

OPEN LETTER

Estonian Civil Society Stands with Georgia: A Call for Action on International Human Rights Day

Tallinn, 10 December 2024

We stand in solidarity with the Georgian people, civil society, and peaceful protesters during this critical moment in Georgia's history. We urge the Estonian government, other foreign governments, international organizations, and human rights institutions to take decisive action. The suppression of civil society and violations of human rights cannot be ignored - Georgia needs our support, attention and action now more than ever.

Georgia is not an isolated case; we live in a time when democracy, human rights, and civil society are under constant attack worldwide. Georgia has become a critical battleground in the global struggle between authoritarianism and democracy, between freedom and a reality where citizens' voices and the rights of minorities are increasingly marginalized. We deeply admire the resilience, spirit, and courage of Georgian civil society in defending democracy and human rights in the face of adversity.

In the wake of the 2024 parliamentary elections, Georgia has witnessed large-scale, ongoing protests. The rights to freedom of association, peaceful assembly, and expression - fundamental pillars of democracy - are enshrined in numerous international human rights treaties. However, according to reliable and consistent reports, state violence in Georgia is widespread and systemic, leaving no credible state institution to address these violations. This underscores the urgent need for international human rights bodies to act promptly.

The severity of the situation is confirmed by several well-regarded sources:

1. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has condemned the excessive use of force by Georgian police during largely peaceful demonstrations. The Commissioner highlights the unjustified use of "special measures," including water cannons allegedly mixed with chemical irritants, in clear violation of established procedures. These actions pose serious dangers to the lives and well-being of protesters, reflecting a troubling disregard for international standards.
2. The Georgian Public Defender and their representatives have documented harsh treatment of protesters detained during demonstrations. After meeting with detainees and reviewing their injuries, the Public Defender has concluded that the violence used against citizens is not incidental but punitive in nature. The location, nature, and severity of injuries provide credible evidence of systematic brutality.
3. The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, a respected human rights organization active since 1994, has reported that authorities attack peaceful demonstrators, encircle and pursue them, arbitrarily detain citizens, and subject them to physical assaults. Furthermore, journalists covering the protests have been deliberately targeted, with police actions resulting in injuries severe enough to require hospitalization. Their findings paint a stark picture of human rights violations that extend beyond protesters to include members of the press.

Alarming, many of those who have suffered and been detained during the protests are young people - the future of Georgia. This is not only deeply unjust but also undermines the very foundation of the country's hopes for a democratic and vibrant future.

These distressing reports weigh heavily on our hearts. Estonia has long been a staunch supporter of Georgia's aspirations to join the European Union. Our country has provided development aid to help Georgia advance human rights, gender equality, anti-corruption efforts, and other values central to European and human rights principles. Estonian and Georgian civil society organizations share a decades-long history of collaboration to uphold these values, making these recent developments particularly painful to witness.

As organizations dedicated to advancing human rights and protecting the rights of minorities, we cannot and will not look away. Georgia is in our hearts, and we will continue to stand with its people and support its civil society in their fight for democracy, freedom, and dignity.

Jointly signed by:

Estonian Human Rights Centre

Estonian Chamber of People with Disabilities

Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation

Golden League NGO

Feministeerium

Estonian LGBT Association

Women's Support and Information Centre NPO

Estonian National Youth Council

Open Estonia Foundation

Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations