



Georgian NGOs: Restriction of freedom of artistic expression and discreditation of cultural and artistic circles shall be inadmissible

Restriction of freedom of artistic expression and discreditation of cultural and artistic circles shall be inadmissible. “Art is alive and independent!”

We, the signatory organizations express our solidarity with filmmaker Salome Jashi, her colleagues, and all the representatives of the art & cultural sector.

Artistic freedom of expression plays a vital role in a democratic and inclusive society. Discreditation campaign from the side of authorities towards cultural sector representatives and limitation or attacks on their artistic freedom of expression is alarming.

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A few days ago, the Ministry of Culture [appointed](#) Koba Khubunia as the acting director of the [Georgian National Film Center](#) (film center), who has no connection with the film industry & arts and worked as a deputy head of the National Agency of Crime prevention. The newly appointed director started the process of [reorganization](#), which is not transparent and not based neither on discussions nor needs assessment or consultations with the representatives from the sector or employees of the film center. The employees of the film center expressed their [distrust](#) of the mentioned process of reorganization, which contains alarming signs of limiting artistic freedom of expression. On June 19, the chairman of the ruling party [discredited](#) filmmaker Salome Jashi in his statement, mentioning her documentary film [\[REDACTED\]](#) the Garden A as a [\[REDACTED\]](#) A film A which [\[REDACTED\]](#) not be produced A [\[REDACTED\]](#) The mentioned statement contains alarming trends of film censorship and the limitation of artistic freedom of expression.

Moreover, the employees of the film center [request](#) amendments to the procedure for the appointment of the film center director. [Current legislation\[1\]](#) (Article 8 (4)) grants the Minister of Culture absolute power to appoint the director. This regulation itself is problematic and contains threats limiting the independence of the film center and artistic freedom of expression. It also contradicts the [same law \(Article 8 \(1\)\)](#), which states that film center should carry out its activities independently (from the Ministry of Culture), with a non-interference principle.

Unfortunately, this is not the first case when government officials discredit or attack the arts & cultural sector representatives. Over the last few years, the Ministry of Culture is increasingly attacking the freedom of expression of artistic institutions and circles. Full-scale assaults against artistic freedom of expression, [threatening](#) Georgian film with a criminal investigation, [appointing](#) political nominees to various positions, constantly [dismissing](#) employees of national museums based on their political or other opinions, and [refusing](#) to allow journalists into art galleries are just some of the issues that arts and culture sector faces. Salome Jashi [\[REDACTED\]](#) documentary film was censored also in 2022, Georgian Film Academy [banned](#) the showing of the film.

Georgia has a number of international obligations to protect freedom of expression. Freedom of artistic expression is part of freedom of expression, protected by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Moreover, the Council of Europe Manifesto on the Freedom of Expression of the Arts and Culture in the Digital Age states that [A](#) artists must be protected against censorship and any form of pressure or

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intimidation. A [] Freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Georgian constitution and Georgia [] law on Freedom of Expression [] which is a progressive legal act, fully in line with international standards. Thus, International obligations and national legislation should be properly implemented.

Therefore, we the undersigned organizations call on Georgian authorities:

[] To ensure a safe and enabling environment for artistic creativity and guarantee freedom of artistic expression in Georgia.

[] Immediately halt the reorganization process of the film center, until drafting procedural document, created with active participation of film center employees and representatives from the sector.

[] Ensure that legislation regulating the film industry is fully in line with international standards protecting freedom of expression. For the representatives of the film sector, it is particularly problematic that the minister of culture has absolute power to appoint a film center director. The mentioned regulation cannot guarantee the independence and principle of non-interference in the activities of the film center.

[] Immediately stop attacks and discreditation on filmmakers & artists, promote artistic freedom of expression which is internationally recognized and plays a vital role in a democratic and inclusive society.

Signatory organizations:

Human Rights House Tbilisi

Human Rights Center

Rights Georgia

Sapari

The Georgian Center for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims

Media Institute

Media Development Foundation (MDF)

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Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)

International Society for Fair Elections And Democracy (ISFED)

Georgia's European Perspective

Guria Civic Center

Georgian Court Watch

Equality Movement

Tbilisi Pride

Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI)

Transparency International – Georgia

Human Rights House Foundation

Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (Southern Defenders)

Réseau de Défenseurs des Droits Humains de l'Afrique Centrale (REDHAC)

Collective Campaign for Peace (COCAP)

International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR)

Truth Hounds