

# Round Table Discusses Women and Peace

*Tamar Kikacheishvili*

Women from across Georgia participated in a round table discussion in Gori on October 18, to decide the role of women and local government in the peace-building process. The event was organized by the Female Local Councilors' Forum, the Gender Equality Council, the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia and the United Nations Development Programme. Part of the project "Gender and Politics in the South Caucasus," the talks also involved members of the local government.

The aim of the discussion was to involve women in peace-building measures and the reconstruction of post-conflict communities. Among the participants were women who had witnessed the war, and women who had become Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from territory that is still occupied.

Anna Pakeliani escaped from Kodori Gorge to Tbilisi with 2,570 other IDPs. They started their difficult journey as the bombs first started dropping, some of them left with nothing but the clothes they were wearing.

Anna is the majority MP from Kodori, and she hasn't left her people since the day they escaped. According to her, the government and the media failed to inform Kodori residents that an evacuation was necessary. After the bombing started on August 9, the municipality made their own decision a day later to tell residents to leave the Gorge. The first stop of this wave of the displaced was Chuberi.

"The people had 4 nights there. Those who were lucky slept at school

while others slept in the yard of the schools," remembers Pakeliani. Many followed humanitarian aid groups to Zugdidi in the Samegrelo region.

"We know how Kodori breathes. We are next to our people so we know their needs, but nobody considers our opinions, even though we were always invited to government meetings," claimed Pakeliani.

Midelashvili Lia remembers that she was the last leave Akhgori, where there

body informed us about evacuation, came face to face with Russian aggressors," remembers Mari Khmiadashvili, the IDP representative of Qurta's municipality. There were civilian deaths as well, said Khmiadashvili.

A representative of the municipality of Tikhva, Lia Revazishvili lives at the 190 public school in the Varketili district with her two children and other IDPs. Revazishvili said that conditions in the shelter where they live are unbearable.

no electricity and the assistance that is given to them is in most cases useless.

"The mattresses that were given us as humanitarian assistance were spoiled, as inside was the dust," claimed Revazishvili.

Anna Pakeliani confirmed that this was also the case with mattresses that had been given to IDPs from Kodori, and that some even contained microorganisms. Nobody used them, and most just threw them in the garbage.

Gardabani, claimed that the IDPs who were in Gardabani were strongly supported by citizens in the region, a region that is inhabited by many ethnic minorities. "Azeri people came with a large amount of food, some asking us what to buy, asking us what these people needed," said Zaalashvili. "We have to think about temporary policies for these IDPs that will help them to get services and aid for free."

The women participating in the



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are still Russian checkpoints.

"We are the last wave of the IDPs, as we left our homes on 15-16 August. Living with a Georgian soul in Akhgori is not possible anymore," claimed Midelashvili.

There are 35 villages in Akhgori and the population is 7600. Only 2 % are left there, including the elderly and some mixed families, said Midelashvili.

"People from Qurta came with the slippers. We couldn't even take the money or bread that we had at home. No-

"My children go to school but we have no textbooks," claimed Revazishvili.

Georgian MP Chiora Taktakishvili claimed that the textbook problem will be solved within one week.

"The problem will be solved in one week, as the Ministry of Education has already apportioned the books and all IDP children will get them for free," said Taktakishvili.

Revazishvili highlighted other problems, including the fact that IDPs have

"I was looking from my veranda when I saw the bombs destroy the house. I had to close my eyes," remembers Eka Berishvili, from the municipality of Oni, Racha. She claimed that now apartments are being built for those who remain homeless.

Local infrastructure wasn't the only victim in Poti. Darejan Tskvitaia, a member of the municipality of Poti, spoke about 12 civilians who died during the bombing.

Sopo Zaalashvili, majority MP of

round table also decided on the wording of an appeal, written for member states in the Council of Europe.

Rusudan Kervalishvili, Vice Speaker of Georgian Parliament, proposed the creation of the Resource Center of Women, which will encourage women to be actively involved in the process of peace building.

"The woman has a key role in the process of peace-building, and at the same time she is one of the most effective during war," claimed Kervalishvili.



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