



NGOs echo recent developments in connection with the May 17 events

According to the [information](#) released today, the Ministry of Interior of Georgia has charged two clerics participating in the May 17 incident on the Rustaveli Avenue. These persons are accused of unlawful infringement and obstruction of the right to assembly or manifestation with the use of violence (Article 161.1 of the Criminal Code).

We welcome the vigor of the Ministry of Interior of Georgia in the process of investigation of facts of violence occurring in Tbilisi on May 17. In view of the mass nature of demonstrated violence, punishment of offenders by the state carries in the first place the preventive function along with restoration of justice. Accordingly, it is crucial that the law enforcement agencies investigate the reported facts of violence efficiently and identify and hold all offenders liable. Bringing charges against clerics in this process is a significant step taken by the state towards the protection of principles of equality and secularism. Everyone is equal before the law, and everyone is equally responsible for the committed crimes, regardless of their religious affiliation and status.

Furthermore, taking into account an extremely grave experience of developments on May 17, we urge the state to pay special attention to the 'No To Theocracy' rally planned tomorrow, on May 24 and to undertake effective and adequate measures for securing the freedom of assembly and safety of the rally participants, as according to another announcement, different group of citizens intends to hold a counter-demonstration at the same place.

Transparency International Georgia

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Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC)

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association

Article 42 of the Constitution of Georgia

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED)