promote a Soviet identity in the disparate regions of the USSR, Moscow pitted ethnic groups against one another by shifting entire populations and drawing or redrawing borders in a federalist framework. The “autonomous” status and resulting authority of oblasts and republics, such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia, allowed for the leadership and elites from those regions to develop their own institutional capacity and resources to drive future secessionist movements (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996).

² As part of this policy, the Abkhaz were not allowed to speak their own language. Georgian schools replaced Abkhaz ones. Abkhaz towns and regions were renamed in Georgian. See Kvarchelia 1998, 19.

³ At the beginning of the war, 66 percent of South Ossetia’s 100,000 residents were ethnically Ossetian. See Gachechiladze 1995, 74.

III. THE THREE GEORGIAN CONFLICTS

The stage was set for an outbreak of war in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The nationalist policies of President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, elected in 1990, severely alienated the non-Georgian populations of Georgia. A former dissident who had spent time in Soviet prison for his nationalist zeal, the new leader promoted a policy of “Georgia for Georgians” which aimed to snuff out autonomous ethnic power within Georgia’s borders (Anchabadze 1998; Chirikba 1998; Nodia 1997). Gamsakhurdia was intent on creating a Georgian nation-state based on the Georgian ethnicity, prying it free once and for all from the Russo-Soviet orbit.⁴ In March 1990, the newly elected Georgian parliament, controlled by Gamsakhurdia’s anticommunist coalition, annulled the 1921 agreements through which Georgia joined the Soviet Union, effectively declaring Georgian independence. The Ossetian leadership reacted quickly by renaming South Ossetia a “Soviet Democratic Republic,” divorcing it officially from Georgia. An outraged Gamsakhurdia abolished South Ossetia’s autonomous status, thereby initiating a rapid descent into armed conflict.

The war itself was especially brutal at the village level, as unofficial bands of local Georgians were joined by the Georgian National Guard and shady paramilitary groups from other parts of the country (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). The South Ossetians, in turn, received critical support in the form of armaments and reinforcements from their ethnic brethren across the border in the Russian republic of North Ossetia (Hunt 1995). Casualty estimates vary, but the death toll for the two years of fighting was put at well over 1,000 (Zurakashvili 1998). The conflict completely devastated the local economy, as production shrank to 15 percent of prewar capacity (Hunt 1995). Fighting continued to flare sporadically until June 1992 when the Georgian government led by Eduard Shevardnadze signed an agreement with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, signaling a ceasefire and withdrawal of Georgian forces from South Ossetia (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). The resulting resolution, though not a full peace agreement, created a functioning trilateral Joint Control Commission (JCC) to promote the peace process and patrol war zones with troops from Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) launched a mission to Georgia to facilitate the settlement, to eliminate sources of tension between the warring parties, and to promote discussion towards a more comprehensive settlement.⁵ For its part, the JCC also was to ensure security for the civilians affected by the conflict, in particular the many internally displaced people whose conditions are described in the next section of this paper (Human Rights Watch 1996; OSCE 1999; Zurikashvili 1998).

⁴ In examining the new states of Central and Eastern Europe, in particular the former Yugoslav states, Bogdan Denitch stresses that ethnic-based “nation-states” create two types of citizens: the majority, or “full members of a political nation,” and the minority, who are “tolerated” as nonmembers of the political nation living within its geographic borders. See Denitch 1994, 141.

⁵ For an overview of the OSCE’s activities in South Ossetia and Georgia, see the OSCE World Wide Web home page at URLs <http://www.osce.org/e/survey/georgia.htm> and <http://www.osce.org/e/f-geo.htm>.

The strife soon spread to Abkhazia. While tense relations between the Abkhaz and Georgian authorities did not spill over into overt conflict during the South Ossetian war, the situation rapidly changed in 1992. President Zviad Gamsakhurdia was toppled in late 1991 after a long period of increasingly erratic behavior, when his ruling bloc fissured into two camps. Two weeks of chaotic confrontation—Georgia’s second conflict, the “Tbilisi War”—paralyzed the capital as forces loyal to the putsch leaders forced Gamsakhurdia to flee to Mingrelia, a western Georgian province bordering Abkhazia (Gachechiladze 1995). As the Ossetian conflict was winding down, Georgia’s new leader, the former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, was able to rush substantial numbers of troops and armaments to Mingrelia to engage Gamsakhurdia’s forces. The latter, meanwhile, came to control important stretches of land and resources in Mingrelia, while also using bases in eastern Abkhazia for attacks on government forces (Nodia 1998).

