



The Statement of the Organizations Involved in the Campaign “This Affects You Too”

For many years, the civil society has been talking about the problems existing in relation to the secret eavesdropping and surveillance and the necessity of introducing reform in this regard. One year ago, the representatives of the civil society sector addressed the parliament of Georgia with the legislative amendment initiatives. However, due to the resistance of the law enforcement bodies the process was procrastinated. Despite the declared will of the governing political group to change the incumbent faulty system, there were no effective actions made in this regard. This is why the civil society sector started active advocacy campaign in March of this year – “This Affects You Too – They are Still Listening”. Despite the active engagement of the civil society sector, the fast enactment of the law had strong opponents – the law-enforcement bodies. In the last period, the issue of the secret eavesdropping and surveillance has become the subject of the political debates and discussions as well. Political parties got involved in the discussion of the subject as well; the parties, of course, along with other reasons, were motivated with political interests, which, in a number of cases, got reflected in politicization of the campaign and sometimes even in the attempts to discredit the campaign. The ongoing discussion was exacerbated when the events relating to the “Rustavi 2” added to the existing environment. Considering the specific nature of this case, it is important for the investigation to be conducted in a transparent and objective manner and to provide timely and well-grounded answers to the questions existing in the society. Especially, it is to be considered that the events are inflamed in the context of the upcoming local self-government elections.

We, the Non-Governmental Organizations, united in the campaign “This Affects You Too” believe that today, as never before, the efforts of all the stakeholders are important to create such a modern system of eavesdropping and surveillance in

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Georgia, which excludes violating the private life of persons and publication of a private information on the motives of citizen safety. For this purpose, the following is important:

The Government of Georgia should take effective actions as soon as possible and should demonstrate unambiguous political will to change the incumbent faulty system of eavesdropping and surveillance. It is important to gain public trust towards the new system, which, on the one hand, should ensure citizen safety, and on the other hand, protection against infringement of their private life.

The Parliament of Georgia should enact the draft law initiated one year ago and approved by the international experts, as soon as possible. The enactment of the proposed regulations under the legislative amendment package will ensure the creation of the legislation that is based on the principles of human rights and freedoms, which will be the guarantee of establishing the best European and international practices. The enactment of the draft law will provide the possibility to protect the rights of each citizen without harming the safety of the country.

The Law-Enforcement Bodies should stop resistance against the enactment of the progressive legislation and should stop misleading the citizens that the draft law represents a threat to the safety of the country. We hope that at least during the second hearing of the draft law in the Parliament, the Ministry of the Internal Affairs and the Prosecution of Georgia will name concrete Articles that in their opinion, pose such a threat.

Political Parties should refrain from the attempts of politicization of the campaign “This Affects You Too” and from using this issue in the pre-election context. We believe that both the previous and the incumbent governments are responsible for the shortcomings existing in the eavesdropping and surveillance-related legislation and for the existing practices in the law-enforcement bodies.

Media Outlets should consider that the incumbent system does not ensure the protection of the information on a private life and the effective control and monitoring of the actions of the law-enforcement bodies. All of the mentioned circumstances result in the unfortunate practice of frequent publication of the records, reflecting private life. This is why the media outlets should acknowledge their tremendous

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responsibility towards the society. We agree that the private life and the personal data protection should not be used as a motive against the freedom of expression in relation to the events, which are necessary for individuals to know in a democratic state for the implementation of the public self-governance. However, it is also important that through the frequent publication of this rather sensitive information, the media outlet should not become the weapon of other interested groups, which might have reserved partisan or other type of interest, different from the public interest (among others, relating to their safety).

The information, publicized by “Rustavi 2” was an important evidence that the problem of the secret eavesdropping and surveillance is still acute in Georgia. We believe that the final goal of both the public and the government should be to stop manipulating with and publicizing the secret recordings in Georgia. This is a responsibility of all the involved sides: on the one hand, the Government should introduce in-depth reforms in the law-enforcement system, while on the other hand, the media should demonstrate its principled position and should refuse at maximum to publicize the records containing private information.