



**PRIME MINISTER
OF GEORGIA**

Tbilisi, 29 November 2012

Dear Commissioner,

First of all I would like to convey my kindest gratitude for your warm congratulations on my appointment as the Prime Minister of Georgia and thank you for your personal involvement and efforts in helping my country.

Georgia intends to actively pursue a genuine and constructive dialogue with the Council of Europe and its institutional bodies. It is Georgia's vital interest to promote, protect and uphold the values of the Council of Europe and to contribute to further advancement of this institution.

In response to your letter of 31 October, 2012 regarding the prison abuse scandal and in particular regarding the human rights violations in prison system, I would like to inform you that the new government of Georgia has embarked on a process of wide-ranging reforms that are inmates' rights oriented and are aimed at improving conditions in the penitentiary system. Accordingly, the goal of overcoming the heavy legacy inherited by the penitentiary system has been set as a top priority of the new government of Georgia.

Let me bring to your attention the measures implemented by the Ministry of Corrections and Legal Assistance of Georgia (MCLA) and present a tentative plan for 2013. At the same time I would like to underline that human rights abuses in the penitentiary system will no longer be tolerated. The new government of Georgia shares your concerns regarding the brutal treatment of prisoners in Georgia and expresses readiness for close cooperation to address the problem.

It has to be mentioned from the very outset that new Minister of the Corrections and Legal Assistance of Georgia has a strong background and extensive experience in human rights. The same holds true of the new head of the Penitentiary Department. Their vision is human rights oriented which is reflected in relevant action plans.

Nils MUIŽNIEKS

Commissioner of Human Rights

Council of Europe

Activities of General Inspection of the MCLA are of high importance when it comes to allegations of various human rights violations. General Inspection provides immediate inquiries and supervision over penitentiary establishments. At the same time, they have mandate to evaluate work performance for the purpose of eradicating any misconduct. Additionally, a special complaint box in every establishment is the novelty initiated by the MCLA. Inmates will be able to drop confidential complaint letters in this box on which General Inspection will be responsible to conduct inquiry. Hotline service has been resumed in the system, which means that during 24 hours General Inspection staff receives calls from all interested persons, regarding any concern related to the penitentiary system. For improving services rendered by the General Inspection and making its work more efficient, it is planned to employ extra staff.

In order to carry out effective monitoring of the whole penitentiary system in Georgia, it is planned to reform the Monitoring Unit of Penitentiary Department by expanding its mandate and retraining its staff. In addition, we are closely cooperating with local and international community to come up with the model of alternative monitoring mechanism of the penitentiary system to make the system as transparent and open as possible.

Provision of adequate medical care can serve as another measure for preventing inhuman and degrading treatment of inmates. Highly qualified and regularly trained penitentiary medical staff is operating nonstop in the medical units of each penitentiary establishment.

The most important is the adoption of Action Plan by the joint order of the MCLA and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Social Affairs (MoLHSA). According to the Action Plan the concrete reforms have been pursued in order to bring penitentiary healthcare system to the standards of the civil sector healthcare. Primary Healthcare Units will operate in all penitentiary establishments by 2013. The services of these units cover dental issues, psychiatric services, HIV/AIDS prevention. Since tuberculosis is one of the grave concerns in penitentiary system, new special Tuberculosis Treatment Center was built to provide inmates with immediate assistance without transferring them to public hospitals. It is also noteworthy that all pharmacies of Penitentiary Establishments were licensed to ensure distribution of safe and relevant medicines to inmates.

As one of the biggest challenges for the new government of Georgia are overcrowded establishments. Several new mechanisms have been implemented to tackle the problem. The brand-new mechanism for early release or reprieve of convicts due to health conditions has been introduced by the new

management. The joint statute will be adopted by the MCLA and the MoLSHA to ensure that prisoners who are in immediate need of medical assistance are released from sentence.

Another successful contributor to effective operation of the penitentiary system is the Commission of Early Conditional Release. Unprecedented number of inmates was released in previous weeks. The Commission along with local councils that are operating in different regions of Georgia actively continues reviewing inmates' applications to grant early conditional release.

The above-mentioned steps have been taken and number of them is envisaged in the foreseeable future in order to improve conditions in the Georgian penitentiary system and ensure their compliance with the European standards.

The Government of Georgia once again expresses its highest appreciation for the interest that CPT shows toward the situation in penitentiary system and monitors the steps taken in prisons by the new government in order to avoid human rights violations.

I would like to take this opportunity and extend my invitation to visit Georgia at any convenient time for you and confirm our full support in carrying out your mandate. Let me once again assure you that the new government of Georgia is committed to the values and principles of the Council of Europe.

Yours Sincerely,

Bidzina Ivanishvili

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be in Georgian script, written over a light blue grid background.

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