In a move that would have deep ramifications for years to come, the Georgian military leadership decided to invade Abkhazia, ostensibly to crush the Gamsakhurdian insurgency. In truth, Shevardnadze was also focused on bringing the autonomous republic back under Georgian control, in part to guarantee for Tbilisi control of critical economic infrastructure such as the main rail line between Russia and central Georgia.⁶ Thus began Georgia’s third and most debilitating civil war. During the first months Georgian forces encountered little resistance as they advanced to Abkhazia’s capital, Sukhumi. By August 1992 the Abkhaz government had fled to western Abkhazia, and, sensing victory, the Georgians installed a military council to rule the region (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996).

Military success was short-lived, however. Disturbed by the events in Abkhazia, as well as by Shevardnadze’s intransigent stance towards Russia, hardliners in Moscow rushed to help the retreating Abkhaz.⁷ Russian military bases in the western Abkhazian towns of Gudauta and Bombora were used to funnel arms and volunteers to the Abkhaz. Support for the Abkhaz was also strong in the north Caucasian republics just over the border in Russia (i.e., Chechnya, Dagestan), and little effort was made by Russian border officials to prevent north Caucasian troops from crossing the border and joining the Abkhaz (Aves 1996). With Russian and north Caucasian support the tide of the war quickly changed. The Abkhaz and their supporters had retaken all of western Abkhazia by October 1992. An offensive on the capital city of Sukhumi was launched the following spring. Although that offensive stalled, subsequently leading to a July 1993 cease-fire agreement, the Abkhaz renewed their attack on Sukhumi in September and captured the city in just 11 days (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). The underequipped and poorly trained Georgian army quickly retreated to the Mingrelian border, withdrawing from all of Abkhazia in the process (Chirikba 1998).

⁶ Shevardnadze justified the invasion of Abkhazia as a means to safeguard railways and highways from Gamsakhurdian forces, and took pains to differentiate between the latter and the Abkhaz authorities, whom he insisted had accepted the invasion plan. See Nodia 1998.

⁷ Shevardnadze consistently refused to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), a loose economic and political organization of former Soviet republics which in theory modeled itself after the European Union. The Georgian leader saw it as an institution through which the Russian Federation would maintain a strong influence over Georgian affairs.

After several months of diplomatic efforts, the Russian government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) negotiated a second ceasefire and an interim peace agreement in April 1994. Though far from a permanent peace agreement, the resulting document, known as the Quadripartite Agreement (QA), called for a major peacekeeping force administered by the UN (called the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia, or UNOMIG) to be deployed on the Abkhazian-Georgian border. The largest numbers of peacekeepers were to be provided by the Russian military (United Nations 1995). More importantly, the QA also planned for the repatriation of 100,000 IDPs, the most dramatic consequence of the Abkhaz war.

IV. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE: THE MAIN CASUALTIES OF WAR

The victims of the Abkhazian and Ossetian conflicts were primarily civilian. In the chaos that followed the Georgian collapse in Abkhazia, between 240,000 and 250,000 ethnic Georgians fled the fighting in fear of reprisal at the hands of the Abkhaz.⁸ During the Georgian invasion twelve months earlier, 30,000 ethnic Abkhaz left their homes in front of the advancing forces. In South Ossetia, upwards of 13,000 ethnic Georgians and 30,000 Ossets had fled the fighting, the latter for the Russian republic of North Ossetia and the former for various Georgian regions. The UN estimated that some 400,000 people were displaced as a result of the different conflicts in Georgia (United Nations 1995, 14). Today, the situation for the displaced remains abhorrent. All told, some 200,000 people (4 percent of Georgia's population) continue to be housed in temporary quarters, five to seven years after they were first chased from their homes. This issue has come to dominate political life in Georgia and has made a permanent solution to the Abkhazian conflict intrinsically difficult to achieve (United Nations 1995; MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996; Hunt 1995; Hayden 1995; WCRWC 1998).

