



The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders

The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders unites 30 human rights NGOs in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The Network seeks to facilitate creation of a safer and enabling environment for human rights defenders in the South Caucasus and to strengthen their voices in the region and internationally.

Members of the South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders condemn the violent crackdown on the opposition manifestation in Tbilisi on the night from 25th to 26th of May 2011 and call upon the Georgian authorities to investigate the incident.

The protesters had a permit to hold a rally on May 25 2011 that expired at midnight. The authorities had warned them that they would break up the demonstration in order to make way for the planned Independence Day military parade on Rustaveli Avenue on May 26 2011. The municipal authorities had offered the protesters another venue, which they rejected. However, the police dispersal of the protest illustrates a disproportionate use of violence.

The Public Defender Office of Georgia reported that 152 persons were arrested and that “the police used disproportionate force”. Dozens were arrested, injured or were missing. Many of the detainees were not given access to a lawyer. Journalists also became victims of attacks and verbal assaults; their cameras and other equipment was seized or destroyed; 17 journalists were injured, several were detained. Dozens are reportedly missing. We are also alarmed that the right to a fair trial and the right to have an attorney was not fully guaranteed for the detainees.

Members of the South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders are deeply concerned about recent crackdowns of demonstrations in the South Caucasus region and consider it to be a part of an increasing trend by governments in the region to silence critical voices.

We, 13 human rights organizations in the South Caucasus region, would like to remind the Georgian authorities, as a member of the Council of Europe, of their obligation to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights to freedom of expression and to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, established in Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Rights (ECHR). The same rights are protected by Article 7 of the Georgian Constitution.

Members of the South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders call upon:

The Georgian government to:

- ensure thorough, independent, impartial, prompt and transparent investigation of the incident;

Creation of South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders is supported by the European Union.
Network is coordinated by Human Rights Center (Georgia), Armenian Helsinki Association (Armenia) and Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan).
Human Rights House Foundation (Oslo, Norway) is the international partner of the Network.

- ensure that all perpetrators are held responsible for their actions and brought to justice;
- immediately release the detained and imprisoned peaceful demonstrators and to cancel all administrative charges and fines against those who participated in the peaceful assembly on 25 and 26 May 2011.

Parliamentarians to the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe to call upon Georgian authorities to:

- ensure and respect the rights to freedom of assembly and freedom of expression, provided in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the Georgian Constitution.

Undersigned organizations:

Armenian Helsinki Association, Armenia

Helsinki Citizen Assembly, Vanadzor, Armenia

Socioscope, Armenia

Jurists against Torture, Armenia

Public Information and Need of Knowledge (PINK), Armenia

Women's Resource Center, Armenia

Shahkatun, Armenia

Journalist Club, Asparez, Armenia

Legal Education Society, Azerbaijan

Association for Protection of Women's Rights, Azerbaijan

Human Rights Centre, Georgia

Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Georgia

Public Movement Multinational Georgia