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GYLA Statement on the violent actions that took place on July 5th

The Georgian Young Lawyers' Association condemns the violent actions of homophobic groups, the statement of the Prime Minister of Georgia made before the Government sitting, which encouraged further aggravation of the situation, as well as the inappropriate response of the Ministry of Internal Affairs as far as it failed to provide preventive work and effective management of processes. Accordingly, GYLA calls on the state agencies, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to ensure the peaceful conduct of processes, timely and effective suppression of violent groups, as well as properly fulfill the positive obligations imposed by the Constitution and protect the freedom of assembly and expression of protesters, as well as the safety of media representatives.

On 5th July 2021, at 18:00, a "March of Dignity" was planned by "Tbilisi Pride". The event was threatened by violent, homophobic, ultra-right groups, who gathered in the morning in the vicinity of Rustaveli Metro and Kashueti Church to demand the cancellation of the "Dignity March" in accordance with the call of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church and various violent groups.[\[1\]](#)

Aggressive groups resort to violent actions. They crossed the fence erected in front of the Parliament and dismantled the tents of the opposition representatives[\[2\]](#). Homophobic groups also posed a significant threat to the media while covering the rally. They tried to expel journalists from the rally, which resulted in numerous cases of verbal abuse, assault and damage to equipment[\[3\]](#). In addition, violent groups broke into the office of the "Shame Movement", where the organizers of the Pride were present[\[4\]](#). Aggressive groups also came to the Tbilisi Pride office, climbed on the balcony and tore down the LGBTQ + flag.[\[5\]](#)

The statement made by the Prime Minister before the Government sitting is also alarming, in which he noted that the "March of Dignity" contains the threat of civil

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confrontation and considers it inappropriate.^[6] The Ministry of Internal Affairs also publicly called on the participants of "Tbilisi Pride" to refuse to hold a march in public space on Rustaveli Avenue due to the scale of the rallies planned by the opposing groups. ^[7] **It is noteworthy that such statements made from heads of state and agencies and shifting of responsibility to peaceful demonstrators further exacerbate the already tense background, also incite violent actions by homophobic groups, and in fact give carte blanche to violence.**

It is also noteworthy that the Ministry of Internal Affairs failed to ensure the effective management of the process and the mobilization of an adequate number of police forces, which further contributed to the aggravation of the process.

Article 21 of the Constitution of Georgia and the Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Demonstrations guarantee the right to assembly and demonstration. The law prohibits the propaganda and incitement of violence that incites national, sectarian, religious or social strife/hostility and poses a clear, direct and essential threat to such actions considered in this article. Article 17 of the Constitution protects the freedom of thought and expression and does not allow persecution of a person for his opinion and expression of his/her opinion. Also, the second paragraph of the same article guarantees the right of every person to freely receive and disseminate information. It is noteworthy that both the statements and the actions of the organizers and participants of the the so-called XXXXXXXXXXXX are violent and endanger the lives and health of the participants of the march. It also hinders the proper exercise of freedom of assembly by citizens and freedom of expression by members of the media.

Accordingly, we call on the State to:

- Have a timely and appropriate legal response to violent calls and actions and ensure the peaceful conduct of processes;
- Protect the rights and security of LGBTQ + people;
- Ensure the proper enjoyment of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia;
- Protect media representatives from unlawful interference with their journalistic activities, ensure their safety and the proper exercise of their freedom of expression, and ensure the timely, effective investigation of crimes against media representatives and the punishment of perpetrators.

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GYLA expresses solidarity with the victims of violence and is ready to protect the rights of victims of violence.

[1] "Opponents of Tbilisi Pride are gathering in the vicinity of the Rustaveli metro station, including clergymen," Interpressnews website 05.07.2021, Available at: <https://bit.ly/2TFqUD7>.

[2] "Opponents of Pride Week have dismantled the tents in front of the Parliament", InterpressNews website, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3dFfa0L>.

[3] "Journalists are being abused during a homophobic rally", Netgazeti website, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3hD3kPy>; "Radical groups attack journalists - Rustavi 2 operator is injured", Rustavi 2 website, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/2SRFalk>; "Our operators have been beaten and many of them, one of them is seriously injured - Marika Gotsiridze", Rustavi 2 website, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/36fVbeG>; "Violent groups physically and verbally abuse journalists on Rustaveli Avenue", Publika website, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3yCJAm7>; "Participants of homophobic and violent counter-rally confronted an On.ge journalist", News.on.ge Facebook page, 05.07.2021, is available: <https://bit.ly/3hjzlwQ>; "Attack on the Media □ a person hit the Media Representatives by Moped at the rally of Homophobes and Violent Groups", Formula Facebook Page, 05.07.2021, Available at: <https://bit.ly/3Au2soZ>; "Abusers confront the journalists", the Facebook page of Pirveli TV, 05.07.2021, is available: <https://bit.ly/2Vb2yld>; "Violent forces attack journalists", the first Facebook page of the TV station Pirveli, 05.07.2021, is available: <https://bit.ly/3jKD4We>; "Attack on Media", the Facebook page of the TV company Pirveli, 05.07.2021, is available at: <https://bit.ly/2TB59o4>; "Hate groups physically assaulted RFE / RL journalists", RFE/RL website, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3hAnwl4>; "The perpetrators of violence rushed to the office of Shame Movement - the TV Pirveli operator has been severely beaten", Formula website, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3Ao64sE>.

[4] "The perpetrators of violence/abusers are throwing stones and eggs at the

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residents of the building where the office of Shame Movement is located", Formula's website, 05.07.2021, is available at: <https://bit.ly/3hfb1Ws>; "Aggressive groups raid the office of the movement" Shame "", Newpost website, 05.07.2021, available at: "Aggressive groups raid the office of the [REDACTED] Newpost website, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3jXj4Qj>.

[5] "The perpetrators of violence came to the Pride office, went up to the balcony and took down the flag" Formula website, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3qL3GI3>.

[6] "Prime Minister - I consider it inappropriate to hold the march announced today, it contains the threat of civil strife/confrontation", Interpressnews website, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3whwKYN>.

[7] "Statement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs", website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 05.07.2021, available at: <https://bit.ly/3dMkj5>.