



Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Transparency International Georgia and International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy

Calling for Immediate Investigation of Mestia Incident

May 20, 2010 / Tbilisi, Georgia – On 4 May 2010, regional media reported that acts of violence had been committed against members of opposition political parties in Mestia on 3 May. According to eyewitnesses, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Governor **Zaza Gorozia**, regional police chief **Tengiz Gunava**, Mestia police chief **Giorgi Shedania**, his deputy **Joni Belkania**, Interior Ministry high-ranking officer **Anzor Margiani**, Mestia majoritarian MP **Kandid (Kakha) Kvitsiani** and Mestia administration chief **Gocha Chelidze** were involved in the incident.

Representatives of the Georgian Young Lawyers Association and Transparency International Georgia travelled to Mestia on 14 May and spoke to eyewitnesses and members of opposition political parties in order to verify the information.

They confirmed that dozens of armed people and vehicles of law enforcement bodies were deployed outside the Mestia administration building at 11 p.m. on 3 May, which is also evident in a video footage recorded by one of the eyewitnesses. Candidates of the Freedom political movement were forcibly taken to the administration building before 3 a.m. and were forced to sign statements of withdrawal from the elections that had been drafted in advance.

Four candidates signed the withdrawal statements, while another four refused. Maia Chartolani, a candidate from the Alliance for Georgia bloc, also withdrew from the elections later because of threats. Bogdan Niguriani, a candidate for the Freedom political movement, was subjected to pressure and wrote a withdrawal statement on 3 May, before the night incident took place.

After the incident was made public, the Inter Agency Task Force working on the election-related issues recommended that Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Governor take a leave from the office. This kind of reaction by the Task Force cannot be considered an adequate measure for the restoration of trust in the electoral process in Mestia. The evidence provided by eyewitnesses clearly indicates that certain officials have committed criminal offences punishable under the Criminal Code, including “obstruction of expression of will in an

election, a referendum or a plebiscite” (Article 162), “coercion” (Article 150), “act of threat” (Article 151), “violence” (Article 126) and “abuse of authority” (Article 333).

Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Transparency International Georgia and International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy are calling on the authorities to investigate the 3 May incident in a timely and impartial manner and to take appropriate action:

- We are addressing the Georgian Prosecutor-in-Chief and demand that an investigation commence immediately in order to identify the offenders.
- We demand that the following officials be suspended until the investigation is completed: Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti Governor, regional police chief, Mestia police chief, his deputy, Mestia administration chief **Gocha Chelidze** and other individuals involved in the acts of threat committed on 3 May.

We also recommend that the Central Electoral Commission send a special representative to Mestia immediately, in order to avoid similar incidents before the elections and on the Election Day.

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