Georgia: Stop Police Brutality and Effectively Investigate Allegations of Torture

The United Against Torture Consortium (UATC), with our national members, call the Government of Georgia to end violence against peaceful protesters, promptly and impartially investigate all credible allegations of torture and other ill-treatment by Georgian security forces against protesters and detainees, ensure guarantees of non-repetition, and provide compensation for victims of human rights violations.

Since mid-April 2024, at least 300 individuals have been detained in Georgia during a violent police crackdown on mass peaceful protests against the re-introduction of the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence. Members and partners of UATC in Georgia report dozens of protesters have been severely beaten by masked police during arrests and in detention. A coalition of 12 Georgian NGOs that provide free legal aid services to protesters have qualified some of the incidences as torture. International human rights organisations have documented illegal, excessive use of force against protesters, including use of tear gas, stun grenades, pepper spray, and water cannons.

Activists have reported the use of rubber bullets against protesters, and images allegedly from the protest show some multiple projectile cartridges from Turkish arms manufacturer Turac. According to Omega Research Foundation, a member of UATC and an expert in use of less-lethal weapons, multiple projectile ammunition should never be used by law enforcement. Such kinetic impact projectiles are inherently inaccurate, indiscriminate, and do not comply with the UN Guidance on Less Lethal Weapons, or the 2024 UN Model Protocol for Law Enforcement.

The violent dispersal by police of the peaceful protests has been accompanied by a series of attacks on individual protesters by plain-clothes assailants, as well as criminal damage to the homes and offices of activists, which have been sprayed with hate message graffiti, and threatening phone calls, some to the children of activists.

“This is the most violent crackdown by police since the 2007 protests,” said Lela Tsiskarishvili, former President of UATC member the International Rehabilitation Council for Victims of Torture (IRCT) and Executive Director of the Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims (GCRT). “Over the past decade, we have seen a marked decline in the practice of torture in Georgia. Current events raise serious concerns that apart from persecution of civil society representatives, activists, and opposition politicians, physical violence and ill-treatment will be used in order to silence and intimidate opponents of the ruling party.”

Branded the ‘Russian Law’ by protesters in Georgia for its similarities to the many Kremlin-backed laws that have been used to decimate Russian civil society over the past decade, the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence requires media and NGOs to register as “pursuing the interests of a foreign power” if they receive more than 20 percent of their funding from abroad, and then submit onerous paperwork to the Ministry of Justice, or face crippling fines. The ‘foreign agent’ law was this week vetoed by Georgia’s President, but is set to pass through parliament on a final vote.

Tsiskarishvili warned implementation of the law would immediately threaten the confidential medical information of torture survivors, victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse, and human rights defenders facing persecution. Torture is prohibited under Georgia’s 1995 Constitution, and through its ratification of the UN Convention Against Torture and the European Convention on Human Rights.

UATC is an EU-funded project that pools the strengths and expertise of six international anti-torture organisations, in partnership with over 200 civil society organisations and other partners in 100+ countries, to strengthen and expand torture prevention, protection, rehabilitation and strategic litigation.

For more information please contact: Hugh Macleod at hml@irct.org / Eugenia Andreyuk at ean@omct.org