**Report on Pledge**

**The effective measures to clarify the fate and whereabouts of persons**

**who have gone missing as a result of armed conflicts**

**under Coordination Mechanisms facilitated by the ICRC**

Submitted by Georgia

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The report provides brief overview of Georgia’s main advancements from 2019 to the present within the Missing Program ongoing under the aegis and with the support of the ICRC, emphasizing objectives, activities and indicators for measuring the results and progress achieved.

The phenomenon of individuals going missing as a result of armed conflicts is among the most devastating and enduring humanitarian crises. Georgia’s unwavering commitment to addressing the plight of missing persons since early 1990s, is reflected in fostering its comprehensive and collaborative efforts to mitigate the humanitarian impact of disappearance, primarily by clarifying the fate and whereabouts of missing persons and accompaniment of their families, inter alia through recommendations of the ICRC.

With this respect, significant progress have been achieved, among others, in strengthening inter-agency coordination, which combined with the enhancement of both national and humanitarian coordination mechanisms (the latter chaired by the ICRC), has markedly increased the effectiveness of the overall efforts. Prioritizing the needs and right of the families to know about the fate and whereabouts of their missing relatives, they are placed at the center of the process, by actively sustaining initiatives to gather and process essential information regarding potential burial sites. The Office of the State Minister of Georgia (SMR), serving as a national coordination institution, along with the other respective State agencies are diligently working to enhance existing opportunities to provide families of missing persons with answers regarding the fate of their loved ones.

These ongoing efforts also underscore dedication of Central Authorities of Georgia to paying tribute to the memory of/not to forget Missing persons through various activities, including public commemorations, awareness-raising, memorials and other initiatives.

Despite persistent challenges, mainly related to the passage of time and including those heightened by the COVID-19 Pandemic, the commitment remains unwavering and effective. Registration of new cases reflects families’ continued pursuit to locate loved ones that have gone missing, illustrating the enduring impact and relevance of the undertaken initiatives. The efforts to locate missing persons have intensified, driven by advancements in DNA testing, expanded research initiatives and enhanced international cooperation.

*Number of identified and handed-over human remains to the respective families*

Since 2019, a total of one-hundred and forty five (145) missing persons have been successfully identified and handed-over to their respective families. The year 2023 marked a milestone with a record annual number of identifications, totaling fifty-nine (59) individuals. Each identified missing person was accorded a dignified burial, reflecting the commitment to closure and respect for the families involved. State institutions, working in coordination with the local municipalities, ensured relevant support for every family, meeting their needs throughout specific moments, the process of hand-over and remembrance.

*Number of profiled DNA samples from the families of missing persons*

Since the year of 2019, overall number of profiled DNA samples collected from the families of missing persons amounted to seven hundred twenty seven[727]. Through the application of relevant DNA profiling capabilities and partnerships with the ICRC, Central Authorities of Georgia have demonstrated a commitment to addressing the growing necessity for identifying missing persons.

*Coordination Mechanisms*

Since 2010, two humanitarian coordination mechanisms under the auspices of and chaired by the ICRC acting as a neutral intermediary, have operated through strictly humanitarian manner to address the needs of missing persons and their respective families. The joint continued engagement of the participants within the Coordination Mechanism remain critical to providing answers to the families of missing persons, finally relieving them from the ambiguity of a loss.

Both Coordination Mechanisms, mindful of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic and given the specificity of their operation, have succeeded to convene more than a dozen meetings during the reporting period.

*Inter-agency Commission*

The Inter-agency Commission for the search of Persons Missing as a Result of Armed Conflicts, chaired by the Office of the State Minister of Georgia (chair - State Minister’s level), comprises representatives from relevant State institutions (members – Deputy Ministers’ level). Commission was established to coordinate and sustain the efforts in determining the fate and whereabouts of missing individuals. Since its inception in 2019, the Commission has convened a total of 6 (six) meetings, fostering effective collaboration and ensuring the fulfillment of its mandated responsibilities. Along with and between the high-level meetings of the Commission, office of the State Minister has consistently engaged in frequent communications with institutions at working/experts’ level, maintaining regular interactions. This proactive approach has been implemented to optimally address inquiries made by families of missing persons. In this capacity, SMR has additionally functioned as a liaison to facilitate connections between families and relevant institutions in accordance with their specific needs.

*Families and Informational Sessions*

The SMR, within its enhanced capacity of coordinating the outreach efforts to engage with the families of Missing Persons, held a number of meetings with families in different formats, including informational sessions, in Tbilisi, as well as throughout various regions of Georgia. These sessions, chaired by the State Minister/the Deputy State Minister, were designed to: providing families with respective necessary information related to the process of implementation of the Missing Program; eliciting their needs and interests regarding the search and identification of their loved ones; contributing to both on-site and following solutions to address the challenges they encounter.

*Commemoration*

The Central Authorities of Georgia have upheld a longstanding practice, by assuming responsibility for organization and hosting commemorative events dedicated to missing persons, specifically International Day of the Disappeared (30th August) and Icon Day (8th December – day for the icon created to honor the memory of disappeared). In acknowledgement of the significance of these commemorative events for families and public awareness-raising, they were organized in major cities throughout Georgia, including Tbilisi, Gori, Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Zugdidi and Batumi. The aforementioned events were planned with consideration for the expressed preferences of the affected families, while simultaneously maintaining continuity with previously established activities.

*Hand-over Ceremony*

The unprecedented handover/burial ceremony organized by the Central Authorities of Georgia for identified missing persons stands as yet another symbolic demonstration of the collective commitment and compassion of the Central Authorities of Georgia. This dignified ceremony provides a public platform for all to pay tribute to the deceased and extend heartfelt condolences to their grieving families. It underscores the unwavering dedication of Central Authorities of Georgia to honoring the memory of those who have gone missing, ensuring they receive a dignified farewell. This ceremony not only fosters solidarity within the community but also serves as a profound reminder of a shared humanity and the imperative to uphold dignity and compassion in all aspects of societal responsibilities.

*Memorialization*

In order to commemorate missing persons, demonstrate support to their families, and raise public awareness about the issue of disappearance, Central Authorities of Georgia attaches particular importance to memorial activities. Memorial Monument dedicated to Missing Persons was installed in Tbilisi in 2021 with the support of the ICRC, along with similar existing in various regions of Georgia serving as tangible reminders of the issue of disappearance.

Currently 1,985 persons are reported missing (with over 2,300 persons in 2019).

The Central Authorities of Georgia have undertaken commitment to gradually take over more responsibilities and certain functions aimed at further increase of efficiency of the Missing Program, based on the recommendations derived from a strategic review initiated by the ICRC (2019). Up-to-date around 40 various thematic working meetings were held between representatives of Central Authorities of Georgia and the ICRC at different levels in such dimensions as: s*earch and assessment, communication with families of missing persons, forensics, data management etc.* to facilitate coordination and advancing humanitarian efforts effectively.