

საქართველოს ახალგაზრდა იურისტთა ასოციაცია GEORGIAN YOUNG LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION



Statement of Georgian Young Lawyers' Association in response to Incidents in Zugdidi and Batumi

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association expresses a concern over the July 20-21 incidents in Zugdidi and Batumi and calls on all parties of political process to say no to violence.

According to media reports, on July 29 there was an attempt to disrupt an event of the political union United National Movement (UNM) on July 20 in Zugdidi. The scheduled event was held amid a protest rally. Party leaders and delegates were verbally abused

by citizens that had assembled outside, throwing rocks and bottles at them. One of the journalists was injured during the incident. The same day it was also reported that local population had been mobilized at the rally by local self-government authorities. Another one of the UNM's primaries was held amid confrontation in Batumi on July 21.

The right to assembly and manifestation guaranteed by the Constitution becomes a focus of a particular attention during pre-election campaigning. However, it must be realized within legal frames, without growing into violence. During the pre-election period the authorities should that pre-election meetings and events are held in a peaceful and free environment; violence should not be allowed and immediately eliminated if detected.

Holding of the upcoming presidential elections in a constructive and civil environment, in which each candidate is free to present his/her own views and election program to voters serves the best interests of the country. To this end, GYLA urges:

individual citizens – to say no to violent expression of protest. We realize that individuals who were present at the rally could have been victims of past violence and injustice; however, there are no legal grounds that would justify their violent actions. Believing otherwise would promote similar actions, which would clearly be harmful to interests of the country;

law enforcement authorities – ensure that pre-election meetings and events are held in a peaceful and safe environment, and acts of violence are investigated in an objective, comprehensive and impartial manner. GYLA believes that the incident in Zugdidi involved grave violations of law, and liability measures applied may be inadequate to prevent them; rather, each violation must be properly assessed from legal point of view and adequate measures of liability must be imposed;

state authorities and local self-government agencies – to ensure abidance with political neutrality, without using state resources in favor of or against a candidate.

GYLA continues to monitor pre-election campaign and remains hopeful that public meetings held during pre-election period will not involve any violence.