

# Press Release

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## Commissioner Hammarberg calls for a continued and meaningful international presence in Abkhazia

Strasbourg, 13.02.2009 - The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg, concluded on 12 February 2009 his fourth follow up mission to areas affected by the South Ossetia conflict, during which he visited Tbilisi, Sokhumi and Gali.

During a press conference held in Tbilisi at the end of the visit, the Commissioner called upon all relevant actors to ensure a continued United Nations presence after 15 February 2009, when the current UN mission mandate expires.

"All the interlocutors I met have underlined the need for an international presence in Abkhazia" said Commissioner Hammarberg. "A mere technical extension of the UN mission for some months is not enough. The UN presence must be substantive and meaningful also in terms of providing security and humanitarian and human rights protection to the population. The coming months must be used by the concerned parties to agree on concrete tasks in this regard for the UN presence in Abkhazia."

The Commissioner also called upon all concerned parties to give free and unhindered access to the international organisations to all war-affected areas, from all directions, at all times, so that the already victimised population can be provided with all necessary humanitarian assistance, including the provision of food and sustainable housing as components of their adequate standard of living.

"It is also imperative that the displaced persons are informed of their options and rights and consulted in the devising of any assistance plan to them", concluded the Commissioner.

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