

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

GEORGIA: APPEAL CASES

2 April 2001¹; AI Index: EUR 56/003/2001; public

Police allegedly fail to protect Jehovah's Witness congregation against violent mob attack

On 17 October 1999 radical supporters of the Georgian Orthodox Church reportedly attacked a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses and beat them with iron crosses and wooden clubs. The police reportedly refused to come to their help.

Some 120 Jehovah's Witnesses had gathered in a rented theatre in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, to hold a Sunday service. Around 200 supporters of a radical defrocked Georgian Orthodox priest named Basil Mkalavishvili reportedly broke up the meeting and assaulted members of the congregation verbally and physically. Some adherents escaped during the attack and reported it to two local police stations, but police allegedly refused to come to their aid or provide protection. Sixteen worshippers are said to have needed hospital treatment as a result of the attack.

Jehovah's Witness Fati Tabagari, for example, suffered a temporary loss of vision after she was struck on her head. Fati Tabagari reports:

"When they found religious literature in my bag, they began to shout at me and one of them hit me with all his might. He hit my face, my eyes. I tried to hide my face with my hands. Blood was running down my fingers. I felt that I was losing consciousness."

After the attack she was reportedly brought to hospital suffering from a concussion and serious injuries to one of her eyes.

In October 1999 the Jehovah's Witnesses lodged a complaint. However, up to now, no criminal proceedings against Basil Mkalavishvili have yet come to court. The case against two female supporters of Basil Mkalavishvili was sent back by the judge for further investigation at a trial in August 2000, even though the women reportedly admitted to their part in the attack. In the meantime, Jehovah's Witness Mirian Arabidze and Zaza Koshadze who attended the religious gathering in October 1999 were convicted of "hooliganism" and sentenced to probationary terms of three years and six months respectively at a trial that took place in September 2000.



Photo: Fati Tabagari suffered a temporary loss of vision after she was struck on her head by radical supporters of the Georgian Orthodox Church. More than a year later the wounds have healed but her vision will never be fully restored, Fati Tabagari reports.

© Amnesty International

¹ Please use this "Appeal Case" sheet as the basis for your letter-writing until further notice.

Background information:

Jehovah's Witnesses have frequently been a target for violence by radical supporters of the Georgian Orthodox Church in several cities in Georgia, often led by defrocked Georgian Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili. In many of the incidents police are said to have failed to protect the believers, or even, to have participated in physical and verbal abuse.

Apart from attacks on Jehovah's Witnesses, other minority religions such as Baptists and Pentecostals have also become targets of violence. "Nobody has been punished for any of the attacks on religious minority groups. This apparent impunity encourages further violence against Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious minority groups in Georgia," said Arno Tungler, representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Georgia. Basil Mkalavishvili repeatedly publicly stated that after 'having dealt' with the Jehovah's Witnesses he would move on to other minority faiths.

Recommended action:

Please send politely worded letters in English, Russian, Georgian or your own language,

- expressing concern at allegations that the police did not protect Jehovah's Witnesses when they were attacked by followers of Basil Mkalavishvili on 17 October 1999;
 - asking the authorities to inform you about the state of the investigation into these allegations, who is responsible for the conduct of the investigation, and when the trial is going to take place;
 - stating that impunity for policemen who refuse to protect victims of ill-treatment gives a wrong signal to society;
 - To stress your point remind the authorities of their obligations to prohibit torture under international human rights treaties such as the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
-

Whom to write

President of Georgia:	Procurator General:	Minister of the Interior:	Procurator of Gldani District:
Eduard Shevardnadze Gruziya; 380018 g. Tbilisi; pr. Rustaveli, 8; Apparat Prezidenta Gruzii; Prezidentu Shevardnadze, E.A.; GEORGIA Fax: + 995 32 - 99 96 30 / 99 08 79 / 98 23 54 E-mail: office@presidpress.gov.ge	Gia Meparishvili Gruziya; 380033 g. Tbilisi; ul. Gorgosali, 24; Prokuratura Gruzii; Generalnomu prokuroru; Meparishvili, G.; GEORGIA Fax: + 995 32 - 98 21 70	Maj.-Gen. Kakha Targamadze Gruziya; 380014 g.Tbilisi; ul. Generala Gia Gulua, 10; Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del Gruzii; Ministru Maj.- Gen. Targamadze, K.; GEORGIA Fax: + 995 32 - 99 95 24 e-mail: jashi@iberiapac.ge	Ramaz Khmaladze Gruziya; g.Tbilisi; Gldani rayon; Rayonnaya Prokuratura; Prokuroru Khamaladze, R.; GEORGIA

Send copies of your letters to:

- the Ambassador of Georgia to your country (if there is one)
- Tbilisi city procuracy; Procurator: Tengiz MAKHARADZE:

Gruziya
g. Tbilisi 380059
Digomsky massiv, P kvartal
Prokuratura g. Tbilisi
Prokuroru
MAKHARADZE T.
GEORGIA