

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

AI Index: EUR 56/002/2005 (Public)
News Service No: 316
23 November 2005

Embargo Date: 23 November 2005 00:01 GMT

Georgia: Torture and ill-treatment two years after the "Rose Revolution"

Amnesty International continues to receive reports about torture and ill-treatment in Georgia. Many cases still do not come to light because police cover up their crimes and detainees are often afraid to complain or identify the perpetrators for fear of repercussions. Amnesty International voiced its concerns as it launched its report, *Georgia: Torture and ill-treatment -- still a concern after the "Rose Revolution"*, on the second anniversary of the events which brought a new government to power.

"The government should keep the eradication of torture and ill-treatment on its agenda as a priority issue. While important steps have been taken, the government still has a long way to go. A long-term approach is needed to achieve lasting results," Anna Sunder-Plassmann, Amnesty International's researcher on Georgia said.

The methods used to torture or ill-treat detainees, as indicated in reports received by Amnesty International since the "Rose Revolution", include electric shocks; putting plastic bags over the head of a detainee; suspending a detainee from a pole between two tables; cigarette and candle burns; placing the barrel of a gun in a detainee's mouth threatening to shoot; threats to beat the detainee's family; gagging the detainee with a piece of cloth so they cannot shout; beatings, including with truncheons and butts of guns, and kicking.

Eldar Konenishvili, reportedly beaten by police and currently serving a prison term in Tbilisi, told Amnesty International:

"The police officers started to beat me. They took the leg of a chair and hit me on the fingers of my left hand. During the beatings another police officer and a procurator entered and started to accuse me of a murder. One of the officers threatened to beat my wife, mother and children unless I confessed to the murder. During the beatings I lost consciousness several times. Blood was coming from my mouth and I couldn't see properly. I had difficulties moving... I did not ask for a doctor at first because I was afraid."

There have been severe shortcomings in the implementation of legal safeguards aimed at preventing torture and ill-treatment.

"The authorities should now concentrate on the implementation of legal safeguards. Any allegations that safeguards were violated should be taken seriously, and promptly and impartially investigated." Anna

Sunder-Plassmann said.

“Impunity for torture and ill-treatment is still a big problem. In dozens of cases where the procuracy has opened investigations the perpetrators have not been brought to justice. Amnesty International has obtained many examples of cases demonstrating that investigations into allegations of torture or ill-treatment have not been conducted in a prompt, impartial and independent manner.”

In order to move forward, Amnesty International urges the authorities to implement a series of recommendations including the following:

- Set up a body independent of the police, procuracy and the justice system to carry out a detailed review of investigations conducted by law enforcement officers into allegations of torture and ill-treatment and of judicial proceedings in such cases. The body should be provided with authority to present its findings, make recommendations to the relevant authorities, and have powers to issue a public report.

- Investigate all allegations of torture or ill-treatment in a prompt, thorough and impartial manner, including by interviewing the victim and any witnesses.

- Conduct prompt specialist medical examinations in all cases where torture or ill-treatment -- including ill-treatment of predominantly psychological nature -- have been alleged.

- Pay special attention to ending torture and ill-treatment in the regions of Georgia outside the capital since many programmes have so far focused only on the capital, Tbilisi.

- Prohibit the use of masks or other means of disguising officers' personal identities. Only make exceptions if such measures are necessary for the personal protection or security of the officers concerned or similar reasons. In such cases the need for each officer, including the special police unit, to be identifiable by such means as a unique traceable identification number is particularly important.

Georgia is a party to a number of international human rights treaties setting out measures to be taken by states to prevent torture and other ill-treatment by public officials; to conduct appropriate investigations into allegations; and to provide reparation.

Background

When the government came to power following the “Rose Revolution” in November 2003 it inherited a system in which torture and ill-treatment were widespread and perpetrators routinely went unpunished. In the months after the change of government the situation apparently deteriorated. However, in the second half of the last year the government acknowledged the need to tackle the issue of torture and ill-treatment.

The fight against torture and ill-treatment is currently **one of the key issues** on the new government's agenda with regard to human rights. In recent months the Georgian authorities have introduced or implemented a number of measures in response to ongoing reports of torture and ill-treatment. Ten police officers sentenced since the “Rose Revolution” are believed to be serving prison terms in connection with crimes amounting to torture or ill-treatment. Extensive monitoring has been carried out under the auspices of the Ombudsman and a number of legal safeguards have been strengthened.

The government's human rights record is mixed. While positive steps have been made in some areas of human rights protection, Amnesty International has become increasingly concerned about pressure on the judiciary by the procuracy and other government authorities, allegations of government interference with freedom of the media in particular in relation to television, and allegations that police continued to fabricate criminal cases in numerous instances, in particular on drug-related charges. The organization is also concerned that while several perpetrators of violent attacks on religious minorities that took place in recent years have been brought to justice, hundreds continue to enjoy impunity. Other concerns include the continued risk of extradition or forcible return of people to countries where they are at risk of serious human rights violations such as torture. Many issues also remain unresolved in connection with the internationally unrecognized breakaway areas of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

See: *Georgia: Torture and ill-treatment -- still a concern after the "Rose Revolution"* (AI Index: EUR

56/001/2005) <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur560012005>

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566

Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

For latest human rights news view <http://news.amnesty.org>