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PHR: Court rejects request to stop demolition of house in Africa settlement of Tbilisi



Ana Arganashvili says the organization will appeal the court's decision.

By NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Ana Arganashvili, a spokeswoman for the Partnership for Human Rights (PHR), said the court had not granted their request to stop the demolition of a house in the 'Africa' settlement of Tbilisi.

Ana Arganashvili says the organization will appeal the court's decision. A few days ago, Arganashvili posted a photo of Gigi, an 8-year-old boy living in this house, on Facebook and wrote that it was planned to demolish the boy's family house.

"The reasoning of the court is very sad and technical when the safety of the child and the survival of his home is at stake.

For me, the saddest part is that we told this kid that the court would listen to him wholeheartedly. We will appeal the decision of the court, the kid should not lose the hope of justice," wrote Arganashvili on Facebook.

The Partnership for Human Rights appealed to the court on December 18 to maintain several square flats built in the 'Africa' settlement of Tbilisi for an 8-year-old boy, his parents with disabilities and a 79-year-old grandfather.

The IDP Agency has yesterday released a special statement regarding the housing of the Changelia family, currently living in the 'Africa' settlement in Tbilisi. The Agency has noted that the family is

registered in Zugdidi, village Rukhi. According to the agency, the family has received a three-room apartment in a newly built building on Baramia Street in Zugdidi.

Ana Arganashvili has commented about this with Radio Liberty, saying that the family has been waiting for the apartment in December, but they have not yet received the keys to the apartment.

"They know that the transfer process was ongoing, but it happened so that they still do not have the keys of the house. All they know is that they built a house and now it is being demolished," said Arganashvili and added that 4-5 months ago, when they started building the house, they did not have an apartment.

According to Arganashvili, the family has two demands: if the state intends to demolish the apartment, they want to receive the money that they spent on building the house. The family has taken a special pension loan, which they spent on building the house in 'Africa' settlement. The second demand is that their home should not be demolished until they receive the keys of the Zugdidi apartment.

According to PHR, the family was given until December 20 to leave the house. On the morning of December 20, activists and citizens gathered near the house of 8-year-old Gigi Changelia to prevent the relevant agency from demolishing the house. Surprisingly, the bulldozers haven't yet appeared.



The PHR appealed to the court on December 18



According to PHR, the family was given until December 20 to leave the house

Human Freedom Index and political prisoners in Georgia – an unlikely co-existence?

By VERONIKA MALINBOYM

According to a recent report, Georgia ranks 40th in the world in the Human Freedom Index 2020, leading in the South Caucasus and Central Asia region with a total score of 7.87 out of 10.

The overall score of Human Freedom is based on the country's residents' freedom of religion, expression, and identity, as well as the rule of law, size and diversity of the government, labor, and trade regulations, and the general safety and security of the citizens.

Georgia has now been named as a region's leader in terms of the Human Freedom Index for two consecutive years. However, one can also note just how many challenges are still lying ahead.

The most prominent of all – and the most well-known too – is the alleged unlawful detention of political prisoners. Among them is Giorgi Rurua – co-founder of Mtavari Arkhi TV Channel, who has recently been attacked by two convicts in the penitentiary N8, where he is

currently detained. As a result of this attack, two prison employees were charged with negligence and have been denied bail. The case of Rurua has attracted a lot of attention – from the predictable outrage among the country's opposition parties to the NGOs, dip corps' and even foreign politicians' outcry.

But who is Giorgi Rurua, and what makes his case so controversial?

Giorgi Rurua is a co-founder and a shareholder of the opposition-minded TV Channel, Mtavari Arkhi. On November 18 2018 he was arrested and charged with illegal purchasing, storing and carrying of firearms, and was sentenced to four years in prison on December 25. To this day, the court ruling is subject to widespread controversy, and the calls for his release continue to be voiced.

Shortly after the sentence was announced, 20 opposition parties signed a joint memorandum, which protested the court decision, and claimed that the release of Giorgi Rurua was a part of the March 8 agreement be-

tween the government and the opposition parties. Moreover, it was because of Rurua's arrest that the opposition bloc refused to vote for the constitutional changes prior to the March 8 agreement. In turn, the ruling Georgian Dream party stated that the pardon of Rurua was never discussed as a condition of the March agreement – a statement that was later confirmed by the German ambassador to Georgia.

Due to the government's persistent denial of discussing Rurua's release with the opposition parties, as well as refusing to either pardon him or accept that his arrest was in any way politically motivated, the local and international NGOs, as well as members of the US Congress and the European Parliament have voiced their own concerns about the case and the legitimacy of Rurua's detention.

