

### **Human Rights House Tbilisi statement at the Pre-session to the UPR of Georgia**

Human Rights House Tbilisi on behalf of its member organizations and in partnership with Human Rights House Foundation welcomes this opportunity. Our statement is focusing on human rights defenders, as well as challenges related to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and attacks on the Media.

Despite Georgia's international obligations, its human rights action plans or strategies do not adequately address the problems facing HRDs. This is important, considering the increased number of attacks against HRDs. These include media smear campaigns alongside attacks by state officials which try to discredit activists before the general public.

Since Georgia's previous review, minority rights defenders have become increasingly vulnerable in Georgia. Particular attention should be directed to certain non-state actor groups, including those with radical homophobic, ultranationalist ideologies, which have become more active in Georgia in recent times.

The previously mentioned radical groups are particularly aggressive against people with liberal views and defenders of minorities' rights, thus they represent a particular threat to human rights defenders. Vitali Safarov, a human rights defender – was killed by the members of a Neo-nazi group in Tbilisi, because he was Jewish and expressed his liberal views during discussion in a bar. The Tbilisi City Court did not rule that murder was committed on the grounds of ethnic intolerance and/or xenophobia.

We are concerned about the violations of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression of human rights activists, including those involved in the implementation of the first-ever Tbilisi Pride March last year. The government created a dangerous precedent indicating that the state could not protect people and support them to exercise their constitutional rights. Another concern is related to the June 20 rally dispersal – as a result of excessive use of force by the police, 240 citizens were transferred to clinics, including journalists.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, we draw attention to the case of Afgan Mukhtarli, Azerbaijani activist and journalist who was allegedly abducted in Georgia and was later found in detention in Azerbaijan. Even though Afgan Mukhtarli was later released in March 2020 – the investigation in Georgia is still pending and his abduction should be effectively investigated.

Therefore, we recommend that Georgia:

- 1. Identifies best practice in policy protection for human rights defenders, in consultation with civil society & ensures that HRDs have adequate protection.**
- 2. Ensures that attacks on HRDs, particularly minority rights defenders, are effectively investigated and receive high-level and public condemnation by State officials;**
- 3. Ensures the effective investigations into the excessive use of force on June 20 protest action, as well as criminal threats against Tbilisi Pride activists from the side of ultra-nationalist groups.**
- 4. Ensures an effective investigation into the case of Afgan Mukhtarli;**

I thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> *Government offers treatment abroad to teenager who lost eye during Tbilisi protests*, Agenda.ge, available here: <http://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/1698>