



Statement about the Incident in Didinedzi Village

The violent incident that occurred in Didinedzi Village on October 1 is jeopardizing free and fair pre-election environment. A physical clash one week before the elections leads to escalation of tensions between political forces, giving rise to a violent setting for the Election Day.

Yesterday, several representatives of the Georgian Dream youth wing were assaulted in Didinedzi Village, Zugdidi Municipality. The confrontation occurred between representatives of the United National Movement (UNM) and the Georgian Dream, when the latter were distributing campaign materials. As a result of the confrontation, three representatives of the Georgian Dream suffered injuries. According to a physician at Zugdidi Hospital, interviewed by reporters, “two have sustained a concussion, one has sustained a superficial injury on his head.”

The Georgian Dream alleges that former Gamgebeli of Didinedzi Village and the head of the UNM local office Papuna Kukava was involved in the incident, along with current

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member of the Municipality Sakrebulo Kakha Kiria (the UNM) and several other supporters of the opposition party. The UNM has dismissed allegations about Kakha Kiria's involvement and has accused the Georgian Dream representatives of inciting the confrontation.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs has launched investigation under Article 125 of the Criminal Code (battery). Regional office of the Georgian Dream in Zugdidi urged supporters not to take the bait of provocations, while leader of the UNM Tengiz Gunava stated that it was a 'deplorable incident' but also declared that the Georgian Dream representatives "received an adequate response" to their use of bad language.

After meeting with UNM representatives Papuna Kukava and Manuchar Kiria, who had been summoned by the police for questioning in connection to the incident in Didinedzi, head of the Public Defender's regional office in Samegrelo Zemo-Svaneti, Levan Papava informed reporters that they did not show any signs of injury; neither have they made any allegations about police harassment. According to the UNM, its members have sustained minor injuries as a result of the incident.

We urge the investigative authorities to investigate the incident promptly, fairly and objectively, and take adequate legal measures for ensuring peaceful and safe electoral environment.

We also urge political parties and their representatives to act very responsibly during the election period and refrain from any confrontation and violence, or from making statements that may provoke violence and confrontation. We believe that any statement implying that violence is justified, even if it does so indirectly, may heighten the risk of violent confrontations during the pre-election period.

Similar incidents ahead of the elections impact conduct of elections in a healthy political environment, which will eventually be detrimental to the quality of democracy and governance in the country.