

Human Rights Watch Reports Inaction by Georgian Authorities on Violence Against Activists

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August 20, 2024

Georgia: Violent Attacks on Government Critics

Georgian authorities have yet to demonstrate that they are conducting effective investigations into a spate of violent attacks on civic and political activists over recent months.

BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has reported that Georgian authorities have not effectively investigated a series of violent attacks against civic and political activists in recent months. According to HRW, this lack of action could contribute to further political violence and instability as the country approaches its parliamentary elections in October 2024.

HRW's report details that from late April through June 2024, more than a dozen activists were violently attacked by

unidentified assailants. These incidents, which often took place in public areas with witnesses and CCTV cameras present, resulted in injuries that required hospitalization. Despite the seriousness of these attacks, HRW notes that Georgian police have not identified or arrested any suspects, raising concerns about the adequacy of the investigations.

The report highlights that many of the activists targeted had spoken out against the "foreign agent" law, introduced by the ruling Georgian Dream party in April 2024. This controversial law, which was vetoed by

President Salome Zourabichvili but later passed by the ruling party on May 28, 2024, requires NGOs and media outlets receiving over 20% of their funding from foreign sources to register as "organizations serving the interest of a foreign power."

HRW documented six specific cases in Tbilisi involving various individuals, including a university student, a professor, the founder of a youth protest group, a protest participant, and a leading opposition party member. Despite formal police investigations being opened in most cases, HRW reports that the authorities have

not made significant progress, and victims have not been asked to assist in identifying suspects.

The report also states that Georgian human rights groups and media have documented more than a dozen additional cases of physical attacks on activists since mid-April. HRW expresses concern that the investigations into these attacks appear to be similarly slow and ineffective.

HRW is urging the Georgian government to conduct thorough and effective investigations to bring those responsible to justice and to prevent further violence,

especially as the parliamentary elections draw near. The organization emphasizes that holding perpetrators accountable is crucial to maintaining stability and protecting democratic freedoms in Georgia.

According to HRW, the prosecutor's office acknowledged that the Interior Ministry is investigating the attacks but noted that no criminal prosecutions have been initiated so far. HRW continues to monitor the situation and calls on Georgian authorities to publicly and unequivocally condemn politically motivated violence.

Central Election Commission Responds to Media Reports on Smartmatic



BY LIZA MCHEDLIDZE

The Central Election Commission of Georgia (CEC) has issued a statement addressing recent media reports concerning the international company Smartmatic. The reports refer to federal charges announced by the US Department of Justice on August 8 against Smartmatic executives and the former Chairman of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) of the Philippines. These charges include allegations of bribery and money laundering connected to the 2016 Philippine elections.

The CEC asserted that these reports are being used manipulatively to create a negative perception of electronic elections.

According to the CEC, Smartmatic has no formal or

legal connection with Georgia's election administration and media reports have inaccurately linked Smartmatic and its current internal disputes with the Georgian election process. The CEC clarified that the dispute involves specific individuals who are no longer with the company and does not concern the company's election technology.

The CEC emphasized that the integrity of the electronic voting machines used in Georgia's elections is not in question. An audit by the American firm Pro V&V last year confirmed that the election technologies used are compliant with local laws and international standards. Additionally, Georgia's electoral legislation ensures that all stages of voting include a paper trail, and ballots will be manually counted.

The CEC urges the public and election stakeholders to avoid spreading unfounded accusations that could undermine the

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Exchange Rates: US Dollar - 2.6995; Euro - 2.9913; GBP - 3.5107; 100 Russian Ruble - 2.9528; Swiss Franc - 3.1397

Central Election Commission Responds to Media Reports on Smartmatic

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election process. According to CEC, Smartmatic, which was selected through a tender process, has extensive experience in election technology across over 30 countries, including the USA, Canada, Belgium, and several others. The CEC calls for all parties to collaborate responsibly and not damage the election environment with baseless claims.

The News in Brief

PREPARED BY MESSENGER STAFF

Khatia Dekanoidze Rejoins Unity - National Movement, Appointed Deputy Chairman of National Committee

“In the fight against Bidzina Ivanishvili, I see my role as crucial,” Dekanoidze said. “For me, it is important that on October 26, the country moves towards peace, and any self-centeredness or personal entanglements are secondary.”

Georgian Airways Adds Direct Flight Between Tbilisi and Novosibirsk

Georgian Airways has announced the addition of a new direct flight route between Tbilisi and Novosibirsk, Russia, set to commence in September. This development was disclosed on the official website of Novosibirsk Airport.

According to the available information, the route will operate between September 28 and October 26, 2024. However, details regarding ticket prices remain unavailable as tickets are not yet listed on the airline’s website.

This new route expands Georgian Airways’ current operations to Russia, which already include flights to Moscow and St. Petersburg. These services resumed following the lifting of restrictions on direct flights between the two countries.



Opposition Member of Parliament Khatia Dekanoidze has officially rejoined the United National Movement, taking on the role of Deputy Chairman of the party’s National Committee. The announcement was made by Koba Nakopia, the recently elected Chairman of the National Committee, during a special briefing.

“Today, Khatia Dekanoidze returns to the ranks of Unity - National Movement, which is welcome,” Plutia stated. “A few days ago, the Congress elected me as the chairman of the National Committee. From today, Khatia will be the deputy chairman of the National Committee. It is important that such a person as Khatia Dekanoidze will still be in the ranks of the National Movement, in the ranks of this great unity.”

Dekanoidze, a former Minister of Education, emphasized her commitment to opposing Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of the ruling Georgian Dream party. She highlighted that her primary focus is to contribute to the peace and stability of the country, particularly in the lead-up to the October 26 elections.

21 AUGUST

BORJOMI | Borjomi Likani Hotel

ღამის სერენადები
NIGHT SERENADES

23, 25 AUGUST

BATUMI | Batumi Drama Theater

15, 17, 18, 20

SEPTEMBER

TBILISI | Tbilisi State Conservatoire

ALLIANCE ART
არტ ალიანსი

Founder of the Festival
LIANA ISSAKADZE

Artistic Director
GIORGI ISSAKADZE

Weather

Wednesday, August 21

Day Clear
High: 34°C

Night Clear
Low: 22°C

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