

Georgia Files Suit against Russia, citing Racial Discrimination

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August 14, 2008

PARIS — Georgia has filed a lawsuit against Russia at the International Court of Justice in The Hague for its actions in and around the territory of Georgia from 1991 to 2008, the court said in a statement.

Georgia has also consulted the prosecutor's office of the International Criminal Court, also in The Hague, but has taken no further steps, a court official said.

In recent days, Russia has threatened to file war crimes charges against Georgia in connection with its attack on the South Ossetian city of Tskhinvali last week.

Georgia filed the lawsuit late on Tuesday at the Peace Palace in The Hague, where the court is based, an official said. In its 32-page complaint, Georgia said that beginning in 1991 Russia, along with separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia under Moscow's control, used violent means to caused the mass expulsion of Georgians as well as other ethnic groups and prevented their return home.

As a basis for the court's jurisdiction, Georgia invoked the 1965 International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which it said Russia had violated.

The International Court of Justice is the United Nations highest court and rules on disputes between nations. No hearing has been scheduled on the case and no action is expected soon, said a lawyer familiar with the court.

"It will be a long and tortuous process, but Georgia has no option," said Payam Akhavan, a specialist in international law and a member of Georgia's legal team. "Georgia has to assert its right under international law."

At the International Criminal Court, the director of jurisdiction in the prosecutor's office, Béatrice Le Fraper, said that a representative of the Georgian government had come "to provide information and to ask questions." But no further steps had been taken, she said.

The criminal court, which is independent of the United Nations, deals with war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Le Fraper said the court had jurisdiction over matters on Georgian territory because the country was a full member of the court, having ratified its statute.