

საქართველოს ახალგაზრდა იურისტთა ასოციაცია GEORGIAN YOUNG LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION



Joint statement of NGOs about the necessity of the state's timely and effective action in response to yesterday's developments in the village of Samtatskaro

NGOs have released a joint statement about yesterday's developments in the village of Samtatskaro, urging the authorities to take meaningful actions for ensuring safety

of local Muslim population and for conflict resolution.

Footage released by media and the information we have received from the Muslim community suggest that on June 28, 2013, after finishing the traditional Muslim prayer (Jumu'ah), a group of locals (up to 200 people identifying themselves as Christian congregation) attacked a house of a local Muslim clergyman's (Khoja), Suliko Khozrevanidze, and threatened to banish his family from the village, stone them and burn them down. The group of people invaded his yard and assaulted Suliko Khozrevanidze's spouse, Emine Khozrevanidze, [as personally stated by the latter in a video](#). In an [interview for Kakheti Information Center](#), Suliko Khozrevanidze noted: "[...] we went there to pray. Nobody complained. After 6[pm], people started pouring towards my house, reaching the door. They were threatening to expel us. Now they are telling me that I will not be able to send my cattle to pasture, to get water, to go out for shopping. [They are telling us] to leave [the village] in 24 hours." As far as we know, police has not arrested any perpetrators. As Kvemo Kartli Mufti, Jemal Adadze has explained to us, today, on June 29, some local Christians paid a visit to Suliko Khozrevanidze and prohibited him from engaging in prayer or receiving Muslim pilgrims from other villages. As a result, Suliko Khozrevanidze was forced to agree to their conditions.

Statements from victims and village trustee Gulnara Nadareishvili suggest that local Christians were irritated by the fact that Friday prayer, in which Khoja and his children were participating, was also attended by pilgrims from other villages.

Notably, after the visit of the State Minister for Reintegration, Paata Zakareishvili in the village of Samtatskaro on June 14 and holding of the first-ever joint prayer on June 24, this was the first time the joint prayer was attended by local Muslims. In particular, 4 local Muslims and 6 Muslims from other villages were attending the Friday prayer. According to Mufti, Jemal Adadze, they had arrived in the village of Samtatskaro to declare their support to local Muslims and overcome the fear engendered following the conflict. Notably, absent from Friday Prayer on June 21 were local Muslims who, according to Mufti, are refraining from collective praying due to the constant acts of pressure and threats. During the joint prayer on June 21, local Christians were lingering near the praying house and consequently, in order to avoid any possible aggression local Muslims decided not to go outside to pray. The acts of pressure against local Muslims in Samtatskaro have also been confirmed by a [statement from a](#)

, directly indicating that the village population and Gamgebeli are exerting pressure against local Muslims.

These developments clearly demonstrate that there is a source of religious conflict in the village of Samtatskaro, and that local Muslims are under pressure and intimidation exerted by the local population. Khoja Suliko Khozrevanidze and his family have been victims of threats, abuse and aggression for all this time. Reasons of conflict and the role of the state in these processes has been discussed in detail in [previous joint statements issued by us](#).

In view of the gravity of the situation, the state has an obligation to take timely and meaningful measures for ensuring safety of local Muslims and resolving the conflict. Otherwise, there are risks that the conflict will be further deepened and spread out to other similar settlements. In this light, we believe that

- The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the office of the chief prosecutor should immediately launch a probe into all crimes allegedly committed following May 24 in the village of Samtatskaro and prosecute all perpetrators. In this respect, we would like to particularly highlight the incident involving assault and threats made against Suliko Khozrevanidze and physical abuse of his spouse. The incident allegedly involved threats (Article 151 of the Criminal Code of Georgia), illegal interference in religious practice (Article 155 of the CCG), persecution (Article 156 of the CCG), encroachment upon inviolability of house or other possession (Article 160 of the CCG) and hooliganism (Article 239 of the CCG). Legal assessment of foregoing acts must highlight the importance of applying para.31, Article 53 of the CCG, qualifying commission of crime motivated by religious intolerance as aggravated circumstances.
- The Interior Ministry should tighten measures aimed at ensuring public order in the village of Samtatskaro and take actions against any violation of law detected, prosecuting perpetrators. Further, special security measures must be taken to ensure safety of Suliko Khozrevanidze's family currently subjected to threats and pressure.
- The state must react in a timely manner against actions of the local authorities, who have proven to be a side of the conflict, acting well beyond the limits of their competence.
- Based on the principle of fairness and religious freedom, the Government of Georgia should elaborate in a timely manner a joint policy for resolving religious conflicts.

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Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)

Georgian Democratic Initiative (GDI)

Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC)

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Article 42 of the Constitution

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