

საქართველოს ახალგაზრდა იურისტთა ასოციაცია GEORGIAN YOUNG LAWYERS' ASSOCIATION



Address of Civil Society Organizations to Donor Organizations

Arguably the peaceful transition of power that took place after the conclusion of the October 1, 2012 elections significantly enhanced the development prospects of Georgia. It without a doubt represents an important precondition for the continued advancement of the country. However, it is still not enough. At this stage, the strengthening of democratic institutes and the establishment of active, healthy and rational relations remains of critical importance.

It is now obvious that the government is willing to involve the public in the creation of

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political, economic and other important reforms. Civil society representatives are being given opportunities to listen to governmental plans, assess their effectiveness, contribute alternative proposals and have a say in the actions of the government. However, in spite of these positive developments, there are still more things that need to be accomplished in this process in order to ensure that the government continues to listen to the public. In order to maintain dialogue and their involvement, Georgian civil society must take the appropriate steps now, by obtaining the support of donor organizations. Donor support is needed for the new government as well.

With this statement, civil society organizations (CSOs) would first like to thank the international community for their invaluable support in the past and their continued support in the years to come. As such, we would like to introduce the work we feel should be a priority in the coming months and years.

Supporting civil society:

-The political landscape and the working environment of NGOs have significantly changed after the elections. New opportunities, as well as new challenges have appeared. Therefore, it is important for donors to revisit their strategies and priorities, assess their compatibility with the existing circumstances and make changes as needed. The opportunity to participate and provide feedback should be given to the new government, as well as to civil society organizations. Changed strategies and priorities should become public.

-Since not much time has passed since the elections, many issues remain vague and numerous changes are expected to take place in the future. For this reason, the politics and approaches of donors should be as flexible as possible. Funding recipient organizations and entities should be given the opportunity to revise already agreed upon action plans according to the changed circumstances that currently exist, and should be based on the appropriate justification. For the success of this process it is necessary to minimize bureaucratic procedures and complete the process as soon as possible.

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-It is generally better if donor organizations do not provide overly tight frameworks for grant programs, instead, provide Georgian NGOs the possibility to use more complex and if needed, risky (new) approaches in resolving pressing issues. Often, resolving issues requires going beyond advocacy and awareness and requires separate approaches. In spite of this, some donors require that a single emphasis be placed on an action with regard to grant proposals. As for the risk, there have been frequent past cases where donors have avoided funding innovative ideas, since it is difficult to predict how well the idea may work.

-Naturally, it is important that the work of NGOs should lead to specific, substantive results and resolve public problems in a very short period of time. However, for this reason, donor organizations should not emphasize an overly quick impact and should not only fund projects that promise results within 6 months. Whereas some problems can be resolved within a predetermined timetable, there are many important issues that can only be resolved over the longer-term. Therefore, donors should also support projects that are focused on long-term results, taking into consideration that while the problem may not be resolved fully, the important preconditions will be established for its eventual settlement.

-For several decades now donor organizations have been supporting Georgian civil society. During this period of time, several organizations were able to prove that their goals and activities were fair, principle-based, unbiased and useful for the country. For such organizations, donors should allocate free “core” (non-project attached) funding and enable them to plan on how to distribute the given funds in pursuit of reaching the appropriate goals.

-As an additional precondition, it is possible to use the following criteria:

-Protection of democracy principles within the organization (involvement of regular personnel and members in the decision-making process); the existence of active communication mechanisms in beneficiaries (the involvement of beneficiaries in defining priorities and planning activities, informing on how work is conducted, etc.); ensuring financial and program transparency (the publicity of appropriate reports and organizing public discussions). In any case, the criteria for selecting organizations should be transparent.

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-It is important to promote new groups and initiatives that support the enrichment of civil society with new ideas and enthusiasm. It is possible to fund new organizations (so called “Seed” grants), supporting joint initiatives of experienced and new organizations, the funding internships of young people in NGOs and supporting other activities of a similar nature.

-Since the role of local government and self-governance is most likely to increase, (the pre-election program of the new government allocated significant space for the need for decentralization), the funding of regional NGOs is especially important.

-It is desirable to maintain the spark that appeared among young people before the elections. Supporting youth groups and organizations should become a priority not only for donor organizations, but to all NGOs, and should become a significant part of the agenda.

-In order to increase the efficiency of NGOs it is necessary to provide sufficient funds for their administrative and organizational costs. They should at least be given the opportunity to (1) attract and maintain qualified personnel by offering adequate funding, and (2) use donor funding for financial audits and the professional evaluation of program activities. On the contrary, most of the donors today set very low limits for administrative and organizational costs.

-And finally, it is necessary for donor organizations, together with Georgian civil society, to start a dialogue on the creation of a special fund (the so-called endowment), which will accumulate money for further activities (in the case of the reduction of international funding). It is necessary to start work towards supporting state grants, philanthropy, the economic activities of NGOs, improvement of research methods and other similar initiatives.

Assistance from the government:

One of the key defects of the previous government was that it completely neglected public participation in the reform process, as well as the implementation and evaluation process. This has resulted in the alienation of society on the one hand, and many mistakes made during the reform process on the other hand. In the near future the special attention of donors should focus on:

-The provision of expert assistance during the process of creating reform strategies and action plans, and the inclusion of civil society in this process.

-Requests for instituting cooperation between the public and government and supporting the creation of the appropriate mechanisms.

-Assistance in addressing priority issues, such as the fair and objective investigation of serious crimes committed at various times to prevent selective justice; the

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investigation of private property rights violations and implementation of adequate measures to mitigate them; the maintenance of a 24-hour electricity supply and energy security; reform of the penitentiary system, the protection prisoners' rights and the effective monitoring of the system; prevention of the unfair dismissal of public servants appointed during the previous government; adequate reaction to the cases of IDPs entering empty buildings illegally and their protests; the prevention of crime and protection of minority rights.

-Together with the problems that should be resolved in a comparatively shorter period of time, attention should be paid to important issues of long-term importance such as the increased quality of education (formal and informal), the reduction of unemployment, the strengthening of independent controlling structures and ensuring realistic independence and the integration of gender issues.

-Strengthening local governance and creating firm guarantees for the protection of private property.

Resolution of these problems will serve as the best way to support the strengthening of Georgian democracy and the protection of the interests of Georgian citizens.

It is important for the donor organizations not to repeat the same mistakes made after the Rose Revolution in 2003- it is important that full attention is not placed on the government and that significant reduction in the support for NGOs does not occur.

Donor organizations should optimally publicize the assistance provided to the government, joint projects implemented and their expectations, and allow NGOs to participate in this process as well. At the same time, if donors fund projects for separate ministries, it should be possible to allocate a small portion of this funding to Georgian NGOs or a group of NGOs in order to control the spending of the relevant ministry. It is also important to ensure the type of funding that will bring together the expertise of civil society and the government, which in turn will serve to encourage cooperation between the governmental, international and civic sectors.

Today Georgia is taking important steps. As in the past, today Georgia greatly counts on the support of the international community. The concerted work of Georgian civil society, the government and international agencies will significantly increase the chances for the success of the country and will help in supporting the country's continued development.

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Signatories:

1. Association "Green Alternative"
2. Human Rights Education and Management Center (EMC)
3. Economic Politics Research Center (EPRC)
4. Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA)
5. Georgia's Reforms Associates (G R A S S)
6. Human Rights Priority
7. Civic Integration Fund (CIF)
8. Georgia Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS)
9. ALPE
10. Analytical Center for Interethnic Cooperation and Consultations (ACICC)
11. Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasting (GARB)
12. International Civil Cultural Center (ICCC)
13. Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)
14. Women Information Center (WIC)
15. Centre of Strategic Research and Development of Georgia (CSRDG)

Members of Regional Civil Society Network (R-CSN):

16. Civil Development Agency (CiDA)
17. Union of Democrat Meskhs
18. Georgia Civil Development Association
19. Civil Society Research and Development Center
20. Kakheti Regional Development Agency
21. Civil Activeness Center
22. Georgian Association of Educational Initiatives
23. Kvemo Kartli Public-Information Center
24. Friendship Bridge "Kartlosi"
25. Gori Club of Disabled Persons
26. Association "Biliki"
27. Khashuri Committee on National Platform on Protection from Violence
28. For Better Future
29. National Network of Protection from Violence – Mtskheta-Mtianeti Regional Committee
30. Dusheti Development Fund
31. Stepantsminda
32. Association "Tolerant"

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- 33. *Public Monitoring and Research Center*
- 34. *Union of Scientists of Imereti "Spektri"*
- 35. *Kutaisi Center of Education Development and Employment*
- 36. *Kutaisi branch of Young Economists' Association*
- 37. *Kutaisi branch of Georgian Young Lawyer's Association*
- 38. *Kutaisi Information Center*
- 39. *Association "Union of Chiatura"*
- 40. *Foundation for Development of Tkibuli District*
- 41. *Association "Gaenati"*
- 42. *Foundation "Abkhazinterkonti"*
- 43. *Georgian Democratic Development Union*
- 44. *Club of Young Scientists*
- 45. *Union of Young Teachers*
- 46. *Guria Youth Resource Center*
- 47. *Lanchkhuti Information Center*
- 48. *Borjgali*
- 49. *Institute of Democracy*