

## **Annex II**

### **Joint assessment mission to the Gali district**

**(20-24 November 2000)**

From 20 to 24 November 2000, the joint assessment mission to the Gali district was carried out, under the aegis of the United Nations and within the framework of the United Nations-led Geneva peace process for the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. The mission evaluated conditions relevant to the safe, secure and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons to the Gali district, including those who have already returned. It was envisaged that those efforts would foster greater international support for the process of return and contribute to the general stability in the area.

The mission, carried out at the expert level, was led by the head of the United Nations Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia, and the deputy head of the mission was a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mission to Georgia. The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Headquarters in New York, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Office of the High Commissioner for National Minorities, the Council of Europe and the European Commission also provided representatives, and a representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross was present as an observer. Logistical support was provided by UNOMIG.

Before the mission commenced its work, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the head of the OSCE mission in Georgia, carried out consultations with the Georgian and Abkhaz sides and agreed on the terms of reference for the mission. In addition, the United Nations held close consultations with the Abkhaz side concerning the programme for the work of the mission.

In the course of its work, the mission met with the head of administration of the Gali district and other district-level officials. It visited all 24 villages of the Gali district and spoke with the heads of administration of the villages, members of the Abkhaz law enforcement agencies, the Commonwealth of Independent States peacekeeping force, school directors and teachers, health officials, members of village self-defence units and local residents. The mission also talked to district-level representatives of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia government-in-exile, who are based in Zugdidi.

Preliminary information and ideas resulting from the mission's work follow, pending the submission of its final report and recommendations.

### **Preliminary information**

#### **United Nations Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia, branch office**

The mission found that the human rights situation throughout the Gali district was precarious. On this basis, the mission would find it useful for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to seek the consent of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides to the opening in Gali of a branch office of the United Nations Human

Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia. "Consent" should be understood as more than mere acquiescence. It should include active support and facilitation by both sides and the acceptance of accountability by the Abkhaz side for the responsiveness of the Gali district-level partners of the branch office staff. The branch office would function on the basis of the same mandate as the United Nations Human Rights Office. As a part of the implementation of this mandate, the Office would formulate proposals for improving the overall human rights situation in the Gali district for possible submission by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to the two sides.

#### **Law enforcement**

The mission has found that while many interlocutors report that the overall security situation has improved in recent months, there is still a lack of effective law enforcement throughout the Gali district. Possible modalities for redressing the situation may include improved training; further integration of the local population into law enforcement structures; and broader cooperation between the respective law enforcement organs of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides operating on either side of the ceasefire line. The mission recommends that the Special Representative seek additional expertise on this matter, with a view to putting forward concrete proposals to the two sides. As a first step in this direction, the Special Representative may wish to consider including as a staff member of the Gali branch of the Human Rights Office an expert in the field of law enforcement.

#### **Language of education**

The mission found that teachers and parents of school-age children in the Gali district are dissatisfied with current policies and practices governing the language of education used in Gali district schools, as a result of which many students receive only an incomplete education. Furthermore, the practices in place create obstacles for those students who wish to seek further higher education. If the present course is pursued, it might result in a situation in which some higher-level subjects, required for graduation, cannot be competently taught, and schools might then be wholly unable to grant diplomas. The mission notes that the Special Representative has engaged in consultations with the Georgian and Abkhaz sides and facilitated bilateral talks between the sides on this matter. It urges him to continue, and also to explore, at an appropriate stage, the possibilities for the provision of concrete assistance by other international organizations. The mission urges the two sides to find the political will to reach a compromise and resolve this matter in the nearest future.

#### **Social infrastructure**

The mission gained the impression that basic aspects of social infrastructure, such as health care, water supply, electricity, educational facilities and public transportation, were in poor condition. While primary responsibility for the provision of social services rests with the Administration, the Special Representative may wish to consider with relevant international and non-governmental organizations possibilities for addressing and improving those conditions.

### **Civil society**

The mission identified some noteworthy local efforts to organize as a community, particularly in the field of education. On the whole, however, the mission found that civil society was extremely weak. The mission would suggest that the Special Representative bear this issue in mind and raise it as appropriate with those in a position to help.

### **Security climate**

The mission found that most interlocutors reported that the overall security climate had improved in recent months, but at the same time remained precarious. In this context, the mission suggested that the Special Representative continue to urge the two sides to implement the provisions of the agreements they had reached on security matters and to continue their active contacts in this field through direct bilateral meetings and the weekly quadripartite meetings as necessary.

### **Reintegration of returnees**

The mission noted the view of many of its interlocutors that the local population of the Gali district was currently under-represented in various structures of local administration. The mission recommends that the Special Representative continue to raise this issue with the relevant authorities and to urge further reintegration of the returnee population, while stressing that measures of a compulsory nature should be discouraged.