



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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### GEO102013.E

Georgia: Reports of violence against Abkhazians; response of government authorities (2005 - 2006)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### Background

Georgia's separatist enclave of Abkhazia declared independence in 1994, following a civil war between 1992 and 1993, which killed thousands of people and displaced 250,000 ethnic Georgians (BBC 31 Oct. 2006; Reuters n.d.). According to the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), the Abkhaz army has been conducting monthly military exercises to ward off a potential Georgian invasion (n.d.). The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was set up to ensure compliance with a peace accord between Georgia and Abkhazia (AFP 3 Oct. 2006) and today numbers approximately 400 military and civilian staff (ibid.; UN 27 Oct. 2006).

#### Recent situation

Several media sources report that on 28 February 2005, unidentified assailants fired several shots at the motorcade of Aleksandr Ankvab, the prime minister of Georgia's separatist republic of Abkhazia, in an apparent assassination attempt (*Eurasia Daily Monitor* 3 Mar. 2005; IWPR 2 Mar. 2005; RFE/RL 1 Mar. 2005). The identity or motive of the gunmen is unclear: while some people, including Ankvab himself, speculate the incident may be linked to organized crime groups frustrated by his anti-corruption measures (*Eurasia Daily Monitor* 3 Mar. 2005), others attributed the attack to Abkhazian political opponents (RFE/RL 1 Mar. 2005; IWPR 2 Mar. 2005), Georgian operatives, or Russian special services (*Eurasia Daily Monitor* 3 Mar. 2005). This information, however, could not be corroborated by the Research Directorate.

In November 2005, a remote-control mine reportedly exploded in Abkhazia's Gali district, injuring three Abkhazians, including two militiamen (ibid. 29 Nov. 2005) and an Abkhaz customs official, Givi Tsulaya (ibid.; Interfax News Service 27 Nov. 2005). While some Abkhaz officials blame the attack on Tbilisi (ibid.; *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 29 Nov. 2005), others say it was the work of lone militias or Georgian guerrillas. Georgian officials suspect the explosion might have been a revenge attack against Tsulaya, who commanded paramilitary forces and "was widely known for his cruelty toward the local Georgians" (ibid.). These latter views, however, could not be corroborated by the Research Directorate.

On 8 March 2006, four people, including a seven-year-old girl, were shot and killed in the Gali region of Abkhazia (AFP 8 Mar. 2006; RFE/RL 8 Mar. 2006); two of the victims were Abkhazians and two were ethnic Georgians (RFE/RL 9 Mar. 2006; UN 9 Mar. 2006). Abkhazian President Sergei Bagapsh and Abkhazian security officials believe Georgian authorities were behind the attack (AFP 8 Mar. 2006; RFE/RL 8 Mar. 2006) and claim to have identified the "group of 12 terrorists" (UN 9 Mar. 2006). The Georgian government reportedly condemned the attack and called for the "immediate opening of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Office in Gali and [the] deployment of UN police in this district" (UN 9 Mar. 2006). According to Agence France-Presse (AFP), "[k]idnappings and killings are frequently reported in Gali, where organized criminal groups and militias are believed to be active" (8 Mar. 2006).

In July 2006, the Tbilisi-based *Kavkas-Press* reported that seven Georgian opposition parties slammed Georgian government's use of military tactics in Kodori Gorge (*Kavkas-Press* 27 July 2006), the only section of Abkhazia controlled by Georgia (ibid.; IWPR 27 July 2006; ICG 15 Sept. 2006). Tbilisi sent law enforcement officials to the district in order to defeat a militia led by a "renegade ethnic Georgian" named Emzar Kvitsiani (IWPR 27 July 2006; ICG 15 Sept. 2006, 21; UN 28 Sept. 2006, Sec. 6). Media sources indicate that despite being in Abkhazia, the residents of Kodori Gorge are mostly ethnic Svans (Jamestown Foundation 17 Aug. 2006; IWPR 25 Aug. 2006), "an ethnic sub-group of Georgians, rather than Abkhaz" (ibid.).

Several media sources reported on the accidental killing of a civilian woman by a Georgian helicopter which had dropped a bomb in the village where Kvitsiani and his militia were based (UN 27 July 2006; BBC 27 July 2006; RFE/RL 27 July 2006). An uncorroborated article by the Information Telegraph Agency of Russia (ITAR-TASS) cites the administrative head of the Gulripshi District of Abkhazia, which includes the Kodori Gorge, as stating that during the operation Georgian troops killed up to 58 civilians; the Abkhaz Defence Minister was quoted as stating that 10 supporters of Kvitsiani were killed in the Kodori Gorge (4 Aug. 2006). However, the Georgian government

stated that allegations that 58 civilians had been killed or that there were instances of "torture, rape and burning and looting" were lies attempting to influence public opinion (Prime-News Agency 4 Aug. 2006; Imedi TV 9 Aug. 2006). According to ITAR-TASS, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia also state that they have "[no] information that civilians had been killed in the upper Kodori Gorge" (4 Aug. 2006b). Following the Kodori Gorge operation, the Georgian government agreed to allow UN observers to monitor the region (*Civil Georgia* 9 Aug. 2006) and to "provide [them with] transportation and security" (RFE/RL 9 Aug. 2006; Imedi TV 9 Aug. 2006).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources, including:** Georgian Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Studies (Tbilisi), Liberty Institute (Tbilisi), Open Society - Georgia Foundation (Tbilisi).

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International (AI), *The Economist*, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme (FIDH), Freedom House, Georgian Helsinki Committee [inaccessible], Georgian European Policy and Legal Advice Center, Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), Liberty Institute, *The Messenger* [Tbilisi], Open Society - Georgia Foundation, Reliefweb, United States Department of State, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO).

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