While relatively small in scale compared to the later displacement from Abkhazia, the forced migration from South Ossetia was particularly brutal. Over 1,000 civilians perished during combat. Soldiers on both sides of the conflict burned upwards of 60 villages to the ground (Zurikashvili 1998). Many towns and families in South Ossetia had been ethnically mixed before the conflict (Gachechiladze 1995). The fighting polarized South Ossetia to such a degree that communities and even families were separated along ethnic lines. Ossetian children forced Georgian mothers into exile. Tolerant Ossets who tried to prevent ethnic cleansing were hounded and harassed by the South Ossetian military and paramilitary bands.⁹ Georgian authorities depopulated entire Ossetian communities in Georgian districts outside South Ossetia, driving most into both South and North Ossetia (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). Meanwhile, a majority of ethnic Georgian IDPs sought refuge in the neighboring Gori region of Georgia as well as in Tbilisi, the capital, often staying in the homes of relatives and family friends (Hunt 1995).

As mentioned above, ethnic Abkhaz comprised barely 18 percent of the prewar population of Abkhazia. This demographic changed radically after the Georgian military collapse. Seventy-five percent of Abkhazia's population, nearly all of it ethnically Georgian, fled the region as the Georgian military retreated (United Nations 1995). Tens of thousands deserted the Abkhazian capital of Sukhumi in a mass panic to escape heavy combat in October 1993. Many escaped in terrible conditions over the surrounding mountains of Svanetia without adequate clothing or provisions. Hundreds died of exposure and exhaustion. Others fled south to Mingrelia. The total

⁸ While the exact number has not been fully tallied, the United Nations and the Open Society Institute concluded that the IDP numbers from the Abkhazian conflict were at or near 250,000.

⁹ Denitch defines ethnic cleansing as "the forcible expulsion of nondominant ethnic groups" from a region or area of a country by a dominant ethnic group. See Denitch 1994: 7.

population of Sukhumi shrank dramatically from 122,000 to between 30,000 and 40,000. In the southern Abkhaz region of Gali, meanwhile, the displacement was even more extensive. Of a total prewar population of 90,000, 95 percent were ethnic Georgians. All but a token few thousand fled to bordering Mingrelia in September 1993 (Human Rights Watch 1996; Hunt 1995).

From the beginning, violence against civilians and IDPs was severe and widespread on both sides of the Abkhazian conflict. Thousands of civilians were killed during the fighting (Greene 1998). When Georgian government forces invaded Sukhumi in August 1992, a vicious pattern of assault, murder, looting, and pillaging was documented. This pattern was reciprocated by Abkhazian soldiers, many of whom tortured and killed Georgians who had chosen to stay in their homes rather than flee (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). Houses and properties were systematically torched and ransacked (Hunt 1995). Schools, monuments, and other public property were destroyed (Metonidze 1998). In addition, the warring sides planted up to 700,000 mines in over 10 square kilometers of fields and properties, particularly in the Gali district, rendering many of the abandoned homes uninhabitable (Hayden 1998; Human Rights Watch 1996). The psychological scarring had a profound impact on the IDP community for years to come, as international relief organizations such as Oxfam and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) predicted. In 1998, Oxfam conducted an extensive survey of 650 women and children IDPs and concluded that the IDP population in general suffered from severe and untreated psycho-traumatic maladies, particularly posttraumatic stress disorder (Kharashvili 1995).

The tremendous flow of displaced people into Georgia heavily taxed the country's infrastructure and government resources, already weakened by the various conflicts and a general post-Soviet economic collapse. Major concentrations of IDPs were settled in the cities of Zugdidi (approximately 72,000 people), the capital Tbilisi (66,000), Kutaisi (20,000), Tsalenjikha (13,000), and Senaki (13,000). In Zugdidi alone, the population of 100,000 almost doubled from the inflow. Most of the displaced were housed with host families (including relatives) and in collective centers, generally Soviet-era hotels, schools, and hospitals.¹⁰ IDPs were almost entirely dependent on the good will of their hosts for food and shelter, as the Georgian government could provide very little assistance. The families' generosity was quickly stretched to its limit (Hunt 1995; MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). A vast majority of IDP adults were unable to find work to provide for their families. Many scraped by on small monthly government pensions (\$8 per family member) or by bartering in local markets (WCRWC 1998).

