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# Hague Tribunal Launches Victims' Fund Program

€ 600,000 aid allocated to August war victims



The ICC investigations focus on alleged crimes committed in the context of an international armed conflict between July 1 and 10 October 2008 in and around South Ossetia, including crimes against humanity and war crimes.

BY NATALIA KOCHAISHVILI

The Directorate of the Victims' Fund (TFV) of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Hague is launching a 3-year € 600,000 assistance program for victims of the August 2008 war. The acting Minister of Justice, Gocha Lortkipanidze, a member of the Directorate of the Victims' Fund of the Hague Tribunal, stated about it.

The program will assist victims of the 2008 war on both sides of the border in medical treatment, psychological rehabilitation, and other support.

According to the Ministry of Justice, Georgia is the first European country for which the directorate has developed an assistance program.

The decision of the Victims' Fund was made based on a detailed study of the consequences of the August war: the victims

and the extent to which its consequences affect the lives of the victims today, their safety, their right to health care.

The TFV Board's decision was informed by the findings and recommendations of the thorough harm-based and victim-centered assessment conducted in 2019/2020. The assessment included wide-ranging consultations with victims, affected communities, Government, and civil society organisations.

The objective of the situation assessment was to examine whether victims continue to suffer to date from persistent injuries resulting from the 2008 conflict, for which the ICC has opened an investigation, and whether reparations or assistance interventions have been sponsored by Government, charities, or civil society. During the consultation, issues were discussed about the type of damage suffered by the victims of the August war and the extent to which its consequences affect the current lives of the victims, their safety, and the right to health care.

TFV Executive Director Pieter de Baan underscored that this is the organisation's first program outside of the continent of Africa. "Sadly for those caught up in the conflict and specifically those in communities near the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) this program is very necessary," TFV head said, adding that working around the COVID-19 pandemic challenges as well as the TFV's organizational capacity and available resources, the TFV will continue to strengthen and build new partnerships to make reparative justice a tangible reality for victims.

As the agency informed, the consultations between the Hague Tribunal and the State of Georgia revealed that the victims of the August war still need support in psychological, health, and other fields. Accordingly, the Directorate of the Victims' Fund has decided to approve a program to assist the victims of the 2008 Russia-Georgia war.

According to the Ministry of Justice, the TFV of the Hague Tribunal will publish detailed information about the new



Ministry of Justice of Georgia (Official publication)

"August war is a tragic event, the consequences of which our country is still suffering," Tea Tsulukiani said in August. Photo: ministry of justice, 2019.

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# A new wave of restrictions: what are they and what do they mean for the country?

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

As the number of confirmed cases continues to grow every day, the government of Georgia decided that the most effective way to fight the spread of the virus was to introduce (and re-introduce) an additional set of healthcare-related regulations. But what are they, exactly, and what impact will they have on the overall state and further development of the country?

The new regulations include a curfew from 21:00 PM to 05:00 AM, the abolishment of public transport, all educational facilities being moved to work remotely, and restaurants and cafes allowed to offer takeaway and food delivery services. The new restrictions will be partially lifted for the New Year and Christmas festivities. However, as of now, they are expected to last until January 2021.

What does this mean for the country's economic growth?

The outbreak of the global pandemic has already hampered the country's economic development, and, despite being able to maintain a record 5.1% average economic growth between 2005-2019, Georgia is now faced with a major economic shock. Georgian Finance Minister Ivane Matchvariani has already stated that the potential economic growth for 2021 should be revised. Originally estimated at 4.3%, the number is likely to drastically decrease in December following the newly introduced regulations.

Nevertheless, the government is still adamant to continue its support towards the local busi-

nesses, especially to the industries that suffered most because of the COVID-19 crisis. As such, in 2021, the employees of the tourism sector will be exempt from both property and personal income taxes. Similarly, the restaurant and hospitality sectors will receive "the most effective support", said PM Gakharia in his recent statement.

Despite the governments' efforts to seemingly ease the tension imposed upon various economic sectors, the benefits that they currently have to offer do not satisfy the needs of the local entrepreneurs and non-white collar workers that risk losing the ability to support themselves and provide for their households. During the last few days, many people took it to the streets of the large cities across Georgia to express their anxiety and dissatisfaction with the governments' handling of the ongoing crisis.

