

THE OBSERVATORY

for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

L'OBSERVATOIRE

pour la Protection des Défenseurs des Droits de
l'Homme

EL OBSERVATORIO

para la Protección de los Defensores
de Derechos Humanos

URGENT APPEAL - THE OBSERVATORY

GEO 001 / 0309 / OBS 054

Acts of harassment

Georgia

March 30, 2009

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in **Georgia**.

Description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by the Human Rights Centre (HRIDC) about acts of harassment against Mr. **Arnold Stepanyan**, a defender of the human rights of minorities in Georgia, Chairman of the human rights NGO "Multinational Georgia" and co-founder of the Multiethnic Resource Centre for Civil Education Development.

According to the information received, on March 19, 2009, a district police inspector visited, for the first time, the offices of the Multiethnic Resource Centre for Civil Education Development, though they are located next to the Ministry of Defence in an area closely monitored by law enforcement bodies, and asked questions about the organisation and its leadership.

On the same day, a person, who refused to identify himself, called and asked a staff member whether Mr. Arnold Stepanyan was Chairman of "Multinational Georgia", whether he was at the moment in the office and when he would come to the office.

In addition, on March 19, 2009, the Tax Inspection Office of the Ministry of Finance closed down a small business called "Arnold Stepanyan", which was established in 2000 and was run by Mr. Stepanyan's father in his flat and a company called "Giperioni Limited", which was co-established by Mr. Arnold Stepanyan in 2006.

These acts follow the transmission to the Council of Europe, early 2009, of a critical alternative report on the protection of minority rights in Georgia, of which Mr. Stepanyan, as Chairman of "Multinational Georgia", is one of the authors. Mr. Stepanyan is also an expert in the field of inter-ethnic relations, an active member of the Assembly of Tbilisi Armenians and Co-founder of the NGO Coalition "For Democracy". Finally, Mr. Stepanyan is a member of a group that organised a demonstration held in Tbilisi on March 15, 2009 calling for justice and freedom.

The Observatory expresses its deepest concern about these acts of harassment against Mr. Arnold Stepanyan, which seem to merely aim at sanctioning his human rights activities.

The Observatory recalls that as a Participating State of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Georgia must conform with paragraph 8 of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Resolution on Strengthening OSCE Engagement with Human Rights Defenders and National Human Rights Institutions, which states that the OSCE Participating States recognise "the need for particular attention, support and protection for human rights defenders by the OSCE, its institutions and field operations, as well as by participating States".

The Observatory also urges the Georgian authorities to conform to the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on Human Rights Defenders, so as to create an environment conducive to human rights

defenders, to take effective measures to protect, promote, and respect them, to ensure their access to effective remedies and to take action to prevent attacks and harassment against them.

Action requested:

Please write to the Georgian authorities urging them to:

- i. Take all necessary measures to guarantee, in all circumstances, the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Arnold Stepanyan;
- ii. Conduct a prompt, effective, thorough, independent and impartial investigation into the above-mentioned acts of harassment against Mr. Arnold Stepanyan, the result of which must be made public, in order to identify all those responsible, bring them before a competent, independent and impartial tribunal and apply to them the penal, civil and/or administrative sanctions provided by the law;
- iii. Put an end to any act of harassment against Mr. Arnold Stepanyan as well as against all human rights defenders in Georgia;
- iv. Comply with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1998, in particular Article 1, which states that *“everyone has the right, individually or collectively, to promote the protection and fulfilment of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels”* and Article 12.2, which provides that *“the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”*;
- v. Guarantee the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights instruments ratified by Georgia.

Addresses:

- Mr. Mikhail Saakashvili, President, State Chancellery, 7 Ingorokhva Street, 0134 Tbilisi, Georgia; Tel : (995 32) 28-27-13; (995 32) 28-24-00; (995 32)99 96 53; (995 32) 98-72-62, (995 32) / 99-87-50, Fax: (995 32) 98-72-62 (99532) 28-27-68; (99532)28-27-14; E-mail: pr@president.gov.ge, vano@president.gov.ge
- Mrs. Eka Tkeshelashvili, Secretary of the National Security Council of Georgia, 7, Ingorokhva Street. 0134 Tbilisi, Georgia, Tel: (995 32) 93 23 22 ; Fax: (995 32) 98 99 72 ; E-mail: snsc@gol.ge
- Mr. Ivane Merabishvili, Minister of Interior, Ministry of Interior of Georgia, 10, Gulua street, Tbilisi, Georgia. Tel: (995 32) 74 62 50; +995 32 99 62 96 / 99 80 50 / 99 95 55/27 28 44/99 53 50/98 39 43; Fax:(995 32) 98 71 46 / 99 95 24; E-mail: presscenter@pol.ge, press_center@pol.ge
- Mr. Giorgi Arsenishvili, Head of the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights Petitions and Relations with the Civil Society, Parliament of Georgia, 8 Rustaveli Avenue. 380018 Tbilisi, Georgia; Tel: (995 32) 28 13 88; Fax: (995 32) 92 15 63. Email: Humanrights@parliament.ge
- Mr. Zurab Adeishvili, Minister of Justice, 19, Griboedov st, Tbilisi, 0108, Georgia, Tel: (995 32) 93 27 21 / 93 50 49 / 75-82-22; Fax: (995 32) 93 02 25 / 75-82-22 ; Email: justice@justice.gov.ge
- Mr. Sozar Subari, Ombudsman of Georgia, 11, Machabeli street, Tbilisi 0107, Georgia, Phone: (995 32) 92 39 60 / 92 24 78 / 92 24 81 / 93 15 85; Fax: (995 32) 92 24 70; Email: info@ombudsman.ge
- H.E Mr. Giorgi Gorgiladze, Ambassador, Permanent mission of Georgia to the United Nations in Geneva, Rue Richard Wagner 1, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland, Fax: + 41 22 733 90 33 ; Email: geomission.geneva@bluewin.ch
- Diplomatic Mission of Georgia to Brussels, Belgium, Fax: + 32 2 732 85 47

Please also write to the diplomatic representations of Georgia in your respective countries.

Geneva - Paris, March 30, 2009

Kindly inform the Observatory of any action undertaken quoting the code number of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory, a FIDH and OMCT venture, is dedicated to the protection of human rights defenders and aims to offer them concrete support in their time of need.

The Observatory was the winner of the 1998 Human Rights Prize of the French Republic.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

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FIDH

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OMCT

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