

URGENT ACTION

CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS AT RISK IN SOUTH OSSETIA

Timur Tskhovrebov, an independent journalist and civil society activist, was attacked and badly beaten in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, a breakaway territory from Georgia. The attackers also issued threats against his colleague Maria Pliyeva. Both activists are currently outside South Ossetia, but their safety is at risk if they return.

Timur Tskhovrebov told Amnesty International that on 24 July he was attacked in the centre of Tskhinvali by a group of up to 10 people, leaving him with a knife wound to the neck, a broken finger and injuries from punches to his face and body. He recognized his three main attackers, all of them members of the South Ossetian parliament. Timur Tskhovrebov took refuge at the local office of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), though initially he was denied entry by the office's staff and had to climb over the fence. While he was doing so, one of his attackers threatened him with a gun. During the attack, the assailants also shouted threats addressed to Timur Tskhovrebov's fellow journalist and civic activist **Maria Pliyeva**, promising that she "will be next". Timur Tskhovrebov has since left South Ossetia and is now in hospital in the city of Vladikavkaz, in the Russian North Caucasus republic of North Ossetia, recovering from his injuries. Maria Pliyeva told Amnesty International that she has also fled South Ossetia in fear for her safety following this incident.

Timur Tskhovrebov and Maria Pliyeva believe that they are being targeted because of their independent journalism and civic activism, and both have previously received threats. In July 2010 Timur Tskhovrebov and Maria Pliyeva attended the Georgian-Ossetian Civic Forum, a meeting of activists from the region, in the Netherlands. They co-signed a document which calls on the parties of the Geneva talks on Georgia to ensure that the humanitarian needs of those affected by the 2008 Georgian-Russian war are addressed and free movement of people in the region is permitted. On 22 July, Boris Chochiev, a senior South Ossetian official, made a televised speech condemning this initiative as "traitorous" and "harmful to the position of the South Ossetian delegation at the Geneva talks", and specifically named Timur Tskhovrebov as a South Ossetian participant in the Forum.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in Ossetian, Russian or your own language:

- Calling on the *de facto* authorities in South Ossetia to take all necessary action to protect Timur Tskhovrebov and Maria Pliyeva upon their return to South Ossetia;
- Calling for a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into the attack on Timur Tskhovrebov irrespective of the status of his alleged attackers; and urging them to ensure that the perpetrators of this attack are brought to justice;
- Urging them to ensure freedom of expression in South Ossetia, including for people with dissenting political views.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 13 SEPTEMBER 2010 TO:

Prosecutor General of South Ossetia

Taimuraz Khugayev

Fax: +79974454527

Salutation: Dear Mr Khugayev

Minister of the Interior of South Ossetia

Valeriy Valiyev

Fax: +79974454532

Salutation: Dear Mr Valiyev

And copies to:

Director of Consular Department

Andrei G. Karlov

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation

Smolenskaya-Sennaya Sq., 32/34

Moscow 119002, Russian Federation

Fax: +74992442476

Email: text@dks.ru

Please highlight that Timur Tskhovrebov and Maria Pliyeva are Russian citizens

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Timur Tskhovrebov is editor-in-chief of the independent newspaper *21 Seculare*. His colleague Maria Pliyeva also writes for *21 Seculare*, and is also the chair of the independent NGO, Civic Initiative.

South Ossetia, a breakaway territory from Georgia, was at the centre of a five-day war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008. Following the conflict, severe mutual travel restrictions were introduced by Georgia and South Ossetia, severely disrupting economic, family and other links. In addition, problems with the supply of gas and water since the conflict have severely affected the lives of people in the region. As part of the truce established in September 2008 between Georgia and Russia, delegations of the two countries meet in Geneva to discuss post-crisis management.

Members of South Ossetian parliament are protected from prosecution by parliamentary immunity, and criminal allegations against them can only be initiated if their immunity is lifted by the parliamentary decision.

Like most people in South Ossetia, Timur Tskhovrebov and Maria Pliyeva hold Russian passports as well as passports issued by the *de facto* authorities in South Ossetia. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, via its consular service, is tasked with protecting the rights and interests of its citizens abroad.

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