



**HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION  
IN THE VILLAGES ADJACENT TO THE  
OCCUPATION LINE OF TSKHINVALI REGION**

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# Human Rights Situation in the Villages Adjacent to the Occupation Line of Tskhinvali Region



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NGO Human Rights Center (HRC) was established on December 10, 1996, in Tbilisi. The objectives of HRC are to strengthen the respect for human rights, and fundamental freedoms and to promote peace processes in Georgia. In order to achieve the above objectives, it is of utmost importance that the awareness of the public is raised, and human rights are observed, further the government respects the rule of law and principles of transparency and distribution of power and ensures the elimination of discrimination at all levels.

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## INTRODUCTION

The report below presents the human rights situation in the villages adjacent to the occupation line between the occupied territory of Tskhinvali region and Georgia controlled territory in the period of April 2023 to September 2023.

The Report describes various facts of human rights violation by the members of the occupation regime nearby the division line of the occupied South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region: illegal borderization, restricted access to natural resources for locals, violation of property rights and deteriorated social-economic situation caused by the occupation.

In the frame of the project, HRC representatives visited 18 villages adjacent to the occupation line.

## THE PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED DURING THE VISITS

In the frame of the project, the HRC representatives visited the conflict-affected villages, where they met local people and heard the problems of the people living near the division line.

**During field visits, the HRC representatives visited the following villages in Gori, Kareli and Kaspi municipalities: Kveshi, Plavi, Plavismani, Karbi, Kere, Kvemo Artsevi, Ergneti, Karapila, Siribari, Zardiantkari, Atotsi, Avlevi, Knolevi, Koda, Abano, Tchvrinisi, Gulikaantubani, Bredze.** During the visits, they met local population and visited places where their entry was safe.

After meeting local people, Human Rights Center petitioned the local and central authorities to advocate the problems identified during the visits. The organization multiple times requested public information from respective state agencies.

It is worth to mention, that together with the problems caused by the occupation, the locals complained about social-economic hardship. **It should be taken into account that because of hard life, young people migrate from the villages. The interviews with the young people, who still live in the villages showed that they also plan to migrate.** Agriculture and cattle-breeding is the main source of income for the population in the abovementioned villages. The locals, who are farming in the villages, face many problems because of occupation. The creeping occupation significantly restrict their access to

agricultural plots, forests and pastures that disable them to develop their farms and negatively impact on their social-economic state.

Locals have limited access to the small part of agricultural land, which is on the Georgia-controlled territory, because it is dangerous to cultivate plots near the occupation line. Additionally, cultivation of the lands is hindered because of absence of irrigation water. **During the field visits, the HRC representatives identified the infrastructural problems too, which are serious burden for the people living adjacent to the occupation line and need to be resolved timely.**

Access to adequate health service is serious problem in the villages adjacent to the occupation line. Although there are outpatients in majority of the villages, the locals do not get adequate medical services there. The doctors do not get patients in the local outpatients everyday so the locals have to go to nearby towns to get medical consultations. Irregular municipal transport in some villages creates problem for the locals to go to doctors. Absence of pharmacies was among one of the major problems identified in the villages. During the meetings, locals complained that they have to go to the nearby towns to buy medicines that is costly and difficult for them.

During the field visits, the HRC representatives observed that small streets inside the villages are not repaired and during rains it is difficult to walk and drive there. There are no street illumination in some villages.

Inhabitants of some villages complained that their villages do not have status of mountainous settlement. The population does not know what the criteria for granting the status to the villages are and why they cannot enjoy the benefits like other inhabitants of mountainous settlements<sup>1</sup>. People are not aware how the altitude of the villages are calculated.

To improve the social-economic situation in the villages adjacent to the occupation line, it is critically important that local and central governments worked in coordination and proactively. They must have close communication with the population and conduct frequent meetings with them. Due to the creeping occupation, when there is increased threat, the problems of the people living in these villages must be priority. The youth must be employed to reduce migration process.

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<sup>1</sup> See the Law of Georgia on the Development of Mountainous Regions

**Inhabitants of the villages adjacent to the occupation line noted that they feel insecure because there are facts when locals are captured. People cannot take their cattle to the pastures because they are afraid to approach the occupation line. There is no police checkpoints in the villages adjacent to the occupation line that make the locals feel more insecure.**

During the field visits in the villages located in the Georgia controlled territory adjacent to the occupation line, the representatives of the organization cannot enter the villages without the preliminary permissions from the respective state bodies. The law enforcement bodies request the members of the nongovernmental organizations to send preliminary notices to their ministries about the planned visits. Unless such notices are submitted beforehand, the visitors may face obstacles to enter the villages adjacent to the occupation line. This requirement refers to the villages, where there are police checkpoints at the entries. Besides that, the police officers accompany cars of nongovernmental organizations into the villages to ensure their safety.

## **VISIT IN THE VILLAGES OF GORI MUNICIPALITY**

On April 28, 2023, HRC representatives visited the villages of Gori municipality adjacent to the occupation line: Kvemo Artsevi, Kveshi, Plavismani, Plavi, Kere and Karbi. The locals informed them about the main problems they have in the village. The interviews revealed that besides the problems caused by occupation, they have to cope with social-economic hardship.