Earlier this year, Transparency International Georgia compiled an *Amicus Curiae* brief on Giorgi Rurua's case, where it stated that the legal procedures of his arrest, detention, and

court hearings were violated on numerous occasions: at the time of detention, Rurua was not provided with an adequate opportunity to contact his lawyer or family members, forensic examinations and personal searches did not oblige by the Code of Criminal Procedure (thus, the findings of the forensic examinations fail to provide meaningful evidence of Rurua's connection with the firearms), and the aggravation of the sentence on the grounds of Rurua's refusal to voluntarily provide saliva samples and fingerprints was also found groundless (as the privilege against self-incrimination is granted by the Constitution of Georgia).

As of today, various local NGOs and INGOs have issued joint statements calling for Rurua's release, and a few high-ranking politicians, including the US Senator Jim Risch and Jeanne Shaheen, have addressed President Zurabishvili to release Giorgi Rurua, who is still detained on "spurious charges".

The case of Giorgi Rurua is more than an indicator of a

faultiness in the country's judiciary system. Unfortunately, it is a symbol of the challenges the country must overcome to become a shining example of a sustainable, healthy Democracy, both in the region and in the international arena. While the high Human Freedom Index score is more than welcome and does not fall short of causing an immense pride for the progress that has already been made, it should also serve as an example of what it is yet to be achieved to progress even further.

The ruling party has announced a large-scale amnesty, that will concern the non-serious crimes committed prior to December 11 2020. Although the Head of the Parliament's Human Rights Committee of the ruling party, Mikheil Sarjveladze, has already claimed that it is not likely to extend to the Rurua's case, there is still some hope that amidst the global pandemic and the political crisis that the country is now faced with, the government will choose to move forward, rather than down below, into deeper uncertainty.

More recoveries than new cases of Covid-19 in Georgia over the last few days



Since the beginning of pandemic, total of 2094 people died in Georgia

By NIKA GAMTSEMLIDZE

Over the weekend, a total of 4635 new cases of Covid-19 were reported in Georgia. Compared to the last few weeks, the number has decreased significantly. However, health experts are saying that people should continue following restrictions, in order to stabilize the situation.

Out of these cases, 2904 were reported on Saturday 19 Dec, and 1731 yesterday, on Sunday 20 Dec. Tbilisi is still leading with daily reported cases. As for recoveries, 8915 people have recovered in total over the weekend. Out of these, 4599 recovered on Saturday, and 4316 on Sunday.

On Saturday, there were 18824 tests taken in the coun-



There are 26,077 active cases of Covid-19 in Georgia

try, out of these 9506 were fast tests on antigen, and 9318 were regular PCR tests. On Sunday, 9812 tests were taken, 4869 on antigen, and 4943 regular PCR tests.

In total, since the beginning of the pandemic, Georgia has reported 208,638 Covid-19 cases. In total, 180,441 people have recovered.

As for active cases in the country, the number of cases stands at 26,077. 6654 people are currently hospitalized 19721 are in so-called Covid-hotels. 1104 people are in severe condition, out of which

417 are on ventilation.

The virus started spreading faster in Georgia over the last few months. At its peak, the daily number of reported cases were between 4,000-5,000. To limit the spread of the virus, the government of Georgia has recently adopted several restrictions. As of now, public transportation in the country is not working, bars and restaurants are closed and are working on delivery services only.

The government is planning to lift some of the restrictions

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Weather

Monday, December 21

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 9°C

Night Partly Cloudy

Low: 1°C

Tuesday, December 22

Day Partly Cloudy

High: 6°C

Night Rain / Snow

Low: 2°C

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UNDP helps rural women repair household budgets

With over 40 percent of the population engaged in farming on a larger or smaller scale, the scope of subsistence agriculture has long been seen as one of Georgia's biggest hurdles to development.

However, in pandemic conditions, thousands of Georgian rural families are now relying more than ever on farming as a coping strategy to put food on the table and replace lost sources of income. To help poorer and vulnerable households succeed in this effort, UNDP is distributing agricultural support packages with a total value of USD 90,000 to 620 women farmers in seven regions of Georgia.

As part of its resolve to support Georgian partners in "leaving no one behind" in the pandemic response, UNDP worked with the Georgian Association of Women Farmers to select recipients from among households facing severe challenges during the pandemic: single parents with large numbers of children; survivors of domestic violence; parents raising children with disabilities; households in isolated locations; internally displaced households; and women-headed households in national minority communities.

