



AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GEORGIA: APPEAL CASE

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Doubts remain about those responsible for Sandro Girgvliani's death

Sandro Girgvliani, a senior employee of a bank, died in January 2006 at the age of 28 as a result of severe beatings and other ill-treatment by Interior Ministry officers. On 6 July Tbilisi city court sentenced four officers to terms of imprisonment for causing his death. After the trial, allegations remained that those who killed Sandro Girgvliani may have acted on the orders of others who have not yet been identified and brought to justice.

Late on 27 January 2006 three officers of the Interior Ministry reportedly abducted Sandro Girgvliani and his friend Levan Bukhaidze to the village of Okrokana near Tbilisi. The three officers and another officer who reportedly joined them later were said to have beaten and otherwise ill-treated the two young men severely. Levan Bukhaidze was abandoned by the men and managed to get back to Tbilisi. Sandro Girgvliani was said to have died as a result of injuries he sustained and was found near a local cemetery the next day. Reportedly, a forensic medical expert found 12 wounds on his neck and two dozen cuts on his left arm.

A television report on *Imedi* TV in early February alleged that senior officials of the Interior Ministry may have ordered the killing. According to non-governmental sources, the abduction and beating of the two young men were connected to a quarrel earlier that evening in Chardin Bar in central Tbilisi where Sandro Girgvliani, Levan Bukhaidze, several senior officials of the Interior Ministry and the Interior Minister's wife had spent the evening.

According to official sources, the quarrel between Sandro Girgvliani and Levan Bukhaidze on the one hand and Interior Ministry officers on the other started outside the bar, not in the presence of senior officials of the Ministry or the Minister's wife.

On 6 March the Interior Minister announced at a press conference that "we have solved the murder of Girgvliani" and that four suspects, all employees of the Department of Constitutional Security at the Interior Ministry, had been arrested on suspicion of killing Sandro Girgvliani. However, several local human rights organizations and opposition politicians urged that the investigation should continue to identify those who allegedly had ordered the crime.

At a news briefing on 2 May Tbilisi city prosecutor Giorgi Ghviniashvili stated that "the fact that the arrested individuals [...] committed the crime is confirmed by numerous pieces of evidence, including their confessions [...] Most importantly, they were identified by victim Levan Bukhaidze." He added that "so far, we have no evidence pointing to anyone who gave the order to carry out the crime".

The trial of the four Interior Ministry employees commenced on 27 June and on 6 July Geronti Alania, Avtandil Aptsiauri, Mikheil Bibiluri, and Aleksandre Gachava were sentenced to terms of imprisonment from seven to eight years for crimes including "deliberate infliction of grave injuries". On 11 December the Court of Appeals upheld the sentences.

Allegations remained that no impartial investigation had been opened into reports that those who killed Sandro Girgvliani acted on the orders of senior officials of the Interior Ministry. In this context, Nino Burdzhaniadze, Speaker of Parliament and a leader of the ruling party, was reported by the online magazine *Civil Georgia* as stating at a session of Parliament on 13 February 2007 that "it is of principled importance for us that the trial ends once and forever in a way that society expects it to be finished and the truth is revealed about this tragedy".

A draft resolution drawn up by opposition politicians calling for a special investigation commission into the death of Sandro Girgvliani and a young man who died at the hands of police officers in November 2004 was voted down by Parliament on 16 February 2007.

Shalva Shavgulidze, Sandro Girgvliani's lawyer, lodged an appeal with the Supreme Court of Georgia calling on the court to review the case and consider allegations that senior officials ordered the killing. As of 9 March 2007 the Supreme Court had not yet reached a decision regarding the acceptability of the appeal.

Recommended actions:

Please send letters in Georgian, English or your own language. If the fax does not work, please send your letter by post.

- expressing concern regarding the beating and other ill-treatment of Sandro Girgvliani and Levan Bukhaidze by officials of the Interior Ministry in January 2006, which resulted in Sandro Girgvliani's death.
- urging the authorities to investigate allegations that the four officials convicted for killing Sandro Girgvliani acted on the orders of others including senior officials of the Interior Ministry.

Please address your appeals to:

President of Georgia

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Prosecutor General of Georgia

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Diplomatic representatives of Georgia accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND ANY REPLIES FROM THE AUTHORITIES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT OF AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. (Eurasia team, Amnesty International; 1 Easton Street; London WC1X 0DW; United Kingdom)