Without effective government agencies through which to channel help, initial international assistance efforts were limited and confused, focusing on immediate humanitarian needs like food and basic medicine. Later, international efforts were more substantial, particularly in response to the mass exodus of Georgians from Abkhazia, but donor and NGO activities were often poorly coordinated. Since 1995, however, a Georgian government agency called Georgia's

¹⁰ A vast majority of IDPs (84 percent) lived with families during the first years of Georgian internal displacement (1991-1994), although the Norwegian Refugee Council stressed that beginning in 1995, more IDPs (53 percent) were housed in collective centers (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996; Norwegian Refugee Council 1995).

Coordination Bureau for International Humanitarian Aid (CBIHA) has been operating to harmonize international aid efforts and programs. Funded by USAID and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), CBIHA has provided an important institutional framework for cooperation and coordination among donors and internal aid organizations (Greene 1998). In spite of this positive development, budget setbacks threatened critical humanitarian assistance programs. USAID mounted a major assistance effort in 1994-95 of \$50 million. Due largely to congressional pressure, the budget for USAID's Caucasian humanitarian assistance program shrank to barely \$17 million in 1996, of which \$7 million was targeted for Georgia¹¹ (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). As of 1997, just under \$6 million in donor assistance was made available for IDPs, a figure analysts have called grossly insufficient (Hayden 1998). By 1998, an assessment of the IDP situation in Georgia by the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC) concluded that few donors were specifically targeting displaced communities with assistance, a fact that had become a major deficiency in Georgian aid programs (WCRWC 1998).

As a permanent solution to the Abkhazian conflict failed to materialize, more IDPs moved into collective centers (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). Conditions were often atrocious. An NRC Refugee Council survey showed that housing in general was substantially overcrowded, with an average of 3.2 persons living per room and 41 percent of IDPs sharing critical facilities such as cooking areas and toilets with other families (NRC 1995). Combined with the Georgian government's inability to provide adequate care, this led to substantially increased health risks, including a rise in the outbreak of diseases such as hepatitis and tuberculosis to dangerously high levels¹² (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996). The 1998 WCRWC fact-finding mission concluded that several of the most prominent collective centers were uninhabitable. In Tbilisi's Republic Hospital, over 500 people had been living in 75 percent of its rooms for half a decade. The hospital itself had little heat, almost no electricity, and its walls and ceilings were in utter disrepair. Similar conditions were noted in the Hotel Vake in Tbilisi, which housed almost 700 people in 200 rooms. In the Tshkaltubo Sanitarium in Kutaisi, over 9,000 people had lived in cold, damp rooms for five years, while the 1200-person Meurneoba Settlement in Zugdidi was made up of old administrative buildings roughly and inadequately refurbished as living quarters (WCRWC 1998, 25-28). Still, almost all IDPs do receive "minimal assistance," as Thomas Greene (1998,) points out. Their misery is more emotionally and psychologically based than a result of physical hardship.

Whether in collective centers or with host families, the living arrangements for IDPs were haphazard and never meant to last more than a few months. After the April 1994 QA was signed by Georgian and Abkhazian leaders, UNHCR launched a major effort to repatriate 80,000 displaced Georgians to their homes in the Gali region of Abkhazia. The program ran from October through November of 1994 and cost upwards of \$11 million. Some, including much of the NGO community in Tbilisi, severely criticized the plan for its hasty preparation and skirting

¹¹ Administered by Save the Children–USA.

¹² The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) warned of a coming pandemic of diphtheria in 1995, particularly among women and children.

of UNHCR's own standard procedures in assessing community attitudes on both sides of the conflict (Hunt 1995). As it turned out, over 75 percent of IDPs believed the restoration of Georgian rule in Abkhazia to be the most important precondition for their return (NRC; MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996).

While Abkhazian authorities officially agreed to the plan, their actions usually contradicted such support.¹³ Furthermore, a QA clause gave the Abkhaz power to disallow the return of Georgians deemed undesirable, such as former combatants. As the Open Society Institute pointed out, this clause empowered authorities to cast a "wide net" preventing most Georgian men of fighting age from returning (Hunt 1995). Not surprisingly, the plan was a total failure. By the end of November 1994 when the program shut down, only 311 IDPs had been allowed to return to Gali. As many of the plan's critics had emphasized, a full political settlement was necessary for such an ambitious plan to work (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996).