The inhabitants of the abovementioned villages underlined the problem of getting funding for the students from their village in accordance with the law. As they clarified, often, students from the villages adjacent to the division line cannot get state funding of high education. The locals stated that several dozen students could not get funding in the frame of the state program.

Inhabitants of **Kvemo Artsevi village** complained that their village is not perceived to be a village adjacent to the occupation line and it does not have status of mountainous region either. During the field visit, the HRC representatives identified infrastructural problems too: the kindergarten was closed in the village and merged to the kindergarten in Kveshi village; the internal roads need reparation; the outpatients is located far from the village

and locals cannot go there; the square was arranged on low place and during rains the area gets flooded.

**In the Kveshi village** locals said lack of irrigation water is their main problem. They said the shields, which release the irrigation water, are located in the so-called neutral zone but the representatives of the occupation forces arrest people if they enter the area. Regardless the threat, they have to risk to irrigate plots. The locals added that they are supplied with the drinking water in shifts.

Inhabitants of the villages **Plavi and Plavismani** mentioned lack of public transport as the main problem. The resolution of the problem depends on the decision of the owners of transport means.

**In the Kere village**, lack of kindergarten and unrepaired internal roads were mentioned as main problems. The locals complained about recently opened school and wished to have a kindergarten in their village.

**In the Karbi village**, like in Plavismani, the irregular public transport movement was mentioned as the key problem as the locals cannot get employed because of this problem. They complained about the water supply too. The locals said the payment system of water supply bills is not well-arranged either.

To advocate the problem in state funding program for the students from the villages adjacent to the occupation line, Human Rights Center addressed the Ministry of Education and Science and requested public information about the program<sup>2</sup>. The organization was notified that any student living alongside the division line can enroll the state program and apply to the Ministry within the determined timeframe to get funding. Additionally, the Ministry clarified that the students, who could not get funding, were able to submit applications later too.

## VISIT IN THE VILLAGES OF KARELI MUNICIPALITY

On June 2, 2023, the representatives of Human Rights Center visited the village adjacent to the occupation line in Kareli municipality: Atotsi, Avlevi and Knolevi. During the field visit, they learned that like in other villages, the population cope with the social-economic hardship alongside the other problems caused by the occupation.

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<sup>2</sup> See the HRC letter 15.05.2023



Inhabitants of Atotsi village mentioned several infrastructural problems, namely: lack of kindergarten, fitness ground and equipment, playground for children and bus-stops. Additionally, they said the public transport does not move in their village. After 15:00 pm they cannot use transport because mini-bus stops movement. Inhabitants of Avlevi village added that their village does not have a status of mountainous region and farmers do not have access to agricultural equipment. They said the village must have the status because their next village Knolevi holds it. The Avlevi residents noted their village meet all criteria for the mountainous settlement.

In Knolevi village, like in Atotsi, irregular public transport movement is one of the main problems for what the locals face problem of transportation and employment.

After the visit, the HRC team petitioned the Kareli municipality city hall and requested information whether they plan any projects/programs to eradicate the problems identified in Kareli municipality<sup>3</sup>. The letter was sent to the administration of the State Attorney in Shida Kartli region to request public information about granting the status of mountainous settlement to Avlevi village<sup>4</sup>. The organization also requested information why the village was refused to get the status. HRC asked whether the regional governor's administration planned to raise the question of the status for Avlevi village in front of the council. The administration of the regional governor answered that they had requested the status of mountainous settlement for Avlevi village but because of insufficient hypsometric height (lower than 800 meter) the village could not get the status<sup>5</sup>.

## VISIT IN THE VILLAGES OF KASPI MUNICIPALITY

On July 13, 2023 the HRC representatives visited the villages of Kaspi municipality adjacent to the occupation line: Karapila, Saribari and Zadiantkari. In these villages, like in other villages adjacent to the division line, people have grave social-economic problems that negatively affect the everyday life of the families. Because of hardship, young people actively migrate from the villages.

During the field visit, local people named several infrastructural problems, namely: lack of children's playground, street illumination, garbage bins and irrigation water supply. They particularly underlined the lack of public transport. As locals clarified, they cannot

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<sup>3</sup> See HRC letter dated by 06.06.2023

<sup>4</sup> See the HRC letter dated by 06.06.2023

<sup>5</sup> See the letter of the administration of state attorney in Shida Kartli region dated by 13.06.2023

have regular transport to the municipal center. There are no pharmacies and outpatients in the abovementioned villages; because of lack of public transport the elderly and sick people are left without the access to adequate healthcare. As village inhabitants noted, there is no kindergarten and school in their villages. Local school-children go to the schools in the neighboring villages by buses. As for the children under the school age, the bus does not transport them to the kindergartens in the neighboring villages and parents have to take them to the kindergarten in Rene village that is difficult and costly for the families.

