



The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders

The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders unites 30 human rights NGOs in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The Network seeks to facilitate creation of a safer and enabling environment for human rights defenders in the South Caucasus and to strengthen their voices in the region and internationally.

A journalist beaten up and illegally obstructed from carrying out professional activities in Georgia

27.01.10

On January 22, 2010 journalist Saba Tsitsikashvili, regional correspondent of Human Rights Center and editor of the regional newspaper “Kartlis Khma” (Voice of Kartli) was subjected to abuse and harassment by regional security guards in Shida Kartli. The guards abused Tsitsikashvili physically and verbally and obstructed him from carrying out his professional activities.

The incident occurred when the journalist visited the office of the regional administration to obtain public information concerning administrative-organizational expenses spent by the regional administration in 2009. The journalist had officially requested the public data several days before in accordance with Georgian legislation.

When he entered the regional administration building, the security guard blocked his way. Security guards assaulted Tsitsikashvili physically and verbally, forcibly kicked him out of the building and obstructed him from carrying out his journalistic activities. (Punishable under article 154 of Criminal Code of Georgia - illegal obstruction of journalist's professional activities).

The journalist relates the incidents to generally hostile attitude of the Shida Kartli regional administration towards his professional activities and the latest action of December 15 2009. More specifically, on that particular day Shida Kartli Regional Governor Lado Vardzelashvili presented an annual report of the work carried out by the regional administration to foreign ambassadors and NGOs. 10 minutes before the presentation Tsitsikashvili distributed copies of his article among the guests. The article reported about bonuses and other illegally taken financial allowances by the regional governor. This caused a serious dissatisfaction of the regional authorities and as Tsitsikashvili believes, resulted in the incident of January 22.

This is not the first case when Saba Tsitsikashvili is harassed and assaulted by representatives of regional authorities; In 2008, after the August Russian-Georgian War he received several life threats and was physically assaulted by the deputy regional governor of Shida Kartli, Zurab Chinchilakashvili. At the end of 2008 the situation became critical and Tsitsikashvili had to temporarily leave the country with the assistance of the **South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders**, FIDH and the **Human Rights House Network**.

It is noteworthy that one of the security guards involved in January 22 incident was the same person who assaulted Tsitsikashvili during the past incidents in 2008. This is a clear indication that impunity for previous abuses encourages offender to further commit illegal acts.

For the challenges encountered during his professional activities, the courage and commitment he has displayed while facing them, Tsitsikashvili was nominated for the Index on censorship award by the HRH F in December 2009.

The South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders urges the regional prosecutor's office to:

- effectively investigate the incident and bring the perpetrators to justice
- pay special attention to similar incidents and take all necessary measures to eradicate impunity for abuses against defenders and journalists

Creation of South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders is supported by the European Union.

Network is coordinated by Human Rights Center (Georgia), Armenian Helsinki Association (Armenia) and Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety (Azerbaijan).

Human Rights House Foundation (Oslo, Norway) is the international partner of the Network.

The Network urges Shida Kartli Regional Administration to:

- condemn acts committed by its security officers and apply administrative sanctions against them.

The Network urges the international community to:

- to ask for a prompt and impartial investigation
- remind the Georgian authorities of the right of human rights defenders to carry out their work without restrictions as guaranteed in the Un Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

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