In the years after 1994, IDPs began to spontaneously return to the Gali region, independent of UNHCR efforts. By 1997, as many as 50,000 IDPs, mostly women, children, and the elderly, were crossing the border to tend to their crops and farms. Although most did not settle permanently for fear of Abkhazian reprisals, many quietly moved back into their homes. The return of IDPs was accompanied by a rise in guerilla and paramilitary activity. A substantial number of hard-line IDPs and other Georgians had given up on their government's ability to negotiate a permanent settlement that would reincorporate Abkhazia into Georgia. They organized guerrilla groups with cryptic names such as the White Legion, the Forest Brothers, and Cobra to launch attacks on the Abkhazian military and civilians. By May 1998, the Abkhazian government had had enough. One thousand five hundred Abkhazian militia members were sent to Gali to crush the guerillas. The fighting was brutal but brief; a ceasefire was negotiated in less than a week. Though it lasted only a matter of days, the fighting had dramatic consequences. Almost all the Georgian IDPs who had returned fled in terror once again. Already cramped IDP refuges were flooded with thousands of IDPs. Many more could find shelter only in tents or squalid ruins. Meanwhile, many of the abandoned Georgian villages in Gali were burned by the Abkhazian forces to lessen any chance of repatriation. Once again, the plight of the internally displaced was at the core of the Abkhazian conflict (Cohen 1998; Zurikashvili 1998).

¹³ Many Abkhazian local leaders expressed open hostility towards ethnic Georgians. Others blamed the attacks on those ethnic Georgians who had remained behind or had returned to check on their homes and farms on bandits and landmines, overtly ignoring evidence that the Abkhazian army and paramilitary outfits were targeting Georgians (Hunt 1995).

V. THE EFFECTS OF WAR ON DISPLACED WOMEN

As analysts and scholars have stressed, the majority of IDPs in conflicts the world over have been women. Men are commonly targeted either for combat recruitment or killed and tortured for their suspected ties to the enemy. As a result, most of those who fled the conflicts in Bosnia, Guatemala, Rwanda, and Kosova, to name but a few recent conflicts, were women and children (Aafjes 1998; Cohen and Deng 1998). The very nature of violence aimed at the displaced is often centered on women. Gender-based violence includes sexual assaults, threats, exploitation, and forced prostitution.¹⁴

In recent conflicts, the primary form of gender-based violence has been rape. Rape during war is used to terrorize civilian populations. It is utilized to torture and humiliate, to intimidate, coerce, and generally maintain social control, or it can be used simply as a vicious, dehumanizing form of reprisal. The tragic civil wars in Rwanda, Bosnia, and most recently in Kosova have focused attention on other explanations for mass rape and gendered violence: ethnic cleansing and genocide. In both countries, rape was systematically adopted to destroy ethnic populations, non-Serbs in Bosnia and Tutsi in Rwanda. It became a chillingly effective tool to drive entire populations from their homes. Soldiers and civilians alike raped tens of thousands of women in their homes or in public view with the intention of terrifying local populations into fleeing (Aafjes 1998; Roe 1992; Vickers 1993).

IDW are subject to specific gender-based violence, pressures, and constraints. As in the regions of combat, border guards, marauding soldiers, and others target women in flight for rape and other forms of violence. The violence does not necessarily end upon arrival in places of refuge. In moments of blind rage and frustration for the displaced, incidents of domestic violence become more commonplace. Spouses and family members beat their wives and other women, reflecting the extreme stress of displacement on the family unit. Many IDW have been coerced into providing sexual favors in exchange for critical supplies such as food, shelter, and documentation. Others have been forced into prostitution by their families in order to provide an income where none would otherwise exist. In camps and other places of refuge, women are commonly in charge of households. The responsibilities can include venturing into war zones in search of water, food, firewood, and other basic staples. They can also include working illegally or in dire conditions to scrape out a small wage where government or donor assistance does not exist. In case after case, traditional gender roles of maintaining the household and providing for the family have put tremendous stress on displaced women (Aafjes 1998, 13; Cohen and Deng 1998).

¹⁴ In December 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which defined gender-based violence as “any act...that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty.” Quoted in Aafjes 1998, 14.

