



Joint Statement of NGOs about the Meeting at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia on June 20

In view of the high public interest, we deem it important to explain the reasons why we refused to watch the footage of torture and inhumane treatment shown yesterday at the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

First and foremost, we would like to note that recent years have been marked with systematic violations of human rights by subjecting individuals to the most cruel and degrading violence. By providing access to videos of torture and inhumane treatment at the penitentiary system and the secretly recorded footage of personal lives, public became even more conscious of the cruelty and the scale of violence perpetrated for years by the state against individuals, without any legal repercussions. In a number of cases torture and inhumane treatment was committed to force individuals into confessing gravest crimes and to hold them liable.

We believe that these cases call for a comprehensive investigation and prosecution, which is important to restore justice and for public to realize its own past. Prohibition of torture is a jus cogens norm and therefore, the state must prosecute acts of torture to the fullest extent of law.

However, due investigation of these facts/practice and institution of further court proceedings requires that the process is addressed in a legal discourse, is rationalized, and the dignity and privacy of victims are strictly protected. Public certainly has the right to know the truth about crimes committed in order to make a correct assumption about what happened; however, the process should be limited to legal frames and the public interest should be met within the framework of justice.

~~Otherwise, the process of restoration of justice will be harmed and will lose rationality~~

and objectivity.

In this light, we believe that the meeting at the Ministry of Internal Affairs should have been more business-like, in which the Ministry would have presented a grounded analytical report about course of subsequent investigation. Public already trusted that these videos and the gravest crimes shown were real, which was the intension of making the footage public, including showing it to foreign diplomats. Public was already aware of the systemic nature of similar crimes even before June 20, and watching a few videos (later we found out that videos depicting two incidents were shown during the meeting) would have been insufficient anyway to see a complete picture. Authenticity of the videos and their ties with crimes must be established through an objective investigation and be subject to objective and fair assessments of an independent court.

Even though we had initially requested that the Ministry of Internal Affairs explain the rationale behind the meeting, regrettably it did not. Further, the format of the meeting did not allow having a discussion. Before the meeting we suggested that the Minister inform the audience about nature of footage, number of episodes, their gravity, status of investigation, any charges brought against individuals based on the footage, legal measures utilized, and alleged involvement of high-ranking officials in these crimes. Regrettably, our questions about aims and format of the meeting were never met.

Further, it was important for the MIA to provide guarantees before the meeting that the videotapes did not allow even the minimum identification of individuals involved. These guarantees were of essential importance against the risk of recording and releasing the videos by participants who had access to necessary technical means. Had the videotapes allowed identification of victims of torture, showing them to an audience of more than hundred participants (at the risk that they could be released in various different forms) would have inflicted additional emotional pain to victims and their family, which clearly is in conflict with the goals of restoration of justice and psychological rehabilitation. Making their identities public would have endangered the feeling of insecurity among victims, further traumatizing them emotionally.

We believe it is crucial for the investigation to be conducted in a maximum transparent and effective manner, and an exemplary punishment be imposed on persons involved in and encouraging the vicious practice. However, it is equally

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important to respect the dignity of persons subjected to inhumane and degrading treatment.

We remain hopeful that in the future the Ministry of Internal Affairs will resort to adequate means of informing public about the status of investigation, ensure that these crimes are prosecuted to the fullest extent of law and the dignity and privacy of victims are protected.

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