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## THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN GEORGIA

### ISSUE

After three severe internal conflicts over the last three years, Georgia faces extremely difficult challenges in its efforts to promote human rights, democratic development and good governance.

### BACKGROUND

Since gaining independence in 1991, Georgia's efforts to develop its nationhood have been sabotaged by civil war and precipitous economic decline. Two separatist ethnic minorities, Abkhazis and South Ossetians, now control sizeable portions of Georgian territory. War, energy shortages and the collapse of inter-republic ties have devastated Georgia's economy, once the most prosperous in the former Soviet Union.

A ceasefire in Abkhazia is now being enforced by 2400 Russian peacekeepers and monitored by the UN. In the breakaway region of South Ossetia, a ceasefire is being enforced by a joint peacekeeping force of South Ossetians, Georgians and Russians. The CSCE has a monitoring mission and a special representative in the region.

The conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have resulted in over 250,000 displaced persons. The Abkhazis, fearing a loss of control and the re-emergence of an ethnic-Georgian majority, have so far refused to accept these refugees back.

Those conflicts as well as Chairman Shevardnadze's dispute with former President Gamsakhurdia gave rise to all manner of human rights violations, including the torturing and killing of civilians, arrests without warrants and censorship.

In addition, the economic collapse has created an anarchic situation with an attendant mob-rule mentality in the country. Mafia-like groups including elements from Russia are widely thought to be responsible for the murder of National Democratic Party leader Chanturia on December 3.

The government has nevertheless made significant progress in the last six months towards reestablishing authority and the rule of law. Despite censorship, independent newspapers are still able to operate, freedom of association is permitted and dissent is tolerated.

The government is in the midst of drafting a new constitution and parliamentary committees have been established to look at the human rights and ethnic minorities issues. The government is also seeking external assistance from the CSCE, European Union and the United Nations on issues relating to human rights, democratic development and good governance.