

Georgia Pressed to Assist War Refugees

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TBILISI, Georgia — Georgia authorities must do "more than the bare minimum" to provide housing, jobs and health care for more than 200,000 people driven from their homes by war over the past two decades, Amnesty International said Thursday.

In a report two years after Georgia's five-day war with Russia over separatist South Ossetia, the British-based rights watchdog said displaced people suffer unemployment and exclusion from society.

Many of those displaced by wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s continue to live in "dire conditions," with about 42 percent still housed in kindergartens, hospitals, hotels and barracks, the report said.

"Displaced people need more than just roofs over their heads," said Nicola Duckworth, Amnesty's director for Europe and Central Asia. "They need the government to ensure employment, access to health care and benefits. They also need to be consulted and be able to make the choices affecting their lives."

South Ossetia and Abkhazia threw off Georgian rule with the Soviet collapse. In August 2008,

more than 100,000 people were displaced when Russia crushed a Georgian assault on South Ossetia. About 26,000 Georgians have been unable to return.

Amnesty welcomed the government's efforts but listed significant shortcomings. It cited a former printing house in the western town of Zugdidi, near Abkhazia, where some 20 families share two toilets and two showers in the yard. In Kutaisi, seven families in a former orphanage share one toilet with no bathing facilities.

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