UNDP Head Louisa Vinton took part in the distribution of support packages to 13 women-headed households in Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions on 15-16 December 2020. The visit included Akhmeta, Telavi, Gurjaani and Sagarejo municipalities.

Among the recipients were a grandmother caring for eight grandchildren; mothers of eight and five children, respectively; widows in Azerbaijani communities; a survivor of domestic violence raising four children alone; and the mother of a teenager with cerebral palsy.

In Sagarejo municipality, Vinton delivered support pack-



UNDP worked with the Georgian Association of Women Farmers



UNDP Head Louisa Vinton took part in the distribution of support packages

ages to families in the remote village of Udabno, whose residents were evacuated from Svaneti after catastrophic avalanches in the 1980s. Women-

headed households from the ethnic minority community in Gardabani municipality also received support.

"Agriculture itself has not

been much affected by the pandemic," said Vinton. "But our conversations confirm that for many rural families, and especially for women-headed house-

holds, COVID-19 has abruptly eliminated vital outside sources of income that they depended on to make ends meet. Our support packages are aimed at helping rural women fill this gap by expanding and improving their crops."

Each package contains an electric-powered backpack sprayer, fertilizer, pesticides and other agricultural tools and inputs along with instructions on use. Included are pesticides aimed at the brown marmorated stinkbug, to prevent the infestations that have devastated harvests over the past three years.

UNDP tailored the contents specifically for small subsistence farmers based on recommendations from the Rural Development Agency that operates under the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture.

Packages were already distributed in Imereti, Guria, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti regions in November. A total of 480 households have received agricultural support packages so far across seven regions, with another 140 packages to be distributed in coming weeks.

The aid is part of a USD 1 million joint programme funded by the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. Implemented by UNDP, UNICEF and the UN Population Agency, the programme supports national and municipal authorities and local communities in addressing the pandemic emergency.

Alongside vulnerable rural families, public sector workers and shelters for homeless and elderly people are also receiving support. The initiative is managed through a Danish-funded local development programme and the UN Joint Programme for Gender Equality financed by the Swedish government.

Together Against COVID-19 in Georgia

EU Ambassador to Georgia, Carl Hartzell met World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Europe, Dr Hans Henri Kluge, during Dr Kluge's official five-day visit to Georgia.

The meeting aimed at discussion of the current status of the EU support to the county's healthcare system in the time of Covid-19 pandemic, as well as further developments and perspectives of cooperation with the WHO.

"An important part of the European Union's efforts to support Georgia during this pandemic, is the direct support we are providing to the Georgian health sector. In this field, we have provided funding to WHO to deliver over 2 million pieces of medical equipment to laboratories and hospitals in Georgia," said EU Ambassador to Georgia, Carl Hartzell. "In addition, WHO is providing training to healthcare workers as well as to other high-risk groups. We are now looking forward to see another large shipment of healthcare assistance arriving shortly. We are also discussing with the WHO ways to support vaccine deploy-

ment and vaccination efforts. This will be challenging, but we will be working hard through different channels to make sure that we do as much as we can to help bringing Georgia out of this health crisis."

"I would like to express my sincere appreciation to EU Ambassador Hartzell, for the strong support to the people of Georgia, the government of Georgia and the World Health Organization to strengthen health in these unprecedented times. We discussed, to strengthen our collaboration both in this acute phase, including on vaccination, deployment and control of the pandemic, but also looking further, recognizing that health is such an important driver of social cohesion, economic development and ultimately regional security," stated Hans Henri Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe after the meeting.

Additional Information

The European Union, in partnership with WHO has been supporting Georgia's healthcare system in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic through various ini-

tiatives, including:

- Delivering almost 2 million pieces of medical supplies for Georgian laboratory and medical facilities
- Delivering essential supplies for patient care
- Strengthening responders' skills, including trainings for healthcare professionals by WHO, and access to regional covid-19 expertise;
- Increasing public compliance with health measures

The EU and Team Europe have mobilized around GEL 1.5 billion of new and reallocated assistance to help Georgia deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost 2/3 of this amount is grants, the remaining are loans at favourable interest rates. That is one of the highest levels of EU assistance per capita to any country in the world and demonstrates the EU's strong solidarity with Georgia at this time of unprecedented crisis.

Find out more on EU COVID-19 support in Georgia at <https://eu4georgia.ge/together-against-covid-19/>

More recoveries than new cases of Covid-19 in Georgia over the last few days

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starting on December 24 temporarily for several days because of the Christmas and New Year's season.

However, a few health experts hold that lifting restrictions would increase mobility significantly and would make the situation a lot worse. Government officials have yet not made any official statements regarding the lifting of the restrictions for the holiday season.