



**Submission by Human Rights Watch  
to the Committee on the Rights of the Child  
on Georgia  
*82<sup>nd</sup> pre-sessional, 2018***

This submission relates to the review of Georgia under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It focuses on the issue of the protection of students, teachers, and schools in situations of armed conflict.

Human Rights Watch documented numerous cases of attacks on schools in the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia carried out by Georgian forces, South Ossetian Forces and Russian Forces during the August 2008 war. This included reports from witnesses of Russian aircraft making several strikes on and near School No. 7 in Gori city in August 2008. According to one witness, about a hundred Georgian military reservists were in the yard of the school when it was attacked. In a further case, Human Rights Watch documented an attack on School No. 12 in the southern part of Tskhinvali, which was seriously damaged by Georgian fire after militias had taken up positions there.<sup>1</sup>

Human Rights Watch also conducted research in the Gali district of Abkhazia, another breakaway region, from June 2009 through March 2011, looking into the situation of spontaneous ethnic Georgian returnees there. We found that access to education was restricted in the form of schooling carried out in the Georgian-language. Prior to the conflict in the 1990s, Georgian was the language of instruction for almost all schools in the Gali district. However, since 1995, the Abkhaz authorities have gradually introduced Russian as the main language of instruction, reducing the availability of Georgian language education. This education policy created barriers to education, as the majority of

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<sup>1</sup> "Up In Flames: Humanitarian Law Violations and Civilian Victims in the Conflict over South Ossetia," Human Rights Watch, January 23, 2009, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/01/23/flames/humanitarian-law-violations-and-civilian-victims-conflict-over-south> (accessed November 8, 2018).

school-age children living in Gali district did not speak Russian. The policy has also had an affect on the quality of education as there was not enough qualified Russian-speaking teachers in the Gali district to teach in Russian. Teachers and parents were concerned at the time that as the Abkhaz authorities devoted more resources to ensuring Russian was the language of instruction in Gali, the few remaining Georgian-language schools would disappear altogether.<sup>2</sup>

The issue is ongoing. According to the consolidated report on the conflict in Georgia prepared by the Council of Europe Secretary General, “the gradual prohibition of teaching of/in the Georgian language [has] continued to give rise to serious concerns and affect the quality of education.”<sup>3</sup> Since 2015, instruction in Russian instead of the Georgian language is now offered from grades one to seven, in all 11 schools in the Lower Gali. In grades eight to eleven, the language of instruction remains Georgian, however the de facto authorities have declared they will replace it with Russian by 2022. The report details that the teaching of the Georgian language and literature has been reduced to two to three classes per week and the policy is reportedly enforced through inspections.<sup>4</sup>

Georgia has recently been a supporter of protecting students, teachers, and schools during times of armed conflict. It was among the first countries to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration<sup>5</sup> and thereby committing itself to using the *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict* as a practical tool to guide their behavior during military operations.<sup>6</sup>

Human Rights Watch recommends that the Committee:

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<sup>2</sup> Living in Limbo: The Rights of Ethnic Georgian Returnees to the Gali District of Abkhazia, July 2011, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/georgia0711LR.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> “Consolidated report on the conflict in Georgia,” The Council of Europe, November 8, 2018, <https://civil.ge/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Consolidated-Report-on-the-Conflict-in-Georgia-April-September-2018.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Safe Schools Declaration, May 28, 2015, [https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/safe\\_schools\\_declaration.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/ud/vedlegg/utvikling/safe_schools_declaration.pdf) (accessed November 6, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA), *Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict*, March 18, 2014, [http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines\\_en.pdf](http://protectingeducation.org/sites/default/files/documents/guidelines_en.pdf) (accessed November 6, 2018).

- Commend Georgia for its endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict;
- Encourage Georgia to advocate for neighboring states to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and implement its commitments to protecting students, teachers, and schools during armed conflict;
- Encourage Georgia to continue to develop and share examples of its implementation of the Declaration's commitments with this Committee and with other countries that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration—especially during the 2019 Third International Safe Schools Conference—as examples of good practice in protecting students, teachers, and schools during armed conflict; and
- Ask Georgia what their main human rights concerns are regarding children's education in Abkhazia and in the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.