



CONCEPT NOTE

The Role of TI Georgia on the MRA Steering Committee for IDP Issues

August 13, 2010

Summary

The Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) has requested that the local and international NGO communities working on IDP issues each select one representative to participate in the Steering Committee on IDP Issues. Transparency International (TI) Georgia has participated on this committee for the last 12 months, but without a formal nomination process.

This concept note now **seeks a nomination for Transparency International (TI) Georgia to be reinstated as the local NGO representative to the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation's Steering Committee on IDP Issues.** Nominations are sought especially from national civil society organizations based in Tbilisi that work on IDP issues.

The concept briefly summarizes the MRA Steering Committee, TI Georgia's history of participation in the Steering Committee and influence on IDP policy. It explains why TI Georgia is no longer a member of the Steering Committee and proposes a clear role for TI Georgia's future involvement in this forum if nominated.

It should be noted that *any* national NGO may be selected as the representative to this body, in the case that the Georgian NGO community thinks that TI Georgia is not the right organization to represent them.

Background

The MRA Steering Committee on IDP Issues meets approximately once every two months and consists of representatives from the MRA, donor organizations, the UN and other government agencies working on IDP issues (including the Municipal Development Fund, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Justice and Civil Registry Agency, Ministry of Economic Development, and others when relevant to the needs of IDPs). The main purpose is to coordinate the strategic decisions on IDP issues in the country. The Committee met for the first time in March 2009, and the MRA serves as the Committee's Secretariat.

According to the MRA, one representative of a national NGO and one representative of an international NGO may participate in the forum. The MRA has not defined the process by which these two groups should select their representatives; therefore this decision should be made by the two groups themselves. Each group may also decide that their representatives should attend the Steering Committee meetings on a rotating basis, with a different NGO in attendance each month. At each Committee meeting, only one NGO from each group may attend (although the Committee



members may invite other NGOs to attend the meetings if/when they give presentations on their work or have a particular expertise in an issue being discussed).

The Steering Committee has two other structures through which NGOs may become involved in the development and implementation of policy for IDPs. The first is the **NGO Coordination Meeting**, a new mechanism introduced in June 2010 through which the MRA will provide briefings to NGOs on the Committee's main activities, recent decisions and plans for the future. This is also an opportunity for these NGOs to raise questions directly with the MRA. The second mechanism by which NGOs may participate is through the **temporary Technical Expert Groups (TEGs)**, which are generally established by the Committee to perform a specific task related to IDP policy planning. There have been TEGs on a number of different issues, and they closely reflect the categories under the UN's cluster approach that coordinated humanitarian aid in fall 2008. The TEGs have dealt with the elaboration of rehabilitation standards, selection criteria for new housing, development of an outreach strategy and an information brochure on IDP benefits, among other tasks. Many NGOs have attended TEG meetings, but the TEGs were originally conceived to be a small group of invited experts in a certain field (i.e. technical construction experts for the elaboration of rehabilitation standards) and there has been an impression that these groups were being attended by too many non-experts, which ultimately slowed their work and efficiency. It is not fully clear how NGOs or experts are invited to join a TEG, as the formation of TEGs is done during the Steering Committee meetings, which have recently been closed to NGOs due to the lack of a nomination process. TEGs also appear to be formed through separate correspondence between Committee members after a meeting.

TI Georgia's Involvement in IDP Policy

Throughout late 2009 and early 2010, transparency and accountability of the new housing policies for IDPs were major concerns held by the general public, donors, media and civil society. On April 15, 2009 TI Georgia issued a [public statement](#) calling for the MRA to allow a longer consultation period on the draft Action Plan for the State Strategy on IDPs. This initiated a dialogue between the MRA and TI Georgia, resulting in an invitation to join the newly-formed Steering Committee on IDP issues. TI Georgia attended meetings from April 30, 2009 until April 1, 2010.¹ However, there was no formal process for the selection of TI Georgia as the NGO representative and no clear role was defined for our participation vis-à-vis other types of members (donors, UN bodies and government agencies). No representative of an international NGO ever attended, although many international NGOs were invited to attend specific sessions. At times, TI Georgia has been mistaken for the international NGO representative.

TI Georgia was initially asked to participate in the Steering Committee as a monitor of the policy process, but the vision within the MRA and UN communities on the role of NGOs on the Committee has never been clearly defined. The confusion over the role of NGOs is reflected in the minutes of the very first meeting in March 2009. The minutes show that a decision was taken that "NGOs will participate in the work of the Steering Committee only for the relevant issues when there is a need for it, otherwise the composition of SC will be kept as it is [government, donors and UN bodies]".

¹ TI Georgia attended the following seven Steering Committee meetings: in 2009: April 30, June 18, September 17, October 15, December 1; and in 2010: February 19 and April 1. TI Georgia did not attend the first meeting in March 2009 or the last two meetings in June and July 2010.