VI. GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMEN IN GEORGIA

As in other recent civil wars, much of the violence in the Georgian conflicts was aimed at women. Of the 5,000 dead in Abkhazia, 2,000 were women and children. In the period after the official ceasefires were signed, an additional 1,200 women and children died as a result of forced migration, sporadic ethnic-based attacks, and other forms of ethnic cleansing (Zurikashvili 1998). Gender-based violence was common. Rape was systematic and widespread in the Abkhazian conflict, as soldiers from both sides used sexual violence as a tool of ethnic cleansing. Actual rape numbers have been difficult to access because many women have refused to seek assistance for psychological and physical trauma due to the cultural stigma that such treatment would invite (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996).

Of all IDPs in Georgia, 53.4 percent were women (Zurikashvili 1998). Those who fled from Abkhazia in 1993 faced horrible conditions, many trekking on foot across snow-covered mountainous terrain for over a month. Among IDPs themselves, this escape became known as “the death path.” Although there is little in the way of official statistics, between 200 and 350 IDW and children died from sickness, malnutrition, and exhaustion during the long journey. Some women were forced to give birth in inhumane conditions, and several died during childbirth (Metonidze 1998; Zurikashvili 1998). The psychological trauma suffered during this period profoundly affected IDW in the years to come. A 1995 Oxfam survey of IDW and children concluded that the IDP community suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder syndrome on a near epidemic level. Of the women surveyed, 86 percent required some form of psychological rehabilitation and treatment (Kharashvili 1995).

Since settling into temporary places of refuge throughout the country, the situation for IDW has been exceedingly difficult. Many live in hotels, hospitals, schools, and settlements in dire conditions, often lacking electricity, central heating, or even running water. Throughout Georgia, IDW and their children are unable to find or afford desperately needed health care. As a result, gynecological diseases, anemia, kidney, and heart diseases are commonplace. Cases of hypertension, asthma, and tuberculosis have risen steadily. Malnutrition continues to be a major problem. According to the Georgian Ministry of Healthcare, the daily intake of proteins and calories has decreased on average each year since IDW took refuge throughout the country. Adequate clothing also remains a problem, especially in the winter months. Children are often kept from attending school in the coldest months owing to the fact that they do not have warm clothing (WCRWC 1998; Zurikashvili 1998).

Most IDW continue to depend on humanitarian assistance and government pensions for income. In a survey conducted by Feride Zurikashvili and the Women’s Studies Center of Tbilisi State University, 90 percent of the 320 interviewed IDW emphasized the critical importance of humanitarian aid. Ironically, the NRC, the WCRWC, and Zurikashvili each tracked and noted a dwindling amount of aid provided for IDPs, even as the situation for the displaced worsened considerably in 1998 with a second wave of displaced from the Gali region. In many locales, the

flow of aid has all but stopped.¹⁵ Zurikashvili's study found that 75 percent of IDW and IDP families have incomes nearly half that of the government minimum subsistence level (US\$ 35 per month). Monthly government pensions equal only US\$ 8 per family member. On top of the dwindling international and government assistance, IDP unemployment continues to exceed 60 percent (Hayden 1998; WCRWC 1998; Zurikashvili 1998).

As Astrid Aafjes emphasized in her examination of gender violence in global conflicts for the Washington-based nongovernmental organization Women, Law and Development, women IDPs continue to be in charge of the household even in times of displacement (Aafjes 1998). This is true in Georgia as well, where traditional gender roles are clearly delineated. While men are the traditional decision-makers, women remain responsible for the well-being of their families, particularly for feeding, clothing, and educating their children. Nevertheless, IDW seem to have adapted better to the lack of assistance and are often the major money earners in IDP families. Zurikashvili's study found that women were the major sources of income in over 70 percent of families. Some barter and sell goods on city streets or in markets. Others own small businesses specializing in various crafts like woodworking, sewing, weaving, and haircutting. One successful International Rescue Committee (IRC) program provided IDPs living with host families seeds and farm animal stock for upkeep. More than half the IRC's beneficiaries were women. Because women are often more responsible for income generation than IDP men, many are overwhelmed with the dual responsibility of caring for their families and being major sources of income (WCRWC 1998; Zurikashvili 1998).

¹⁵ The NRC notes that as of 1997, only US\$ 11,898,162 of a requested US\$ 39,868,021 of the UN consolidated appeal for humanitarian aid was received. Of that, only US\$ 5,758,309 was available for IDPs (Hayden 1998: 170). In the Zurikashvili study, all humanitarian assistance was terminated to the surveyed IDW as of January 1998 (Zurikashvili 1998). The WCRWC study reveal that all aid was eliminated for two of the three major places of refuge (WCRWC 1998, 26-28).