The inhabitants of the villages of Karapila and Saribari, alongside the abovementioned problems, stated that their villages do not have status of mountainous settlement and respectively have limited access to agricultural technique. The locals said they wish their villages had the status, particularly when their neighboring Zadiantkari village has it. They believe, besides the hypsometric height, the villages meet all other criteria necessary for the status of mountainous settlement and it can offer them many benefits.

When traveling in the villages, the HRC representatives had to ask the names of the village because there were no name banners installed in any of the abovementioned villages.

In the frame of the project, the HRC petitioned the Kaspi municipality city hall and requested the public information whether they plan any projects/programs to resolve the identified problems in the concrete villages; what are the planned projects and programs and when the city hall plans to implement them<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, the organization requested the information whether the Kaspi municipality city hall had petitioned the National Council on Mountain Development to grant status of mountainous settlement to the villages of Karapila and Saribari as an exception (notwithstanding the hypsometric height) or if they plan to petition the Council in the near future<sup>7</sup>.

In reply to the letter, the Kaspi municipality city hall answered that they had started working to resolve the problems and will inform the organization about next steps. As for the status of mountainous settlement, they clarified that the concrete settlements do not meet the criteria set for the status<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> See the letter of HRC dated by 19.07.2023

<sup>7</sup> See the letter of HRC dated by 19.07.2023

<sup>8</sup> See the letter of the Kaspi municipality city hall dated by 30.08.2023

## VISIT IN THE VILLAGES OF KARELI MUNICIPALITY

On September 18, 2023 HRC representatives visited the villages of Kareli municipality adjacent to the occupation line, namely: Bredza, Koda, Abano, Tchvrinisi, Atotsi (Gulikaantubani). During the field visit, the locals complained about unemployment, bad irrigation system that disable the farmers to cultivate their plots and get harvest because the draught.

**In the Abano village**, the inhabitants mentioned lack of the mountainous settlement status as the main problem. They wish the village had the status and believe that Abano village meets all criteria determined for the mountainous settlement. The status will offer them particular advantages. The locals mentioned several infrastructural problems too, namely: lack of irrigation and drinking water system; lack of outpatients (they visit outpatient in Koda village); poor street illumination and lack of speed breakers on the road nearby the new square that creates threat for the children playing there.

**In the village of Tchvrinisi**, like in Abano village, the lack of mountainous settlement was mentioned as the main problem. There is no outpatient in their village either (they visit the outpatients in Bredza village), there is no public transport and cannot irrigate their agricultural plots that is very problematic for the locals. During the field visit, the inhabitants of the **Bredza village** also complained about the lack of status of mountainous settlement and lack of drinking water supply in the village.

**In the village of Atotsi (Gulikaantubani)** the locals complained about the lack of drainage channels and irrigation system.

**In the village of Koda** the inhabitants said there was no irrigation system in the village. They noted that because of the Russian occupation, the locals lost access to their agricultural plots; instead they did not get any compensations/alternative plots from the state. There is no shop and pharmacy in the village that also create serious problems for the locals.

Human Rights Center petitioned the municipality authorities about the identified problems and requested to address them adequately<sup>9</sup>. Additionally, the HRC petitioned the administration of the state attorney in Shida Kartli region to issue information about

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<sup>9</sup> See the letter of HRC dated by 21.09.2023

granting the status of mountainous settlement to the abovementioned villages in Kareli municipality<sup>10</sup>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*To improve the social-economic and human rights situation in the abovementioned villages it is necessary to fulfil the below presented recommendations.*

### ***To the Ministry of Education and Science:***

- To timely inform the students living adjacent the occupation line about the education funding program for them. In case of later submitted applications, they shall take the objective reasons into account and finance the students.

### ***To the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Welfare and the Kareli municipality city hall:***

- To petition the Council to resolve the issue of granting the status of mountainous settlement to the villages of Abano, Tchvrinisi and Bredza so that the inhabitants of these villages enjoyed the benefits under this status;
- The municipal authority shall arrange sport playground and speed breakers in Abano village;
- The municipal authority shall arrange drinking and irrigation water systems in Abano village;
- To open outpatients with specialists in Abano village;
- To arrange drainage system and irrigation water system in the villages of Atotsi (Gulikaantubani) and Koda;

### ***To the Kaspi municipality city hall and the Ministry of Education and Science:***

- To petition the Council to consider granting the status of mountainous settlement to the villages of Karapila and Saribari so that the inhabitants of these villages enjoyed the benefits under the status;
- To arrange the name banners in the villages of Karapila, Saribari and Zadiantkari;
- To timely arrange the children's playground, street illuminations, garbage bins and irrigation water system in the villages of Karapila, Saribari and Zadiantkari;
- To ensure that locals had unlimited access to public transport;

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<sup>10</sup> See the letter of HRC dated by 21.09.2023

- To build kindergarten and school.

***To the Gori Municipality City Hall:***

- To build kindergarten in Kvemo Artsevi village so that children of pre-school age do not have to go to kindergartens in the neighboring villages;
- To petition to the Council to consider the granting of the status of mountainous settlement to Kvemo Artsevi so that the inhabitants of the village enjoyed the benefits under the status;
- To provide public transport for the inhabitants of Karpi and Plavismani villages so that the locals were able to transport without obstacles and get employed.