However, the rest of the detailed minutes show that there was a lengthy discussion about this issue among participants. In particular, Minister Subeliani made two suggestions. He suggested that two representatives be asked to join the Committee, noting that “NGOs will be involved in case of need for relevant issues. There could be as well other mechanism if members will agree, like have one place for local NGO and one from the international NGO for monitoring.” Later in the discussion, the minutes indicate that “Mr. Subeliani said that the participants could prepare the list of organizations who they thought should be invited on permanent level and who should be invited on temporary level. He remarked that MRA had bilateral meetings with all the participating organizations which would definitely continue, but adding this kind of format of meetings would create better opportunities for sharing information on who and what is planning or implementing.” These multiple concepts of the number and role of NGOs on the Steering Committee have persisted. The meeting minutes also highlight one of the roles envisioned for the NGO representatives, which is to act as conduits for information between the SC and their peers.

During its period of participation, TI Georgia contributed to the development of the new Action Plan for the State Strategy for IDPs, which was approved in May 2009. In particular, in both of these documents, TI Georgia worked with the international community to secure government commitments to transparency, accountability and access to information for IDPs, including the further elaboration of standards in construction and relocation; the commitment to give IDPs an “informed choice” in the selection of durable housing options, etc. This laid the groundwork for holding the government accountable for the implementation of the new policy. These achievements were made in close cooperation with other civil society and international organizations.

TI Georgia also participated in a Technical Expert Group (TEG) on Legal, Protection and Outreach issues – a temporary working group formed under the Steering Committee with the specific task of elaborating an information campaign on IDP issues. We played an important role in developing an information brochure on IDP benefits, focusing on the use of simple language to make complex legal issues clear to beneficiaries. Independently, we also raised the issue about IDP’s lack of access to information, specifically related to the government’s failure to clearly inform IDPs in cottage settlements about the switch from fully- to partially-subsidized electricity and gas.

At the same time, TI Georgia has been able to constructively engage the government on these issues and to initiate more meaningful debate. We believe we are able to do this because of our focus on evidence-based research and advocacy. For example, at the presentation of a report about accountability in aid and construction of new IDP settlements in April 2010, representatives of the MRA, the Municipal Development Fund and Ministry of Interior attended and spoke with civil society for more than an hour about the decision to build the new settlements. This was the first time a conversation on this issue had taken place publicly, and it was remarkable for the level to which both sides (government and civil society) engaged in meaningful debate rather than a string of accusations. TI Georgia hopes to continue playing this role as facilitator of public discussion on IDP policy, using evidence-based research as a starting point for discussion.

Recent Changes to the Steering Committee

In June 2010 TI Georgia learned that the Steering Committee would be reduced in size, and that NGOs would no longer be invited to participate. There was no clear or official communication about this change from the MRA to TI Georgia, but since that time there have been two more meetings of



the Steering Committee to which TI Georgia was not invited.² Important changes are taking place which deserve a wider public scrutiny, including the elaboration of a set of criteria to determine how “first wave” IDPs will be resettled into newly-built or renovated durable shelter. The Steering Committee is also reportedly discussing the current wave of IDP evictions, without any involvement of the national NGO community. This highlights the need for a quick decision on the NGO representative to the Committee, as the next meeting will likely take place in September.

Several reasons have been mentioned for limiting the size of the Steering Committee: it was too large to make any meaningful strategic decisions, with too many organizations attending and diverting the conversation. It was also allegedly more difficult for donors and the government to speak openly about funding and new policy initiatives, as it was feared that those NGOs that were present might gain unfair access to information about future donor procurements related to construction and renovation of IDP housing. Both of these reasons are important to consider. However, they do not justify the wholesale exclusion of all civil society actors from the Steering Committee.

Upon communication with the MRA, TI Georgia has clarified that the Steering Committee would allow the regular participation of TI Georgia, or any other “elected” NGO, back to the table if other local NGOs would support that organisation in this effort.³

Proposed Role of TI Georgia on MRA Steering Committee

Over the last year of TI’s participation in the SC, there was never any clear definition of TI Georgia’s purpose or role. In seeking a formal nomination back to the SC, it is now a good opportunity to clarify this question.

There are many highly qualified local NGOs with direct and ongoing relationships with IDPs across the country. TI Georgia does not provide services directly to IDPs, nor are we in daily contact with them. Thus we are removed from the people who are most directly affected by new policies. While this can be seen as a downside to our potential involvement in the Steering Committee, as we are not real “experts” on issues facing IDPs, the distance also has the advantage of lowering the risk of conflict of interest – one reason that was informally given as justification for excluding NGOs from the last two meetings. Because TI Georgia does not get involved in providing services to IDPs, there is less risk of compromising donor procurement processes that may be planned in coordination with the Steering Committee. This implies that TI Georgia can play a role *monitoring the process* of IDP policy formation and implementation without being a part of implementing it. In short, we bring a degree of neutrality to the issue.

