



Investigation into the attack of Tabula journalists is inadequate

According to media reports, current and former journalists of Tabula (Irakli Kiknavelidze, Levan Sutidze, Nino Macharashvili and Avto Koridze) were attacked by several unknown individuals and assaulted verbally and physically, destroying inventory of the restaurant where the incident occurred. According to Tabula representatives, the attack occurred on January 12, 2016, at Restaurant Chashnagari at Kote Apkhazi Str. in Tbilisi. Kiknavelidze believes that the reason for the assault was motivated by the critical view of Tabula towards the Georgian Church. The incident was captured on telephone by one of the customers. The video shows commotion inside the restaurant.

Journalists reported the incident to the police and requested investigation. According to the Interior Ministry, investigation has been instituted under Article 125 of the Criminal Code of Georgia in relation to alleged beating; however, the applicants' statements lead us to believe that investigation must be instituted under Article 239, in relation to hooliganism.

Tabula's representative contacted the Ministry on January 13 to inquire about the status of the investigation. The Ministry responded that there are no new developments in the investigation. It is unknown if witnesses have been interviewed

and other necessary investigating steps have been taken.

We regret that in her statement Deputy Speaker of the Parliament Manana Kobakhidze dismissed allegations about illegal interference in journalistic reporting, the crime envisaged by Article 154 of the Criminal Code of Georgia. As noted above, victims have alleged that the assault was motivated by Tabula's activities. There is a serious doubt that Tabula's journalists were attacked for their journalistic reporting.

We regret that law enforcement authorities often fail to take actions in response to crimes against journalists. The Interior Ministry has not released any information about investigation and prosecution of other violent actions perpetrated against journalists and media representatives. The stage is obligated to combat impunity of crimes against journalists and to create free media environment based on Georgia's national legislation and a number of international documents that address and regulate the issue (standards and recommendations of UN, CoE, OSCE, EU and other major international organizations).

In light of the foregoing, the Coalition urges the law enforcement authorities to investigate this particular incident and other offences against media representatives in a timely, comprehensive and effective manner. It is important to detect and prosecute offenders in a timely manner, in order to prevent such incidents in the future. We urge government officials to base their views on proper assessment of facts and to refrain from hindering effective and objective investigation.

The Coalition for Media Advocacy will continue to examine the incident and update public accordingly.

Members of the Coalition for Media Advocacy

- Georgian Young Lawyers' Association
- Civil Development Institute
- Charter of Journalistic Ethic of Georgia
- Institute for Development of Freedom of Information
- Open Society Foundation – Georgia
- Network of Regional Broadcasters
- Regional Media Association
- Media Club
- NGO for Civil Society

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- Levan Mikeladze Foundation
- Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters