

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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GEORGIA: ESCALATING REPRESSION AND ARBITRARY ARRESTS THREATEN RIGHT TO PROTEST

Amnesty International is gravely concerned over the recent wave of arrests and reprisals against protesters in Georgia. In a post-election clampdown that followed the events of 4 October, when a peaceful anti-government protest in Tbilisi escalated into clashes after some participants attempted to enter the compound of the presidential palace, police carried out heavily militarized raids, including operations targeting protesters in their homes, often in the presence of children. More than 60 people were charged in connection with the 4 October events, facing accusations such as participation in group violence and blocking strategic infrastructure. Many of those detained appear to have been denied due process and legal safeguards.

A second wave of arrests followed shortly after the adoption of new restrictive legislation rushed through the ruling party-(Georgian Dream) controlled parliament, which criminalizes non-violent protest and enables the imposition of disproportionate and unwarranted custodial sanctions, including up to two weeks of administrative imprisonment for actions such as blocking a road or wearing a face covering. More than 100 people have since been detained solely for exercising their right to peaceful protest under the new law's vague, excessively broad provisions which violate human rights such as the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.

These actions on the part of the Georgian government represent a significant escalation in repression which seeks to impose a chilling effect on the protest movement, and to strip the people of their rights to peaceful protest.

Amnesty International calls on the Georgian authorities to immediately release all individuals detained solely for exercising their rights to peaceful protest, to halt arbitrary arrests and prosecutions, and ensure fair trials for those detained. Police officers who used disproportionate and unlawful use of force during the post-4 October arrest operations must be held accountable, to end the existing cycle of police impunity.

REPRISALS AGAINST PROTESTERS FOLLOWING 4 OCTOBER MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS

On 4 October, tens of thousands of people gathered peacefully in Tbilisi to protest local elections that took place amid severe political reprisals against opposition figures and civil society.

A group of protesters attempted to forcibly enter the compound of the presidential palace. Police dispersed them using pepper spray, tear gas and water cannons. Thirty-five police officers and at least six protesters were reportedly injured following clashes.¹ The ruling party said events amounted to a foreign-orchestrated coup attempt and vowed a harsh response.²

In the aftermath of the 4 October protests, armed special forces carried out raids across multiple cities, detaining more than 60 protesters, many at their homes and in operations resembling counter-terror raids. The arrests were followed by the hasty adoption and enforcement of sweeping legislative amendments which were pushed through by the ruling party-(Georgian Dream) controlled parliament on 16 October. The new provisions to the Criminal Code and

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/MIAofGeorgia/videos/1150063759824902/>

² <https://x.com/shpapuashvili/status/1975992605453451302>

Administrative Offences Code that outlaw blocking roads, wearing face coverings, and erecting temporary structures have since been used to arrest and charge more than 30 protesters.

UNNECESSARY USE OF FORCE DURING “TERRORIZING” HOME RAIDS

The nationwide arrest operations in the aftermath of 4 October were marked by excessive force and intimidation. Armed special forces units carried out simultaneous raids across multiple cities, often in the early hours of the morning, detaining protesters in their homes and often in the presence of their family members and children.

Witnesses consistently described scenes resembling a **counter-terror operation**. Masked police equipped with assault rifles arrived at dawn in convoys, blocked streets and surrounded residential buildings before breaking into homes and awakening children at gunpoint.

During one of these terrorizing arrests, **Mariam Mekhantishvili**, a single mother of a six-year-old daughter, reported being detained early in the morning in front of her child during one of these raids. Notably, Mekhantishvili was detained after television footage captured her speaking with the Finnish foreign minister at a protest in Tbilisi on 14 October. She is accused of “organizing group violence” under Article 225 of the Criminal Code.

Another activist, **Davit Ghurtskaya**, was reportedly detained in front of his three-year-old child on 17 October. According to his wife, the operation took place at around 6 am, when armed officers and police forcibly entered their home while the family was asleep. She recounted that officers stormed the bedroom, waking up the children in terror, and handcuffing David Ghurtskaya in front of his family.