Therefore, the value of TI Georgia as a member of the Steering Committee is not primarily as a mechanism for sharing information with other like-minded NGOs (as it has been suggested should be the primary role of the national NGO participant), although information sharing should certainly

² In spring 2010, several NGO coordination meetings were held by the MRA to present information approved at the previous SC meeting – a welcome change that demonstrated the MRA’s commitment to increasing information exchange with civil society. Unfortunately, there has been no such coordination meeting after the most recent two Steering Committee meetings.

³ While several international NGOs participated regularly in the Steering Committee, TI Georgia was the only national NGO to do so regularly. The international NGOs are currently discussing their own process for selecting their representative.



be one function of this representative. Rather, TI Georgia believes that its role should be as an “active monitor”, watching the actions of government and donors in their policy planning and stepping in when we believe that the process does not meet accountability and transparency standards.

Many questions about the last two years of IDP policy remain unclear. For example, why has the government chosen to build new apartment blocks for IDPs in Poti? Why has it not chosen to provide housing vouchers for IDPs? How are decisions taken on which collective centres will be renovated, and which will not be renovated? How did the government notify IDPs in new settlements about the changes in the electricity and gas payments? How were IDPs selected to receive the USD 10,000?

While much of the policy planning process must, by necessity, take place in a limited group and in confidentiality, it is also essential to publicly justify these decisions. This is also in the best interest of the government and especially the MRA, which are often criticized for their lack of public accountability. TI Georgia’s role should be to monitor the Committee’s work, raising issues to the Committee when they are overlooked (especially in consultation with other NGOs who are working directly with IDPs and who better understand the implications that these policies will have), and serve as a meter of the government’s commitment to transparency in this process.

ROLE: To ensure transparency and accountability of the policy making process. This will be done by focusing on the following areas:

1. **Downwards accountability and information to IDPs:** To what extent are the MRA and other government agencies taking steps to inform IDPs of their rights and new policies? How effective are these efforts? IDPs should have access to information about what decisions are being made, why they are made, and how they will be affected by the new policies.
2. **Participation and inclusive decision making:** Is the government taking proper steps to ensure that relevant stakeholders are informed and, when necessary, included in planning processes? e.g. does the MRA continue to hold NGO Coordination Meetings that accurately reflect information from the Steering Committee? [If not, TI Georgia will take proactive steps to raise issues that have not been public addressed.] To what extent is the government taking decisions that reflect the true needs of beneficiaries?
3. **Information sharing with civil society.** While it is the primary responsibility of the Government agencies to share information about their activities with civil society, this does not always happen in practice. When it doesn’t, TI Georgia will share materials with broader civil society, seek input from NGOs on upcoming or urgent issues and represent NGO interests to the SC when appropriate. To do so, we will hold meetings among NGOs in Tbilisi to discuss the MRAs work on an ad hoc basis, depending on when there is a need to discuss issues as a group. Lastly, we will monitor the government’s information sharing mechanisms, including the new NGO Coordination Meeting mechanism.

Information Sharing and Active Monitoring



TI Georgia will not play a passive role in monitoring. When issues arise, especially in relation to the areas listed above, we will take active measures to correct the problems, seeking always to work in cooperation with the government and donors before seeking more public and critical forms of advocacy.

We will also aim to bring the voice of local NGOs and the IDPs into the policy process whenever it is appropriate. We can do this, for example, by notifying local IDP NGOs about upcoming plans for discussion within the MRA and about the formation of Technical Expert Groups.

When it is possible (e.g. when the information is not sensitive), TI Georgia will share information from the Steering Committee with NGOs working with IDPs in Tbilisi and especially in the regions. This will be done on an ad hoc basis, through email, phone and when there are big issues to discuss, through meetings. Meetings with IDP NGOs will also be organized *before* Steering Committee sessions if there is an important topic coming up on the agenda, in order to better inform TI Georgia of the perspectives of other NGOs.

How to Cast Your Nomination

To nominate TI Georgia for the role as national NGO representative on the MRA Steering Committee, you can send an email to or call Caitlin Ryan (English, Russian), caitlin@transparency.ge, 899-658-881 or Nina Khatiskatsi (Georgian, English, Russian), nina@transparency.ge, 899-920-600, indicating whether you support TI Georgia's bid to regain a place on the MRA's Steering Committee.

Support is especially sought from national NGOs working in Tbilisi.

If you do not support this idea, if you have an alternative idea or would like to learn more, we hope that you will contact us. International NGOs and local NGOs working on IDP issues but based outside of Tbilisi are welcome to indicate their support for TI Georgia as well.