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**EXTERNAL**

**Garri Anatolyevich PILIA**  
**in Russian**

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**Republic of Georgia**

**Amnesty International is concerned by reports from unofficial sources that Garri Pilia, an ethnic Abkhazian, was detained by Georgian forces in August 1992 as a hostage on grounds of his ethnic origin, and remains imprisoned because he is related to an opposition Abkhazian parliamentarian. At least one other person is also said to have been detained on these grounds.** The organization is seeking further information about the circumstances of Garri Pilia's detention and any charge or charges against him in order to determine whether he is a prisoner of conscience.

Garri Pilia was born in 1961 and comes from Tkvarcheli, a town in the south of Abkhazia. Abkhazia itself is located in the north-west of Georgia, and recent tensions between the local and republican administrations came to a head on 14 August 1992 when Georgian forces entered the area and took control of the capital, Sukhumi. At that time Garri Pilia is said to have been staying with friends in Dranda, a town to the south of Sukhumi. Around 18 to 20 August 1992, according to his friends, Garri Pilia started out to return home but was taken hostage. A former detainee of Dranda prison reported hearing that Garri Pilia was also being held at Dranda, but his exact whereabouts and situation are currently not known. It is also not clear if any criminal charge or charges have been brought against him.

#### Background

Abkhazia was annexed by Tsarist Russia in 1864. In March 1921, following the Red Army's takeover of the independent Georgian republic, Abkhazia was proclaimed an independent Union republic. However by 1931 it had been incorporated into Georgia as an Autonomous Republic. The Abkhaz are currently a minority in their republic. According to the Soviet census of 1989 they constituted 17.8% of the population, with Georgians making up 45.7%. Other large minorities include Russians, who constituted 16% at that time, and Armenians who constituted 15%.

Tension has long existed between sections of the Abkhazian population who have been seeking greater independence, and the Georgian government which has sought to preserve the republic's territorial integrity. Various measures taken over the years have exacerbated each side's perception that they have been discriminated against by the other.

Armed conflict broke out on 14 August 1992, when Georgian troops entered Abkhazia and took over the capital, Sukhumi. The official reason for this was to combat looting and sabotage along the railway line and to search for Georgian officials, including the Interior Minister, who had

been reportedly kidnapped by supporters of ousted President Gamsakhurdia. The Abkhazian leadership regarded the incursion as an invasion and have subsequently moved the seat of their operations to Gudauta, a town some 45 kilometres north-west of Sukhumi. Fighting has continued sporadically since then, and is estimated to have claimed hundreds of lives.

In the context of this conflict Amnesty International has approached the Georgian authorities concerning numerous allegations that Georgian armed forces have been involved in human rights violations within the scope of the organization's work, including the arbitrary detention of non-combatants, some in the condition of hostages, on the grounds of their ethnic origin; beatings and ill-treatment of detainees; and extrajudicial executions.

For example M.K. Dzhindzholiya of Sukhumi reports that he was out walking with his uncle on 17 August 1992 when they were stopped by members of the Georgian National Guard close to the Institute of Experimental Pathology and Therapy. He alleges that both he and his uncle were detained solely because of their ethnic origin as Abkhazians, and that they were beaten, kicked and subjected to a mock execution. After this they were taken in a bus along with some 42 other detainees to Dranda prison (where Garri Pilia has reportedly been sighted). M. K. Dzhindzholiya says that on arrival the detainees were forced to pass one by one between two lines of Georgian guardsmen who beat them severely as they went through. M.K. Dzhindzholiya was released without charge on 21 August in an exchange of prisoners.

Allegations of human rights violations have also been made against forces under Abkhazian control, and Amnesty International is seeking further information on those that fall within its remit.