

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

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Georgia: Treatment of opponents is litmus test for commitment to human rights

Amnesty International today urged Georgia's interim President and government to do all within their remit to ensure human rights are protected in this transition period and to strictly adhere to the Constitution and Georgia's obligations under international human rights law standards.

"The treatment of political opponents at this crucial time in Georgia will be a litmus test for the interim authorities' commitment to protect human rights. The authorities must open prompt and independent investigations into any human rights abuses and bring perpetrators of abuses to justice," Amnesty International said.

Background

The 2 November 2003 parliamentary elections -- that according to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe "fell short of a number of international standards" -- triggered mass demonstrations that culminated in a non-violent storm on Parliament in the capital Tbilisi on 22 November. The next day President Eduard Shevardnadze resigned and Nino Burdzhaniadze, speaker of the outgoing parliament, was announced interim President. New presidential elections are scheduled to be held on 4 January 2004.

In the last two weeks, attacks have taken place against opposition party offices, media buildings, and individuals. On 25 November unidentified gunmen reportedly shot at the flat of Lyuba Eliashvili, head of the news department of the TV and radio company Iberia TV, that had broadcast programs critical of the so-called "Rose revolution". The flat of Irina Sarishvili-Chanturia, spokeswoman for the former governmental election block in November, reportedly came under similar attack on 2 December. Following these events on 3 December a night-time bomb explosion damaged the walls of State Television and Radio offices. Although there were no reported injuries.

Georgia is a party to key human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Article 19 of the ICCPR, for example, guarantees freedom of expression and Article 26 of the ICCPR stipulates that "[A]ll persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall ... guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as ... political or other opinion...".

