Statement by H.E. Mr. Kaha Imnadze,
Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations

United Nations General Assembly

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Mr. President,
Excellences,
Distinguished Delegates,

Today I have the honour to introduce the draft Resolution on "Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia", contained in document A/68/L.47, under Agenda Item 34 "Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development", and I seek the Assembly's support for it.

In fact, I seek your support for a principle; for a principle of morality and of international law, for a humanitarian cause and to once again ascertain that it is inadmissible to use force to change demography, redraw borders, and deny the population its right to return.

This Resolution is to reaffirm the inalienable right of all forcibly displaced persons of all ethnicities and religious beliefs, evicted from Abkhazia, Georgia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, Georgia to return to their places of origin in a voluntary, safe and dignified manner; and respect their property rights as defined in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.
Hundreds of thousands displaced persons, ethnic Georgians, Abkhaz, Greeks, Estonians, Ossetians, whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim are still denied access to their homes, as a result of waves of displacement.

We ought to respond to their hopes and expectations. We ought to support their dream of the day that they will return to heal their wounds and restore their broken neighbourhoods. We ought to attempt to vindicate their sincere belief that resolute calls of the international community will bear fruit.

Excellencies,

In his 2014 report the UN Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon underscores: “It is essential to recognize return as both a human right and a humanitarian issue that must be addressed irrespective of any solution to an underlying conflict” (A/68/868, para. 45). We thank the Secretary-General for this reminder. When introducing this Resolution every year, we leave politics aside and focus exclusively on the humanitarian dimension of the problem. Its primary focus on human rights is a deliberate choice to avoid political speculation when the fundamental rights of the displaced are at stake.

Given the scale of displacement and the time passed, the urgency is heightened for ultimate response to address the needs of those displaced.

This Resolution and the subsequent report of the Secretary-General serve as the reference points in the Geneva International Discussions which remain the only platform between Georgia and Russia pursuant to the six-point ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008 for addressing the security and humanitarian issues with the United Nations, the OSCE and the European Union present. This Resolution, which was first adopted in May 2008 - months before the Geneva International Discussions were established - reinvigorates and reinforces the Geneva format and complements the work on humanitarian issues. It encourages the participants in the Geneva Talks to redouble their efforts to ensure respect for human rights and create favourable conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return. It further confirms one of the main principles, as underlined in the above quote from the Secretary-General’s report, that the political dimension of the Geneva Discussions should not hijack the fundamental human rights of those concerned.
The draft Resolution before us, therefore, is not a political tool aimed at obstructing the ongoing negotiations, as one delegation repeatedly and misleadingly suggests. To the contrary, it forms the basis for respecting the human rights of all those uprooted from Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.

Regrettably, the development of a comprehensive timetable remains unresolved. To this end, the Secretary-General calls on those involved in the Geneva Discussions to engage constructively on the issue, building on international law and the relevant principles.

My Government is committed to those talks and to the principle of the non-use of force - a pledge my country has made unilaterally and reiterated on numerous occasions at the highest level, still expecting to be reciprocated by the Russian Federation.

Dear Colleagues,

The Government of Georgia continues its efforts to remedy the plight of IDPs, in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, without prejudice to their right to return. Implementation of the State strategy on internally displaced persons (IDPs) and its updated Action Plan, as well as the new Law on “Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories of Georgia”, brought significant improvements with regard to the issues of providing appropriate living conditions to the IDPs, financial assistance, proper registration and procedures for timely granting an IDP status to every affected person, family reunion, reassuring the right of property restitution, providing appropriate healthcare, education and employment in a non-discriminatory manner etc.

Excellencies,

Let me briefly update you on the current situation on the ground. Continued installation of barbwire fences and expansion of the zone of occupation have caused further displacement, cutting of the entire villages and dividing the families living in adjacent areas. It is particularly alarming that some representatives of authorities in control in the occupied regions, and most recently in Abkhazia, have been periodically calling for further discriminatory measures against ethnic Georgians.
The gravity of the situation was also witnessed and highlighted by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms. Navi Pillay who traveled to Georgia last month. She made a clear reference to the absence of any internationally mandated monitoring mechanism and nearly full isolation of those regions. Referring particularly to Tskhinvali region as "...one of the most inaccessible places on earth, with no access permitted for international agencies, except the ICRC". Ms. Pillay underlined the devastating consequences of "borderization" activities along the Administrative Boundary Lines "further impeding the right to freedom of movement for IDPs, and the enjoyment of rights to property, water, health, education and access to religious and cultural sites".

It is totally unacceptable that Ms. Pillay and Dr. Chaloka Beyani, Special Rapporteur on IDP Human Rights were repeatedly denied access to the occupied regions, contrary to the spirit of this Resolution, which calls for unimpeded access for humanitarian activities.

Dear Colleagues,

Let me conclude my remarks by what we have said before: each and every one of those hundreds of thousands carries a dream in their hearts, the dream of returning to the soil that nurtured generations of their ancestors and of sharing it with their children.

This year, the issue of security in the GUAM area and the problem of forcible displacement worldwide have topped the international agenda. In this light, I believe, today the General Assembly will be even more united, principled and decisive in its support to ascertain the fundamental principles enshrined in this Resolution.

I do hope that you will add your voice to strengthen this humanitarian cause and will vote in favour of the Resolution, in favor of International Law, moral principles of humanity, and, ultimately, the UN Charter!

I thank you.