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## Commissioner Hammarberg releases his special report on the human rights situation in the areas affected by the South Ossetia conflict

Strasbourg, 08.09.2008 – The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg released today his special report on the human rights situation in the areas affected by the South Ossetia conflict.

"This is a humanitarian disaster" he said. "The conflict has had a devastating effect on the human rights of the population. Thousands of people are still displaced waiting for security and help to rebuild damaged houses. *This requires that the principle of the right to voluntary return is upheld, fully recognized by all decision-makers and all the victims informed of their options.*

Unfortunately, there is a need to prepare for the grave risk that several thousand, perhaps as many as 30,000, will not be able to return home within the foreseeable future. They must be cared for and assisted to lead a life as normal as possible. *It is therefore needed that material resources are allocated and that the assistance is well organised by the national and international agencies and that the displaced persons themselves are invited to participate in the decision-making.*

One major threat against the return is the fact that large areas are affected by bombs, shells, unexploded ordnances and other dangerous remnants of the warfare. Systematic demining must be undertaken as a matter of highest priority. The population must be fully informed about the dangers and how to avoid them. *Demining efforts that have started must continue and international expertise are welcomed to contribute."*

The Commissioner also highlighted that "the policing vacuum in the 'buffer zone' has to be addressed. *This requires agreements between the Russian and Georgian governments and it seems necessary that representatives of the international community contributes to an active and prompt solution, for instance through providing on an interim basis a contingent of police advisors."*

Furthermore, Commissioner Hammarberg stressed that "the efforts to trace persons detained or in hiding must continue and further exchanges made. A system must be established to assemble and act upon information about people missing. The mechanism established for exchanges should be strengthened. *The two key negotiators and the ICRC must be given all necessary support."*

Finally the Commissioner concluded saying that "the remaining problem about international access in the area must be resolved. Apart from cease-fire monitors and police presence there is a need of a systematic and competent international contribution to human rights monitoring. Efforts must also be planned for a systematic, impartial collection of evidence about violations committed in connection with the hostilities. *This needs urgent contacts between international human rights organisations in order to develop a package of international contribution which would be effective for the genuine protection of human rights in the area."*

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**A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 47 member states.**

The [report](#) is based on the visit to Vladikavkaz, Tskhinvali, Gori, Tbilisi and Moscow that Commissioner Hammarberg carried out from 22 to 29 August.

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The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent, non-judicial institution within the Council of Europe, mandated to promote awareness of, and respect for, human rights in the 47 member States of the Organisation. Elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the present Commissioner, Mr Thomas Hammarberg, took up his function on 1 April 2006.