VII. THE GROWTH OF GEORGIAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Despite the misery of social conditions for IDW, one positive trend has emerged: the increasing importance of women's organizations. As the WCRWC study showed, women have organized to take charge and solve problems creatively in communities across the country. Many local groups have grown in stature and earned impressive reputations for their efforts. Organizations like the IDP Women's Association (in Tbilisi), the Georgian Young Lawyer's Association (in Tbilisi), the Women's Committee of Abkhazia (in Tbilisi), the Association Moselni (in the city of Zugdidi), and the Abkhazian Women's Council for Peace (in Kutaisi), among others, have brought attention both nationally and internationally to the unique problems of IDW and their families (WCRWC 1998).

The growth of such organizations has occurred within the context of a burgeoning civil society throughout Georgia generally, as several scholars and analysts have documented. The Soviet and Stalinist legacy had discouraged all organizational ties not mandated by the state. The violence that erupted soon after Georgia's independence only entrenched the lack of organizational life in the country. As recently as 1992, in fact, there were no registered NGOs in Georgia. However, the cessation in fighting in 1993 and the slow crawl to political and economic stability signaled a change for civil society in Georgia. By 1995, over 60 organizations had registered with the government. Hundreds more followed suit in the years to come. By 1997, Georgian civil society had evolved to such a point that the Institute for Soviet-American Relations (ISAR)—the U.S.-based NGO funded by USAID and tasked to promote civil society growth in many former Soviet states—closed its office in Tbilisi and announced the formation of an indigenous Georgian network of NGOs, called the Horizonti Foundation, which took its place (Jones 1996; Clayton 1997).

Women's groups, and more specifically IDW organizations, have been an active part of this organizational growth. They have been active on both grassroot and national levels. The Association for IDP Women, for example, has conducted extensive surveys to determine the health needs of displaced women and children throughout Georgia. It has also sponsored a children's magazine, organized skills-building and leadership-training seminars for women in several major IDP locales, and it has focused on peace-building by training IDP leaders in various alternative conflict resolution methods and by sending children to multicultural peace camps (Horizonti Foundation 1998b; WCRWC 1998). With assistance from UNHCR, the Association Moselni provided professional skills training in small business development, management, marketing, and computer skills to IDW in Gori (Horizonti Foundation 1998a). The Women's Committee of Abkhazia, meanwhile, has targeted the protection of displaced-women's rights as a prime goal and has worked hard to bring attention to the plight of the 1,100 female headed households in IDP communities (Horizonti Foundation 1998c; Women's Committee of Abkhazia 1998).

In settlements saddled with the direst of conditions, women's activities have emerged as critical to those communities. Often these activities occur unofficially. In the Hotel Vake in Tbilisi, in which 680 IDPs have lived for over five years in 200 rooms, women have organized learning activities for children who are unable to go to school (for which they must pay). Similarly, in the Meurneoba Settlement in Zugdidi, community women leaders have organized a kindergarten for

children. These same leaders have worked with a local NGO, the Charity Humanitarian Center “Abkhazeti,” to send teachers from area schools to the Meurneoba Settlement to work with children who have been unable to attend school for years. With the help of the IRC, they have also organized regular health education seminars for the community. As a result, most women no longer travel outside the settlement for routine medical attention (WCRWC 1998).

While some assistance organizations have begun to recognize the value of women’s organizations in pinpointing the needs of IDP communities, few donors and international NGOs have focused programmatic attention on them. USAID has recognized the need for leadership and skills training for IDW organization leaders. Through its partner the NIS-US Women’s Consortium (NUWC), a membership organization administered by Winrock International of women’s NGOs from the former Soviet Union and the United States, USAID funded a month-long training session in March 1998 to improve management and leadership skills and processes among Georgian women’s organization leaders. In fall 1998, NUWC teamed with the Horizonti Foundation and the USAID-sponsored Academy for Educational Development (AED) on further training of Georgian women’s organizations, although the resulting conference was broadened to include women’s organizations from Armenia and Azerbaijan. While neither training session was specifically aimed at IDW, they did include several groups working on IDW issues, notably the Association of IDP Women, the Women’s Committee of Abkhazia, and the Georgian Young Lawyers Association. The autumn conference even included a working session focusing solely on IDP organizational issues in the Caucasian region (NUWC 1998; AED 1998).

