

GEORGIA: AUTHORITIES SHOULD IMMEDIATELY RELEASE NIKA MELIA AND ENGAGE IN A GENUINE DIALOGUE WITH THE OPPOSITION

Statement by members of the Civic Solidarity Platform

26 February 2020

We, the undersigned members of an international NGO network, the Civic Solidarity Platform, express our strong concern about the recent developments in Georgia that amount to a full-fledged political crisis provoked by the government.

On 23 February 2021, the Georgian government sent law enforcers and riot police into the headquarters of the major opposition party United National Movement (UNM) and [arrested](#) its chairman Nika Melia. We consider these actions by the authorities as arbitrary detention and selective justice, driven by political motives.

By the time the raid took place, representatives of different opposition parties, MPs, political activists and UNM supporters had gathered in the building. When storming the UNM headquarters and soon afterwards, the police administratively [detained](#) more than 20 peaceful protesters. The arrest of the opposition leader was preceded by numerous cases when the law enforcement officials disproportionately [interfered](#) with freedoms of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

The latest developments can be seen as a continuation of a dangerous and disturbing [pattern](#) of the Georgian government cracking down on the opposition, civil society and journalists, challenging their freedoms by limiting space for protests and expression, as well as engaging in aggressive rhetoric which encourages attacks against dissenting and opposition voices.

We are alarmed by the government's decision to further [aggravate](#) the political crisis, which developed following the parliamentary elections in October 2020, the conduct and the official results of which were strongly criticised by the opposition and civil society, by arresting the leader of the largest opposition party in the country.

We call on the authorities to immediately release Nika Melia, refrain from actions that contribute to the escalation of the political crisis in Georgia, take all necessary measures to resolve it, and engage in a genuine dialogue with the opposition. We urge the government to adhere to its OSCE commitments and other relevant international obligations and to guarantee the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression and not use police force against peaceful protests.

We call on the OSCE executive and political bodies, institutions and participating States to contribute to preventing further confrontation in the country by giving an appropriate reaction to the events taking place in Georgia. Georgian authorities should abide by the country's international obligations and work for the strengthening of democratic institutions and rule of law rather than undermining them.

List of organisations supporting the statement:

1. Public Association "Dignity", Kazakhstan
2. Human Rights Center (HRC), Georgia
3. Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Norway
4. Human Rights Monitoring Institute, Lithuania
5. Crude Accountability, USA
6. Centre for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights, Russia
7. DRA Berlin, Germany

8. Human Rights House Zagreb, Croatia
9. Public Verdict Foundation, Russia
10. The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House, Lithuania
11. Promo LEX, Moldova
12. The Swedish OSCE Network, Sweden
13. Netherlands Helsinki Committee, Netherlands
14. Human Rights Center ZMINA, Ukraine
15. Association UMDPL, Ukraine
16. Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Poland
17. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), International NGO