

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST SUBJECTED TO TORTURE OR OTHER ILL-TREATMENT FOR PROTESTING

Activist Davit Katsarava was detained for protesting peacefully on 14 May. Police subjected him to beating, strangulation, and other degrading treatment, which they filmed on their phones. He was hospitalized with broken facial bones, severe head concussion and an eye injury.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE MODEL LETTER

*Mr. Irakli Kobakhidze,
Prime Minister*

Administration of the Government of Georgia

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GeorgianGovernment>

Tel: (995 32) 299 09 00

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to you in connection with the arbitrary arrest, beating and abuse of activist Davit Katsarava.

Davit Katsarava was apprehended by special police forces on 14 May in front of the Parliament while protesting peacefully against the law "On Transparency of Foreign Influence." Several masked men without identification numbers from special police forces, dragged him away from the crowd, handcuffed him on the ground, and started beating him in his face and head while hurling insults. He was then taken to a police minivan, where they continued beating him with special knuckle-duster gloves, aiming sustained blows at his face and head. One of the officers also attempted to strangle him with his scarf several times. After several hours of violence and humiliation, officers filmed him before ostensibly waiting for confirmation to hand him over to patrol police. After signing administrative proceedings for "petty hooliganism" patrol police transferred him to a hospital, where he was diagnosed with a severe brain concussion, multiple facial bone fractures, including a broken eye socket and jaw, and had to undergo urgent surgery. He continues to suffer from loss of eyesight and heavy concussion.

Davit Katsarava is one of dozens of people who suffered severe injuries at the hands of security forces during peaceful protests. Since April, more than a hundred individuals were reported to have been arbitrarily detained, severely beaten, tortured or otherwise ill-treated for their participation in protests.

It is unacceptable that no one has been identified and held accountable for more than a hundred complaints by protestors about beatings and other forms of torture and ill-treatment. The failure to carry out effective investigations and ensure accountability perpetuates a culture of impunity.

I urge you to ensure a prompt, impartial and effective investigation into all allegations of torture or other ill-treatment of protestors during or after protests, or while in detention, including that of Davit Katsarava, and to bring those responsible to account in fair trial proceedings, including any officials who gave orders for the unlawful use of force.

Additionally, I ask you to take urgent and effective measures to prevent torture and other ill-treatment of protestors and ensure that people can protest peacefully without fear of being arbitrarily arrested, physically assaulted, or otherwise abused for peacefully protesting or expressing dissenting opinions. This includes publicly condemning acts of unlawful use of force by the police, ensuring that police officers and other officials making arrests wear clearly visible identification.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Davit Katsarava is a leader of the Georgian anti-occupation movement "Strength in Unity," which conducts monitoring of the Russian occupation line (the border between Georgian-controlled territory and Russian-occupied regions of the country) since 2017. Alongside members of the movement, Katsarava regularly visits to document complaints from local population and observe Russian military movements. He has also been actively involved in the widespread protests against the bill "On transparency of foreign influence" that obliges civil society organizations that receive funding from foreign sources to register as "conductors of foreign influence." The bill, which has since been signed into law, violates the rights to freedom of association and expression.

Davit Katsarava was apprehended by special police forces on 14 May in front of the Parliament while protesting peacefully against the parliament's approval of the bill. In the video footage depicting his arrest, Davit Katsarava is seen standing among other participants of the rally and addressing the police in a peaceful manner, when several police officers broke off from the ranks, ran in his direction and dragged him away, all of them had their faces covered with black masks.

In a video interview given to Amnesty International on 28 May, he recounted in detail how he was detained, beaten and abused for more than an hour by members of special police lasting more than an hour:

"The beating and physical abuse started immediately, as soon as they captured me and dragged me outside the protest area. They took my bag, phone, personal belongings and started beating me mercilessly as they were yelling de-humanising insults. At some point, I heard someone giving an order to make a circle, and around 10 members of the special forces started beating me simultaneously while I was on the ground, handcuffed. After this they put me in the minivan where the insults, abuse and beatings continued. They were wearing special gloves with knuckle-dusters and aimed the blows at my face and head. At the third beating, they beat me with special cruelty, since one of them yelled: "ill him, kill him". Then they started to choke me with the scarf I was wearing. I was sure I was going to be either killed or maimed. When they saw that my whole face and head were bleeding and I couldn't open my left eye, they took out a phone and started filming me. Only after filming, they handed me to the police, who made me sign a notification of facing administrative proceedings, and called an emergency ambulance after."

Davit had to undergo an urgent surgery for his broken facial bones and eye surgery and continues to suffer from the results of head concussion that prevent him from perform even nominal activities. He also has an impaired vision and permanent eye injuries.

The Special Investigation Service, a body charged with investigating abuses by police, started an investigation into the beating of Davit Katsarava that they qualified as "exceeding official authority with the use of violence" (Article 333(3)(b) of the Criminal Code).

Police reportedly arrested 13 people during the 14 May protest, all of them are accused of petty hooliganism or disobedience to the police. According to the reports of Georgian human rights watchdogs, since the beginning of the protests on 15 April, approximately 300 people have been arrested for protesting against the law "On transparency of foreign influence", more than 200 persons have been charged with administrative violations and fined for their participation in protests. About a dozen of protesters face criminal charges. Some 100 protestors have reported being subjected to beating and other forms of ill-treatment by the police, including several suffering serious injuries.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Georgian, English

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 5 August 2024

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Davit Katsarava (He/Him)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

Ms Sofio Katsarava
Ambassador Extraordinary & Plenipotentiary
Embassy of Georgia
20 St George's Square, SW1V 2HP
020 7348 1941
Fax 020 7603 6682
Email: london.emb@mfa.gov.ge
Salutation: Your Excellency

<https://x.com/miaofgeorgia>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GeorgianGovernment>
(1) Irakli Kobakhidze (@PM_Kobakhidze) / X
(1) MIA of Georgia (@MIAofGeorgia) / X

Suggested messaging:

We call on Irakli Kobakhidze of @GovernmentGeo to protect the right to peaceful protest in Georgia. Police use unlawful force, torture and other ill-treatment against protesters, such as Davit Katsarava, who was beaten for protesting peacefully and suffered a severe concussion, eye injury, and broken facial bones. We urge Mr Kobakhidze to ensure a prompt and effective investigation into this and other instances of illegal use of force by the police against protesters in Georgia and protect the right to protest. Everyone has a right to peacefully protest without fear!

Dozens of opponents of the bill on "foreign influence" in Georgia have reported being beaten by the police forces. I'm calling on @ GovernmentGeo to put an end to illegal use of force by police violence against peaceful protesters #protecttheprotest

(<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/8015/2024/en/>)