



THE OBSERVATORY
for the Protection of
Human Rights Defenders

JOINT STATEMENT – THE OBSERVATORY / HUMAN RIGHTS CENTER

Georgia : Serious deterioration of the situation of human rights defenders

In recent years, human rights defenders in Georgia have faced escalating threats and violence, exacerbated by hostile rhetoric from the government and high-ranking officials in the country. The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (OMCT-FIDH) and the Human Rights Center denounce the worsening conditions for civil society in Georgia and call on the authorities to ensure effective, timely, and objective investigations into attacks against human rights defenders and to put an end to all acts of harassment against them.

Paris-Tbilisi, June 26, 2024 - During the last few years, human rights defenders (HRDs) in Georgia [have been subjected to attacks, including through smear campaigns](#) and the use of the “internal enemy” discourse by high-ranking public officials. However, the situation has severely deteriorated since the [reintroduction](#) in April 2024 of the draft law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, inspired by the Russian “Foreign Agents Law”, followed by its definitive adoption on May 28, 2024. The reintroduction of this piece of legislation, which gravely restricts civic space in the country, gave rise to large peaceful demonstrations that were met with [widespread police violence](#).

At the same time, on several occasions, unidentified individuals in civilian attire [physically assaulted](#) activists, opposition politicians, and their family members, and NGOs’ offices, as well as homes and cars of HRDs were sprayed with hate message graffiti.

Among many others, the Observatory and the Human Rights Center denounce the following cases that serve as illustration of this ongoing violence:

On May 5, 2024, **Lado Apkhazava**, a holder of the National Teacher Award who has been actively criticising the “foreign agents” legislation, [was beaten up](#) by several persons near his house, while he was with his son.

On May 7, 2024, the Executive Director of the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, **Giorgi Kldiashvili**, [was attacked](#) near the Embassy of Sweden in Tbilisi when he was being interviewed by TV Formula, whose camera crew was also physically attacked.

On May 8, 2024, **Lasha Gvinianidze**, an activist and organiser of the bikers’ marches against the “foreign agents” law, was [assaulted near his home](#) and severely beaten up.

On May 11, 2024, the 73-year-old father of **Ana Subeliani**, the co-director of Tbilisi Pride, was [physically assaulted](#) and hospitalised due to the injuries inflicted on him by the perpetrators.



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In the latest case, on June 11, 2024, a member of the "Shame Movement" and activist, **Zuka Berdzenishvili**, was [assaulted](#) in front of the entrance to his house by a group of three men who were waiting for him in a car.

In addition, criminal investigations have been initiated against several protest participants as well as a well-known blogger and activist [Ucha Abashidze](#). Journalists from critical media have also [been physically attacked](#) by the riot police while [reporting](#) on the protests.

Furthermore, since May 7, 2024, HRDs - including the Human Rights Center's Executive Director **Aleko Tskitishvili** and staff members of the organisation – activists, and their family members have been repeatedly receiving [intimidating and insulting phone calls](#) from unidentifiable numbers. This coincided with the statement made by the Speaker of the Parliament Shalva Papuashvili on May 8, when he spoke of creating a [special database](#) to store information about individuals who are "involved in violence, other illegal actions, threats, and blackmail, or publicly approve of such actions", thus targeting critics of the recently adopted law.

Posters labeling HRDs as "foreign agents" as well as hate message graffiti continue to be put up on the facades of the premises of CSOs as well as on the homes of HRDs and civil activists. For instance, the office of the Human Rights House Tbilisi was vandalised on two different occasions: first, posters of Executive Directors of human rights organisations the Human Rights Center, Sapari and Rights Georgia, containing vilifying language such as "agents" or "destroyers of the country", were put up on the entrance door; the second time, the building was sprayed with insulting graffiti. Similar attacks occurred against the former Public Defender of Georgia and the founder of Georgia's European Orbit, **Nino Lomjaria**; the Executive Director of Transparency International Georgia, **Eka Gigauri**; and the Executive Director of Media Development Foundation **Tamar Kintsurashvili**.

The Human Rights Center and the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders urge the relevant Georgian authorities:

- to ensure effective, timely, and objective investigation regarding the instances of physical attacks, damage of property, and persecution against HRDs and their family members;
- to ensure effective, timely, and objective investigation of the excessive use of force and violence on the part of law enforcement agents against HRDs, their family members, and journalists;
- to conduct an investigation regarding threatening phone calls to HRDs and their family members;
- to put an end to all acts of harassment against HRDs, members of civil society, independent journalists, and their families;
- to guarantee the rights to freedom of assembly and expression, as enshrined in the Constitution of Georgia, and to uphold Georgia's international obligations, including under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights;



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- to comply with Georgia's obligations regarding the protection of HRDs and respect the legitimate exercise of their rights, as stated in the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

Signatories

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and FIDH. The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. OMCT and FIDH are both members of [ProtectDefenders.eu](https://www.protectdefenders.eu), the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.

The Human Rights Center, founded in 1996, is dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights, the rule of law, and sustainable peace in Georgia. The HRC monitors and documents human rights violations, provides free legal aid, and engages in local as well as international advocacy to impact policy-making and legislative processes in the country.