Twenty-two-year-old **Simon Makharadze** was reportedly seized from his relatives’ home in Ozurgeti, western Georgia, during a pre-dawn raid on 17 October. His cousin, who witnessed the detention, described the violent raid on their home while two children were asleep. According to him, armed officers stormed the house with automatic rifles. He stated that one officer pointed a gun at a four-year-old child’s head, while others threatened sexualized violence and the killing of family pets, all in the presence of children.³

Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze said the deployment of special forces was necessary to detain individuals “who go into hiding,” despite the fact that the arrests were carried out in the private homes of those individuals.⁴

On 28 October the ruling party filed a lawsuit to ban three opposition parties — the United National Movement, Coalition for Change, and Lelo — accusing them of seeking to overthrow the constitutional order, inciting protests, and undermining territorial integrity. The case, filed under Article 23 of the Constitution, which permits banning parties that threaten the state’s order or promote violence, has been condemned by opposition leaders as a move to ban opposition parties and political dissent.⁵

FAIR TRIAL CONCERNS: BLANKET PRE-TRIAL DETENTION AND VIOLATIONS OF THE PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE

Over 60 individuals have been detained and criminally charged in connection with the 4 October demonstrations. Those detained are charged with incitement to violently overthrow the government, attempting to seize or block strategic facilities, and organising or participating in group violence, while others are accused of using violence against law enforcement officers. These provisions carry severe penalties ranging from six to nine years.⁶

Only three of the criminally charged individuals have been released on bail based on humanitarian considerations. In all other cases the court has imposed pre-trial detention. Several defence lawyers told Amnesty International that in their clients’ cases the courts did not look into individualized circumstances, assessing the risks of flight or

³ <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DP5hzhvjM-A/>

⁴ <https://publika.ge/kobakhidze-dakavebebze-specrazmi-sachiroa-roca-imalebian-yvela-sheeguos-imas-rac-khdeba/>

⁵ Georgia ruling party files lawsuit to ban opposition parties - JURIST - News

⁶ <https://publika.ge/article/4-oqtombris-movlenebi-vin-aris-41-dakavebuli-moqalaze/>

destruction of evidence as required by law, but imposed blanket pre-trial detentions during what were often summary hearings.

On 8 October, protester **Giorgi Kirvalidze** was remanded in pre-trial detention after the court rejected a bail request. According to his lawyer, the decision was made without any individualized justification, with no assessment of the risk of him absconding, destroying evidence, or committing a new crime and despite the fact that Kirvalidze appeared voluntarily at the police station after learning that the police were looking for him, and did not attempt to flee or resist arrest in any way.⁷

Several defence lawyers told Amnesty International that despite the severe criminal penalties envisaged for the alleged offences, many of those detained have been charged and remanded without reasonable suspicion or evidence of wrongdoing. Lawyers report that in several cases the prosecution's case files rely almost exclusively on selectively abridged or low-quality video footage that merely depicts individuals in the vicinity of the presidential palace during the 4 October protests. These clips, which show no identifiable act of violence or unlawful conduct, are nonetheless being used as the sole basis for indictments under articles relating to "group violence" and "attempted seizure of strategic facilities."

Zurab Chavchanidze, a displaced person from Abkhazia, was detained on 8 October 2025 and charged under Articles 222 and 225 of the Criminal Code for the alleged "attempted seizure of strategic facilities" and "participation in group violence." His lawyer, Nino Lominadze, told Amnesty International that the prosecution has presented no evidence establishing his involvement in any violent acts or attempts to seize state buildings. According to the lawyer, the video footage presented by the prosecution only shows him sitting down in the premises of the presidential palace before being pepper sprayed by special forces. He had travelled from Batumi to Tbilisi on 4 October to join the protests when security forces began violently dispersing crowds near the presidential palace.

The arrests following the 4 October protests as well as detentions under the new restrictive laws described below have been accompanied by statements from high-ranking government officials that undermine the presumption of innocence of those detained and prejudice the judicial process. In a recent example, on 23 October when speaking to journalists, Parliamentary Speaker Shalva Papulashvili referred to a woman protester detained on criminal charges of hooliganism, claiming that she had been incited by foreign forces to commit the crime and had proceeded to carry it out. This statement was made just one day after her detention and before any court hearing or judicial determination in her case.⁸

The blanket use of pre-trial detention in the absence of individualized evidence or clear judicial reasoning constitutes a serious breach of Georgia's international obligations and represents a regression to punitive, politically motivated justice. Amnesty International emphasizes that the rights of fair trial of these detained, including their right to presumption of innocence and the principle of individual criminal responsibility (no-one should be held responsible for acts for which they are not personally culpable) must be upheld.

