

Statement by Non-Governmental Organizations Regarding Pressure on the Civil Sector

On January 26, 2015, Bidzina Ivanishvili made a statement regarding the conduction of a survey to study activity of the leaders of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Fair Elections and Transparency International Georgia, Nino Lomjaria and Eka Gigauri, as well as the former Chairman of Georgian Young Lawyers Association, Kakha Kozhoridze. The survey will be conducted by Citizen NGO, founded by Bidzina Ivanishvili.

The above statement is fully in line with the statements that Bidzina Ivanishvili made during and after his premiership, speaking about an urgent need for changes in the civil sector and pledging support for this process after he quit the government. It should be noted in this regard that incumbent Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili has also made several groundless allegations regarding NGOs.

Every person, be it a civil society activist or a politician, has the right to express an opinion regarding any organization and its leaders. Yet, this right should not be turned into a lever of direct or indirect pressure against critically thinking persons, especially if done with informal use of public resources and through serious financial support.

We believe that such standards are improper for a country with democratic transformation ambitions, aspiring to membership in the European Union and NATO and sharing democratic values. At the same time, we would like to express indignation in connection with the obviously anti-Western statements, made by the ex-Prime Minister's business partners, who accused international donors of criminal affiliation with civil society leaders and organization of anti-state conspiracy. Such approaches are typical of totalitarian states.

Public consolidation and intensification of democratic development are of key significance in the light of the challenges facing our country. Effective and transparent government and civil society free from pressure are necessary conditions of the country's progress that can be promoted by a strong civil society with diversity of opinion.

Unfortunately, despite the government change, the ruling force's negative attitude towards the civil society has remained unchanged.

We would like to express solidarity with our colleagues and concern with the present situation.

We reiterate our position regarding the need for more dialogue and effort to find common interests and opportunities and to rationally use the high potential of our society. We come for dialogue and against creation of new sources of conflict.

We would also like to underline that we are open for reasoned criticism, but we cannot accept groundless and populist accusations that fuel negative attitudes and stereotypes against the civil sector among the public.

Signatory Organizations:

1. European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi
2. United Public Movement "Multinational Georgia"
3. Foundation "Multi- Ethnic Resource Centre on Civic Education Development"
4. Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters
5. Human Rights Centre
6. Centre for European Studies
7. Media Research Centre
8. The Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia
9. Research-Intellectual Club "Dialogue of Generations"
10. Open Society Georgia Foundation
11. International Center for Advancement of Research, Technology & Innovation (ICARTI)
12. Energy Efficiency Centre Georgia
13. Media Monitoring Centre of Georgia
14. Caucasus Environmental NGO network (CENN)
15. Eurasia Partnership Foundation
16. Post Alioni
17. Association "Atinati"
18. Repatriates' Union
19. Association DEA for Disabled Women and Mothers of Disabled Children
20. Youth Alternative
21. Junior achievement of Georgia
22. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)
23. Economic Policy Research Centre (EPRC)
24. Institute for the study of nationalism and conflict
25. Association of Tea Producers Georgia "Georgian Tea"
26. Georgia's Reforms Associates
27. Association "MERKURI"
28. Women's Initiatives supporting Group
29. People's Harmonious Development Society
30. Samtskhe-Javakheti Regional Association "Toleranti"
31. International Center for Civic Culture
32. Association of Youth Journalists "New Vision"
33. Georgia Press Association
34. "Women Enterprise" Fund Georgia
35. World Experience for Georgia
36. Human Rights House Tbilisi
37. Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
38. Association "Save Future Generation"
39. Eurasia Partnership Foundation