

Over 50 Journalists Attacked During Pride March in Tbilisi

Georgia remains committed to protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia and International Treaties, as well as takes all measures to ensure that freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are exercised.

It is also noteworthy that the existence of pluralistic media in the country represents one of the most significant achievements for Georgia, which is the cornerstone in building democracy and its protection is our main goal.

There are several aspects in relation to Pride Week in Tbilisi that needs to be emphasized:

With the purpose of ensuring the safe environment during Tbilisi Pride Week, starting from the preparatory period, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia held systematic meetings with the organizers of the event. The meetings aimed at planning preventive measures and eliminating possible violence acts against participants of the events scheduled within the Pride Week from the side of the opposing groups.

As a result of effective cooperation, the Ministry of Internal Affairs succeeded to ensure safety and security of the participants during the events of the July 1st and 3rd, which was positively assessed by the Tbilisi Pride organizers, as well as by different local and international organizations.

Concerning July 5th event, the Ministry of Internal Affairs repeatedly explained the organizers that considering the pre-announced rally of the opposing group, as well as past experiences and analysis of the existing circumstances, it would be highly risky and precarious to perform the final event, March of Dignity in the format of pacing on the Rustaveli Avenue in terms of protecting the safety of the participants.

To ensure more protection, the organizers of the Week were offered to consider alternative location and arrangement for performing the march, however, they were persistent in not considering changing the format of the event.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs provided maximum number of police forces throughout the city to allow Pride participants to exercise their constitutional right to march, and simultaneously to ensure their safety.

The unfortunate developments of July 5th in Tbilisi, raised questions and caused sincere concerns among our partners. Georgia has created a safe and free environment for the journalists' professional activities, as it is also pointed out in the Public Defender's latest report. The violent acts against media representatives on July 5th were spontaneous with no reasonable precondition of possible massive attacks. The police forces mobilized on the ground, took all appropriate measures to respond to and prevent all violent attacks in a timely manner.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia immediately launched the investigations on the violent acts that occurred on July 5th. The investigation has established that on July 5th 2021, the individuals participating in the demonstration, held in parallel with the Tbilisi Pride, attacked journalists and

cameramen representing different TV companies, internet publishers, and the press to prevent them from their journalistic activities, with the motive of intolerance based on discrimination.

The offenders also persecuted them based on their profession and did not let them perform their professional duties. In order to interfere with their professional work, using physical and verbal abuse, the perpetrators were forcing the representatives of the TV companies "Rustavi 2", "TV Pirveli", the publisher "Tabula", the information agency "Newpost" etc., to cease their professional activities.

For the time being, the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia has initiated criminal prosecution against 31 individuals. The charges include unlawful interference with a journalist's professional activities based on hate crime motivated by sexual orientation and gender identity, committed by a threat of violence (Article 154 §2 of the Criminal Code of Georgia), persecution of persons for their professional activity, committed with violence (CCG Article 156 §2 (a)) and participation in group violence (CCG Article 225 §2). All 31 defendants are detained based on the respective court order. 27 people were arrested in total for the violence committed against media representatives on July 5th. Around 50 individuals were recognized, including 42 journalists and operators, as victims in the case.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia continues intensive investigation process to identify all persons who broke the law by organizing and participating in the violence during the protest against Tbilisi Pride. Everyone, who performed violent acts and attacked media and peaceful citizens, will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. The Prosecutor's Office of Georgia has a strict policy against discrimination-based hate crime. It also takes all necessary measures to protect the legitimate interests of victims.