Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

Ref.: AL GEO 1/2026
(Please use this reference in your reply)

1 April 2026

Excellency,

We have the honour to address you in our capacities as Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association; Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders and Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions 59/4, 52/9, 52/4 and 52/7.

In this connection, we would like to bring to the attention of your Excellency's Government information we have received concerning **the alleged serious deterioration of fundamental freedoms and civic space in Georgia over recent years**.

Similar concerns have been raised with your Excellency's Government in the past, including previous allegations of disproportionate use of force in response to peaceful protests in late 2024 (GEO 4/2024, GEO 1/2025), legislative reforms that modify existing and introduce new provisions representing a serious risk to the effective exercise of fundamental human rights (GEO 2/2025), and administrative charges against human rights defenders, journalists and politicians (GEO 3/2025, GEO 4/2025). We regret that to date, we have not received a reply from your Excellency's Government to these communications.

According to the information received:

Restrictions to the rights to freedom of expression and assembly

Since November 2024, a series of peaceful protests have taken place across Georgia advocating for the protection of human rights, gender equality, media freedom, Georgia's European integration and democratic governance. Participants in these protests included civil society organisations, journalists, human rights defenders, civil servants and other individuals exercising their lawful rights to peaceful assembly and expression. In this context, participants engaged in demonstrations and public gatherings, as well as activities such as human rights monitoring, legal observation, public advocacy and awareness raising. Journalists were present to document and report on the assemblies. It has been alleged that a significant number of participants, including journalists and human rights defenders, were subject to arrest and administrative detention due to their involvement in these protests. The legal bases reportedly invoked include provisions of the Administrative Offences Code relating to public order, participation in unlawful assemblies, obstruction of traffic, failure to comply

with police orders, and "insult" of public officials. In certain cases, repeated administrative violations have reportedly been relied upon to justify imposing increasingly severe sanctions.

Several allegations indicate that detained peaceful protestors have been subjected to ill treatment. For example, between 15 April 2024 and 1 March 2025 alone, the Public Defender and their representatives visited 624 detained and injured protesters. Out of these, 360 persons (57.7%) reported ill-treatment by police officers. Between 28 November 2024 and 28 January 2025, the Public Defender's Office identified 282 cases of alleged ill-treatment.

The alleged perpetrators are reported to be law enforcement officials operating under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and related security services. It is further alleged that dispersals of protests, administrative detentions and the use of force as described above were carried out as part of the official duties of these officers.

Information received indicated that in most of the cases, protests have been dispersed without prior warning, and several cases of protest being kettled by riot police have been informed.

We have received information suggesting that certain legal provisions are formulated or applied in vague and overly broad terms, including in relation to repeated protest participation or public order concerns. It is further alleged that facial recognition technologies and other forms of digital surveillance have been used to identify participants in assemblies and to initiate administrative proceedings against them. Reportedly, cumulative fines and repeated detentions have been imposed in a manner that may discourage continued participation in peaceful protests.

Concerns have been also received about amendments to the legislation concerning civil service and diplomatic service. A ministerial order related to the Law on Diplomatic Service refers to the strict adherence to the general rules of ethics and conduct, which is formulated in vague terms and leaves room for interpretation as to what is acceptable conduct. Civil servants, including diplomats, have been dismissed from their positions due to their participation in peaceful protests or expressing their protest against the policy of the 'Georgian Dream' ruling party, suspending the negotiation process with the European Union.

Concerns have also been raised regarding judicial oversight in protest related cases. It is alleged that administrative hearings have in certain instances been conducted in an expedited manner, with limited opportunity to challenge the legality and necessity of arrests or the admissibility of evidence, including evidence derived from facial recognition systems or police body worn cameras. Access to legal counsel during the initial stages of detention is reported to have been delayed or ineffective in several cases. Some individuals were reportedly held in temporary detention facilities under the authority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

We have further been informed of amendments to legislation and administrative practices affecting protest related conduct and media activity, including provisions concerning "insults" towards public officials and other protest related offences. Moreover, we have received information regarding changes to defamation laws, restrictions on filming in courtrooms, introduction of content obligations and funding cuts. Journalists covering assemblies are reported to have been detained or sanctioned while performing their professional duties. It is further alleged that remedies in cases of short-term detention, alleged ill-treatment and excessive use of force have not been prompt, effective or impartial.

Particularly serious are allegations concerning the deployment of undisclosed chemical agents, suspected to be CA (4 bromobenzyl cyanide) and a solvent called trichloroethylene, mixed in water cannons during crowd control operations. According to medical documentation and expert assessments cited in the information received, individuals exposed to these substances reportedly experienced severe and long-persistent health effects, such as cardiac electrical abnormalities, severe burning sensations that intensified upon washing, prolonged respiratory distress, visual impairment, and neurological disturbances - clinical manifestations not typical of CS gas or other riot-control agents. It is alleged that the effects observed are not compatible with the lawful use of standard crowd control agents which must be temporary, known and regulated, and may be inconsistent with relevant international standards, including the absolute prohibition on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in article 1 and 16 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and article 7, ICCPR, the Special Rapporteur on torture's non-exhaustive lists of prohibited or controlled law enforcement items (A/78/324), and the UN Guidance on the Use of Less Lethal Weapons. It is further alleged that the authorities had not fully disclosed the composition of the substances deployed during peaceful protests and that domestic inquiries have not met standards of independence, transparency regulation or scientific verification. In this respect, the fusion of chemicals with water could constitute an "experimental weapon" that would be prohibited by article 7, ICCPR, which explicitly provides that "no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation." Not disclosing the content of crowd control agents also prevents people from seeking or delaying appropriate medical treatment in violation of the rights to the highest standards of health.

