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Georgia: President Saakashvili should put human rights at the heart of his policies

Having won around 96 percent of the vote in the presidential election Mikhail Saakashvili has an overwhelming mandate from the people of Georgia. Amnesty International is calling on President Saakashvili on the occasion of his inauguration today, to put human rights at the heart of his policies.

"Amnesty International urges President Saakashvili to demonstrate his commitment to human rights by promoting respect for the rights of all, regardless of their political opinion, religious belief, ethnic background, or gender."

In particular Amnesty International calls on President Saakashvili:

- To take decisive steps to ensure that religious minorities can feel safe in Georgia. For years religious minorities including Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals have been victims of a series of violent attacks by supporters of the Georgian Orthodox Church. In many cases, the police failed to provide adequate protection or even actively supported the attackers. The authorities of Georgia have not taken firm steps, and hundreds of perpetrators of the attacks have still not been brought to justice.
- To take all appropriate measures to make Georgia a country where no one has to fear torture or ill-treatment at the hands of the police. Amnesty International remains concerned about persistent reports of torture and ill-treatment in custody and that many official investigations opened in such cases have not been pursued impartially and with vigour.
- To ensure respect for the rights to freedom of expression and association in Georgia. Recently, Amnesty International has been particularly concerned about the harassment and intimidation of independent journalists in the autonomous republic of Abkhazia and reports that some of them were beaten by police. Amnesty International is also concerned about reports that approximately a dozen supporters of the Youth Movement Kmara and members of their families have been detained in recent weeks to punish them for peacefully exercising their right to freedom of expression.
- To prioritise human rights in Georgia's international relations. Despite its obligation not to extradite anybody to a country where he or she would be at risk of serious human rights violations, Georgia has extradited a number of Chechens to Russia whom the Russian authorities accused of "terrorism". Amnesty International urges President Saakashvili to build on the positive stand taken last year when

Georgia refused to hand over three men to Russia following a Supreme Court decision in May 2003.

· To put on the agenda of his government the immediate abrogation of the impunity agreement reached with the United States by the prior government. In May 2003 the Parliament of Georgia was only the second parliament in the world to ratify a bilateral impunity agreement with the United States (US). This agreement seeks to prevent Georgia from surrendering to the new International Criminal Court (ICC) US nationals accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. This agreement runs counter to Georgia's obligations under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as under international law.

Public Document

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