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

United Nations General Assembly

New York, 3 June 2015

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Mme. President,

Excellences,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year again I take this podium to address a very important humanitarian issue for my country and solicit your support for 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/69/L.69, under Agenda Item 33 "Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development”.

Since its first adoption in 2008, the Resolution has drawn increasing international support due to its human appeal and humanitarian goals. In principle, each of your votes in favour is a vote in support of the fundamental humanitarian values based on the provisions of international law, including the UN Charter, to which we all subscribe.

Each vote sends a powerful signal to every displaced person in Georgia. In a country of 4.5 million, around 400 thousand, 10% of my country's population has been forced to flee their homes and remain unable to return due to circumstances entirely beyond their control.

With this Resolution, my Government aims to galvanize international support for our citizens of all ethnicities and religions expelled from the two Georgian regions, Abkhazia
and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, reaffirm from this highest platform their right to safe, dignified and voluntary return to the places of their origin and to acknowledge their inalienable property rights.

We, as the international community, have moral responsibility to come together and demonstrate our adherence to the humanitarian cause that transcends the case of a single country and is universal in its nature. To our dismay, currently 50 million people are displaced worldwide - the highest figure ever recorded since World War II.

Excellencies,

The plight of the Georgian IDPs and refugees dates back to the early 1990s. They were forced to flee in search of security and safety. As OCHA so expressively describes, becoming a forcibly displaced person “doesn’t just mean losing the roof over your head. It’s about losing your connection to your family, to your source of income...; it’s about losing access to the network of people around you who you would normally turn to in times of hardship.”

Many of you have seen the same sentiments vividly expressed in the photo exhibition "A story of Internal Displacement Captured on Camera" on a display one flight down in this building. Those powerful images tell a story of my countrymen who left everything behind while forced to flee their homes.

The Government of Georgia makes every effort to alleviate their burden and ensure decent conditions for them, in accordance with the National Strategy and its relevant Action Plan, without prejudice to their unalienable right to safe and dignified return.

Dear Colleagues,

The present Resolution is not directed against any party, nor does it aim to point fingers at those responsible for forced displacement. Its primary focus on human rights is a deliberate choice to avoid political speculation when the fundamental rights of the displaced are at stake.

The text of the resolution remains unchanged because its provisions continue to remain unfulfilled. And for this very reason we need this resolution as an important international legal instrument. The Resolution itself and the reporting mechanism constitute indispensable instruments for the United Nations to remain seized with the matter.

As the Resolution shows its firm commitment to the Geneva International Discussions – the forum mandated by the 12 August 2008 ceasefire agreement between Georgia and the
Russian Federation to address security issues in Georgia - it gives a necessary impetus to the participants to take immediate steps to realize the main goals of the present Resolution in practice. The UN Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, also highlights that “the Geneva international discussions remain the only forum for relevant stakeholders to meet and address the issues identified in resolution 68/274". The Resolution and subsequent report of the UN Secretary-General serve as the reference points in the Geneva International Discussions and complement the work on humanitarian issues.

Let me reiterate, that my Government is committed to the peace talks and will remain engaged in the discussions in good faith to attain tangible results.

Excellencies,

Let me briefly draw your attention to the ongoing situation on the ground.

The so called "integration treaties" recently signed by the Russian Federation with the occupation regimes in Tskhinvali and Sokhumi, undermines all principles of international law and further exacerbate security and humanitarian situation. Large-scale installation of barbwires and fences along the occupation line has intensified, already exceeding 60 km. This artificial obstacles separate families and communities, significantly affect the livelihoods of the local population and prevent people-to-people contacts. Due to the restrictions on the freedom of movement, the displaced population is not allowed to even visit the graves of their family during religious holidays.

While there is some progress in provision of medical services, still, on a number of tragic occasions people seeking medical assistance died en route to hospital, when denied passage through the occupation line. From our end, we continue to remain committed to provide free medical care as well as other government services to those residing on occupied territories.

Dear Colleagues,

It is particularly alarming that no international monitoring mechanisms are allowed inside the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. Last year the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs were denied access to the occupied territories. This year Mr. Juan E. Mendez, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, also was not allowed in.
Excellencies,

When introducing this Resolution every year, we leave politics aside and focus exclusively on the humanitarian dimension of the problem. As the UN Secretary-General, H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon rightfully reiterates in his 2015 report, A/69/909, “the right of return and its exercise by an IDP cannot be directly linked to political questions or the conclusion of the peace agreement. 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.”

We thank the Secretary-General for this reminder and in this light, I urge you once again to support the fundamental principle of the right of return and vote in favour of this resolution.

I thank you.