Throughout the outbreak of the COVID-19 in Georgia, approximately 400-500 thousand people lost their jobs because of the scarce state of the national economy. As of today, the accommodation and food services has shrunk by 40%, entertainment and recreation sector suffered a decrease by 24.1% administrative and support service activities declined by a whole 54%.

Such numbers, to a common viewer, might mean very little, and, at best, illustrate just how much the Georgian economy is struggling. However, behind the dry numbers, you will find thousands of personal stories – stories about people, who simply do not and cannot adapt to the new realities. It is the same people,

who, on a daily basis, work as hard as they can – at the local markets, repair shops, and small restaurants – all with the simple goal of providing for their families. Of course, for many white-collar workers, the new lockdown will simply mean working remotely, however, a large portion of the population of Georgia will be left on the verge of poverty as a result of the new measures.

Is something better than nothing?

The government has also introduced a social benefits package: vulnerable groups will be eligible for ₾ 100 assistance for the next 6 months, and individuals who lost their jobs amidst the pandemic will, too, be eligible for assistance that will amount to ₾ 200 for the next 6 months. Employees of the sectors that were temporarily forced to postpone their activities will be issued one-time assistance of ₾ 300, and self-employed individuals will be able to postpone their bank loan repayments, on top of receiving the aid of ₾ 300. PM

Gakharia announced that the overall cost of the stage four assistance package will be ₾ 1.10 billion.

While the intention is noble, one does not have to be an expert to realize that such pay-outs will barely be enough to support a small household, let alone an extended family. A similar view is shared by the opposition parties, which have already condemned the new measures and blamed the ruling Georgian Dream party for mishandling the second wave of the pandemic. Leaders of the European Georgia party expressed their concerns about the new set of regulations potentially resulting in the "people becoming even poorer." The party leaders have also called for government officials to consult with representatives of different social groups, including members of the opposition, before introducing such measures.

In turn, the country's PM claimed that the opposition rallies that occurred earlier this month were carried out without

full consideration of the necessary regulations, thus contributing towards the increase in increasing the number of new cases.

Nonetheless, the government's decision to introduce new regulations was welcomed by the healthcare officials, who claimed that the new set of restrictions could reduce the number of new cases by almost a half, and, thus, significantly ease the strain placed over the overloaded healthcare system. That, coupled with the government's commitment to assist both the businesses and the citizens affected by the crisis, does give some hope that Georgia will, indeed, be able to make a meaningful recovery by the end of January next year.

With the political crisis yet to be resolved and with the new restrictions coming up, it is to see whether the country will be able to come to an effective solution to the many crises it is currently facing. Will the desire to score political points outweigh the welfare of the country's citizens this time?

## CEC spokesperson resigns



"I would like to thank each of my colleagues, partners, journalists, people, with whom I have many years of business or friendship for their cooperation," Mikeladze wrote.

By NATALIA KOCHAISHVILI

Ana Mikeladze, who served the post of the Central Election Commission (CEC) Spokesperson since May 2015, announced her resignation on December 1 via a Facebook post. According to her, it is not a 'personal decision.'

"I have always been guided by the principles of professionalism, justice, and fairness," she under-

scored. Assessing the move as a 'difficult, but important decision.'

Mikeladze had not led CEC press briefings since November 2, soon after the October 31 parliamentary elections, so there have been rumors about her resignation for several weeks. The resignation coincides with the contested parliamentary polls induced protests by the opposition, that accuse the CEC,

among others, for allegedly rigging the election results. The opposition parties that have overcome the 1% threshold to enter parliament, reject the results, and refuse to enter the new parliament. They demand the Georgian Dream led the government to yield to their demands: the resignation of the CEC Chair Tamar Zhvania, scheduling snap elections, the release of alleged political prisoners.

## Hague Tribunal Launches Victims' Fund Program

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assistance program as a result of further consultations with the Georgian government, civil society, and victims of the August war.

Speaking following the deci-

sion, Chair of the TFV Board of Directors Mama Koite Doumbia said that the victims in Georgia continue to endure injuries that result from the conflict in 2008 and they are living in precarious situations due to the destruction or loss of their property; they are displaced from their homes and now lack opportunity. "With this decision, we hope to be able to address some of these problems and help survivors move forward with hope and dignity and to restore their lives," Doumbia said.

### Weather

Wednesday, December 2

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 11°C

Night Clear

Low: 2°C

Thursday, December 2

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 9°C

Night Mostly Cloudy

Low: 4°C

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