

Georgia: Immediate action needed on persistent human rights violations

The Georgian government should take immediate action to implement the UN Human Rights Committee's recommendations on persistent human rights violations, said Amnesty International today.

The lack of progress made by the Georgian government in key areas has been highlighted by the UN Committee as it concluded its current consideration of the country's compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

"While welcoming positive measures, we urge the Georgian government not to shrink from full implementation of the human rights principles to which it subscribes," Amnesty International said.

In its concluding observations, the Human Rights Committee expressed among other things its concern about the "widespread and continuing" torture and ill-treatment of prisoners by law enforcement officials and prison officers as well as the lack of remedies open to victims. It also expressed its concern at "the still very large number of deaths of detainees in police stations and prisons, including suicides and deaths from tuberculosis".

Amnesty International has regularly expressed its concern about the numerous reports it has received about torture and ill-treatment in detention facilities. A number of them appear to have gone without serious investigation, even where these have resulted in the death of the detainee, as with a series of fatalities suffered by detainees after allegedly falling or jumping out of the upper floor windows of police stations.

The Committee also noted "with deep concern" the rising toll of acts of religious intolerance and the harassment of religious minorities. In its evidence to the Committee, the Georgian government had reported that the current criminal code, unlike the previous one, does not ban the advocacy of national, racial and religious hatred. Its delegation had agreed that such laws were necessary but no specific commitment was forthcoming.

Amnesty International has published information on a catalogue of assaults on members of minority religious groups by radical supporters of the Georgian Orthodox Church. In many of these instances, members of the law enforcement bodies have failed to prevent the attacks or to protect the victims. There has been more than one occasion on which police officers are reported to have joined in the physical assault.

The Committee also expressed its concern at discrimination against conscientious objectors due to the fact that non-military alternative service is twice as long as ordinary military service and that the rules on the acceptance of conscientious objection are not clear. Amnesty International had previously raised its own concerns about this with the Georgian authorities.

The Committee also recorded its concern with the harassment of members of non-governmental organizations, particularly those defending human rights.

Amnesty International supports the recommendations of the Human Rights Committee, which include measures to:

- protect the life and health of all detainees;*
- prevent and punish all forms of torture and ill-treatment;*
- ensure the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion;*
- investigate and prosecute harassment of religious minorities;*

reduce non-military alternative service to a non-discriminatory length;
conduct training and public awareness campaigns on human rights;
ensure that non-governmental organizations, especially those defending human rights, can operate in safety;
publicise the Committee's conclusions in all appropriate languages.

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