Both the WCRWC report and the Zurikashvili study stress that women’s organizations are unique sources for addressing the needs of IDP communities. The potential cooperation between donors and IDW/IDP organizations could become all the more important if repatriation becomes a reality. As mentioned previously, external assistance to the IDP communities is decreasing. As the WCRWC notes, the U.S. government and the UN both have cited the “imminent return” of the displaced to their homes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia to rationalize diminishing funding to IDP communities (WCRWC 1998: 22). Yet the situation for the displaced has only worsened in the six years since the wars mostly ended, and a vast majority of IDPs have linked their return with political settlements that have yet to be achieved. The Georgian government is incapable of supporting the 200,000 remaining IDPs without the support of donors and international assistance.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Since 1994, Georgia has made a remarkable recovery on several fronts. Shevardnadze's government has both regained control over much of the country (excluding South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and the confidence of many Georgians. The UN-monitored ceasefires in South Ossetia and Abkhazia continue to hold, and peace negotiations are still ongoing. While the conflict flared again briefly in the spring of 1998, a ceasefire has been reestablished. As peace has settled over the country, the economy too has rebounded dramatically.¹⁶ The Republic of Georgia has been affected by the economic turmoil in its large trading partner to the north (i.e. The Russian Federation), but the Caucasian state has not shown signs of economic collapse.

IDW and IDPs have not benefited from the economic development of Georgia. They live in squalid, untenable conditions half a decade after their arrival, unable or unwilling to relocate. Most displaced women are unemployed yet relied upon as the principle income earners for IDP families. Many suffer from posttraumatic stress and other major health problems. Along with these continuing problems, aid to IDP communities continues to decrease.

Addressing women's issues continues to be central to postconflict social rehabilitation in Georgia. As in conflicts throughout the post-Cold War world, women suffered tremendously during the conflict itself. That legacy continues to be felt in many IDP communities. Yet in this difficult atmosphere for IDW, women's organizations have emerged as important actors in assessing the various needs of women and other IDPs. IDP women's organizations have begun to network and demand increased rights from the Georgian government, which has not properly addressed their plight. Put another way, women are not simply victims of war but have worked through women's organizations to ameliorate their own and their communities' conditions.

Many questions about IDW organizations remain. In August 1999, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) is scheduled to send a team to assess these organizations as part of a larger evaluation series examining the roles of women's organizations in postconflict and wartorn countries.¹⁷ The team plans to address several critical questions that were not answered in the few existing assessments of Georgian IDW organizations. Namely, have IDW been empowered by their organizational activity? Are groups becoming more politically involved or have their functions been primarily service-oriented? Are any IDW organizations contributing to the peace-making process between the Georgian and Abkhazian governments and people? Conversely, do any IDW groups exhibit rightwing/nationalistic political leanings, particularly in light of nonresolution of both the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts? What evolution lies ahead for these groups? Also critical to the evaluation,

¹⁶ Georgia's GDP growth in 1998 was predicted to be over 10 percent, according to the World Bank.

¹⁷ In addition to Georgia, country studies are planned for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Liberia, Mozambique, El Salvador and Guatemala. For a detailed summary of the study and its conceptual framework, see Kumar, Silver, Buck, and McNulty 1998.

how has international assistance affected these organizations? Has it helped or hindered their growth? What lessons can be drawn for donors who hope to provide assistance to these groups?

The situation for the displaced in Georgia is continually changing. Recent reports have confirmed that hundreds of IDPs have crossed the border and returned to their homes in Abkhazia, despite the fact that peace has yet to be formalized by the Georgian and Abkhazian governments (Fuller 1999). Although a peace agreement remains elusive, IDW groups will undoubtedly play important roles when Georgians from Abkhazia and South Ossetia are eventually repatriated *en masse*. On the local level, women's organizations may well use their service provision skills to aid in the community-rebuilding processes. On the national level, they may continue to pressure the Georgian, South Ossetian, and Abkhazian governments for the needed assistance to their communities. In any case, the future formerly internally displaced Georgian women will likely be as involved in the postconflict period as they were as IDW.

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