CRIMINALIZING THE PROTESTS

On 17 October, new amendments to Georgia's Administrative and Criminal Codes entered into force, dramatically expanding the powers of law enforcement to penalize those who organize and participate in peaceful assemblies. The changes introduced sweeping new penalties for protest actions long recognized as legitimate forms of protest and expression. Covering one's face, wearing items such as masks or scarves, or setting up temporary protest structures—including tents, installations, stages or banners—are now punishable by up to 15 days of administrative detention, or 20 days for organizers. Participation in any protest "subject to termination at the demand of the Ministry of Internal Affairs" is punishable by up to 60 days of administrative detention, effectively giving the Ministry unilateral power to end demonstrations and imprison participants.

⁷ <https://sknews.ge/ka/news/44163>

⁸ <https://www.interpressnews.ge/ka/article/852646-shalva-papuashvili-vnaxet-adamiani-romelic-policiis-mankanaze-azvra-es-kalbatoni-danashaulisken-caakezes-shemdeg-panel-diskusiebs-chaatareben-albat-mis-surats-sadme-achveneben-aigeben-grantebs-daleven-qavas-da-eknebat-salonuri-saubari/>

Repeated offenses trigger criminal liability, with sentences of up to one year in prison for a second violation and up to two years for subsequent offenses. Similarly, individuals accused of “insulting or disobeying” police orders three or more times may face criminal prosecution carrying up to one year of imprisonment. These amendments give law enforcement wide discretion to interpret behaviour as unlawful, effectively allowing the criminalization of ordinary protest activity.

In the days following the passage of the new amendments, police began systematically identifying and targeting individuals involved in protest activities. The available footage from the protests shows officers stopping people in the vicinity of Rustaveli Avenue, searching them, and confiscating masks or scarves allegedly used during the rallies, before arresting them. Activists were photographed, questioned about their participation, and warned that repeated involvement in demonstrations would result in criminal prosecution. This campaign of intimidation extended beyond the capital, with reports of police surveillance and visits to activists’ homes in other cities.

On 19 October, just two days after the amendments took effect, the Ministry of Internal Affairs announced that police had identified 27 individuals accused of taking part in blocking part of Rustaveli Avenue during the 18 October demonstration. Fourteen were taken into custody, and administrative proceedings were initiated against the remaining thirteen. Among those detained were journalist and television anchor Vakho Sanaia, sentenced to six days of administrative detention, and his colleague, journalist Ketil Tsitskishvili, who received a five-day sentence. Civic activist Lara Nachkebia was detained for four days for “covering her face with a scarf”.

Only days later, on 22 October, police again moved to disperse a peaceful protest in Tbilisi, detaining between 20 and 30 participants after demonstrators blocked Rustaveli Avenue during the daily pro-EU, anti-government rally. Witnesses reported that police used force to remove even protesters who were simply present but who were not blocking the road and that at least one person was hospitalized as a result.

An estimated 100 people have been reported detained between 16-26 October for blocking roads or covering one’s face during demonstrations, including opposition figures, journalists, and media professionals, and facing fines and administrative detention from five to 14 days.⁹

This wave of arrests in Georgia, absent due process safeguards and combined with the recent legislative amendments, is clearly intended to create a chilling effect on the right to protest—a right protected under both domestic and international law. Peaceful acts of protest (including where these involve blocking roadways, wearing masks, or setting up temporary structures) should not be met with house raids or imprisonment. Laws that criminalize the exercise of the rights of peaceful assembly and expression violate Georgia’s constitution as well as its obligations under international human rights law, and must be repealed. The cumulative effect of these measures is the systematic erosion of the right to protest and closing down the space for civic participation.

⁹ MIA: 60 Detained in Three Days Over Protest-Related Offenses – Civil Georgia