



CSOs concerned over screening to children of a violent film in four Samegrelo cities

On March 13-15 theatres and halls owned by Poti, Zugdidi, Senaki and Khobi municipalities held screenings of a documentary film - The Bloody Chronicle of the Saakashvili Regime. Screenings were organized by Gia Salukvadze. Salukvadze was released from prison as the Georgian Dream Government considered him a political prisoner. He is the head of All Generations for Georgia, a non-governmental organization. An exhibition was also held along with the screening, displaying photos from the film. The film shows and narrates stories of murder, people dying in suspicious circumstances, protest rallies dispersed using force by the police, unlawful imprisonments, video footage discovered in secret hideouts, and inhumane treatment, rape and torture of inmates in prisons during the United National Movement government. Local government representatives, local educational resource centers and the administration of local public schools were actively involved in organizing the events.

All Generations for Georgia was registered on February 24, 2014 and is headed by a former public defender and former head of tax inspection Davit Salaridze. The organization was co-founded by Gia Salukvadze, Nino Gigineishvili, Besik Makashvili and Merab Toria. Photos shared through social networks reveal that some of these people have connections with the ruling coalition. The organization does not have a website and information about its funding is impossible to find.

Poti

According to media reports, the first screening was held on Friday, March 13 in Poti. Apart from citizens and local government representatives the screening was also attended by local school principals, teachers and students, who comprised the

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majority of the audience. The students were underaged, none more than 15 years old. In their interviews with Interpressnews the school children stated that they had been deceived into attending the screening. The students reported that before coming to the theatre they had been informed by the school administration that they would attend a presentation of new projects planned for the city by the local government. Upon arrival at the screening venue the students were greeted with a very different event. A total of three students reported to journalists about having viewed the film in Poti.

Salukvadze commented on the issue by stating that the screening was pre-announced by various media outlets and that all attendants participated willingly. He also stated that the screening was attended by [] only students, but by other members of society as well. A [] One school principal, however, states the opposite. Principal of the 15th public school Teimuraz Shurghia told journalists that he was contacted by the local resource center and notified about the screening. He did not know [] kind of event was being planned, but did receive instructions from the local resource center to send his students. A [] This, in turn, was denied by head of Poti educational resource center Gocha Korkia.

Zugdidi

The screening in Zugdidi was held on Saturday, March 14. The event coincided with a children's dance ensemble concert held in the same building. Unlike Poti, several persons stood at the entrance to the concert hall and did not let minors inside before the start of the screening. Therefore, there were no children present in the audience at the start of the screening. However, the entrance was not controlled during the screening. Moreover, no one ensured that the children, aged 12-13, would not be exposed to photos of dead and tortured people exhibited in the foyer.

Head of Zugdidi educational resource center Goner Papava told journalists that he is not aware of any schools preparing lists of students to attend the screening. Television company Odishi, however, interviewed students saying that their schools notified them of the event and prepared lists of students who would attend the event.

Khobi

~~The screening in Khobi was held on Sunday, March 15. This event was also attended~~

by school children between 13- 15 years of age. Students reported to the media that they were told that they were going to see a theatre performance and that the local governor brought them to the event on a minibus.

Senaki

The screening was held in Senaki also on March 15. There have been no reports of mobilization of school children for this event. However, nobody ensured that children attending other events in the same building did not attend the screening on their own accord.

Signatories of this statement believe that these actions are distressing due to the following reasons:

1. Violation of children's rights

First of all, it is distressing when a civil society organization disseminates a film containing torture and violence in this way. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) pays special attention to the need to protect children as a special group, taking into account their physical and mental immaturity. The Convention calls on its signatory states to develop and encourage mechanisms for protection of children from the kind of information and material that might be harmful to their well-being and their healthy physical and mental development. It is clear that in this case the government was unable to uphold the requirements of Article 17 of the CRC by failing to protect children from a harmful influence.

2. A campaign in favor of the ruling party

Reports about representatives of the local government and resource centers of the Ministry of Education being involved in these illegal actions are also a cause for concern. Therefore, in its essence the screenings constitute use of administrative resources for an electoral/political purpose. Moreover, actions of the CSO organizing the event should be considered as a donation to a political party, since the screenings included acts of open campaigning in support of the ruling political team.

The obvious organized involvement of educational institutions in these screenings ~~contradicts one of the main principles of the general education policy, which obligates~~

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the state to ensure the independence of public schools from political associations. The involvement also violates Article 3, Paragraph 2, Subparagraph 1 of the Law on General Education, which obligates the state to ensure the independence of public schools from religious and political associations.

In an interview with newspaper Netgazeti head of press service at the Ministry of Education Nata Asatiani stated that an investigation would be launched on Monday, March 16 in order to find out how school children ended up at the film screening. Asatiani also states that the Ministry would have an adequate response if the investigation reveals the involvement of any of its employees in the incident.

Based on the above, we call on:

The Parliament - to create a legal environment in line with the requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that would protect children from harmful influence and would create mechanisms for protecting their rights and interests.

The Ministry of Education and Science - to immediately conduct an investigation and hold those individuals responsible who were involved in acts of violation of children's rights. We believe that restriction of teaching rights to specific teachers and principals would be appropriate.

The Georgian Dream Coalition - to publicly distance itself from similar campaigns and to only use fair methods of fighting against political opponents, so that the rights of specific vulnerable groups are not violated in the process.

All political players in Georgia must work towards establishing a higher political culture. Development of a democratic society is impossible through manipulation of children, promotion of violence and dissemination of hatred. Political parties must not forget the responsibility they hold towards the country and the society. Their driving factor must be this responsibility and not some narrow party interests that only bring short-term gains and serve to strengthen their pre-election position at the expense of human rights.

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Transparency International (TI) Georgia

Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center (EMC)

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED)

Civil Development Agency (CiDA)