We have furthermore received information about the use of messages posted by activists on social media related to the protests as 'proof' that they were organizing assemblies, in order to detain them or impose fines.

Restrictions of freedom of association, including freedom to access of resources

Legislative reforms

Between 2024 and 2025, and at an increasing rate since the announcement of the suspension of the European Union accession process in November 2024, various packages of legislative reforms led by the government were adopted in the Georgian Parliament. These legal reforms have been adopted in fast-track processes, reportedly preventing broad discussion on the issues they cover, and without consulting actors who could be affected, such as civil society associations. Indeed, we have received reports that these laws are now implemented in a manner that appears to target such organizations.

It is pertinent to cite the other laws or amendments that reportedly also relate to the curtailing of rights and reduction of civic space in Georgia including the 'Law on the Fight against Corruption', the 'Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence', and the 'Organic Law on Political Association of Citizens'.

Between the amended laws are the:

1. **The Law on the Fight Against Corruption** was adopted on 29 May 2024. The European Commission and the Venice Commission expressed their concerns about the reform, citing its misalignment with the Georgian Constitution and international human rights standards. Specific concerns were raised regarding the power of Parliament to appoint the head of the Anti-Corruption Bureau, as well as new powers allowing the Bureau to i) request extensive information from institutions, individuals and companies, including sensitive data; ii) request the dissolution of political parties and transfer of its assets to the state treasury; and iii) develop and monitor compliance of programs on ethics, integrity and accountability.

2. **The Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence** was adopted on 28 May 2024. Concerns regarding this law were communicated to your Excellency's Government in GEO 1/2024, as well as in the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Expert Opinion No. NGO-GEO/506/2024 of 30 May 2024, which indicated that the obligations introduced by the law "fall short of the strict requirements provided in international human rights law governing the imposition of restrictions on the right to freedom of association".

3. **The Organic Law on Political Association of Citizens** was adopted on 13 May 2025, at the same time as the Law on the Constitutional Court and less than six months ahead of local elections. The law grants the Constitutional Court the power to ban political parties and candidates from 9 months up to 14 days prior to elections for the following reasons:

    a. Receiving donations in the forms of events or grants from foreign sources, unless such donations are approved by an authorized

governmental body, under the oversight of the Anti-Corruption Bureau.

b. Goals or activities related to those of parties that have been prohibited in the past. Particularly, the Law was intended to target political groups seen as a threat to the Georgian constitutional order, territorial integrity or independence ("anti-Georgian"); or if those seen to engage in incitement of violence.

Further proposed amendments to the Law on Political Associations would reportedly prohibit individuals from political party membership for a period of eight years if they have received funding from organisations classified as "foreign-funded," defined as deriving 20 per cent or more of their annual income from foreign sources. New sanctions are also reportedly envisaged for entrepreneurial entities engaging in political activities outside the scope of their business activities. These amendments foresee sanctions including fines, community service and imprisonment, with enhanced penalties in cases of repeated offences or aggravating circumstances.

4. Amendments to the **Law on Diplomatic Service**: the amendments passed in January 2025 by ministerial order allow for stricter control, including faster termination of diplomats perceived to be acting against government foreign policy. New grounds for terminating employment include acts that damage the "national interests" or "image" of Georgia. This is widely interpreted to target staff who oppose the government's shift from European integration and those civil servants who participated in peaceful protests.

5. On 28 January 2026, the ruling Georgian Dream party introduced legislative amendments on the **Law "On Grants"** before the Georgian Parliament. These new amendments were subsequently adopted by Parliament on 4 March 2026, with the aim of effectively dismantling independent civil society organizations by cutting them off from foreign funding, and criminalizing their vital work inside Georgia. Under the newly adopted amendments, receiving "unauthorized" grants now constitutes criminal offence, punishable by up to six years of imprisonment. The definition of "foreign grants" has also been significantly expanded, allowing for the arbitrary and politically motivated criminal prosecution of civil society actors. In addition, individuals previously employed by organizations receiving more than 20 percent of their funding from foreign sources within a calendar year are now banned from political party membership for eight years. These amended provisions have a retroactive effect.

6. The amended legislation also introduces criminal liability for vaguely defined "extremism against the constitutional order" (**new article 316 of the Georgian Criminal Code**). This provision seeks to punish the "systematic" "non-recognition of the Georgian Dream government", including through "systematic and public calls (…) for mass violations

of legislation, mass disobedience to state authorities, or the creation of alternative bodies to state authorities", with fines and up to three years of imprisonment. A citizen of Georgia or a stateless person having status in Georgia who systematically and publicly calls for mass violation of the legislation of Georgia, for mass disobedience toward the authorities of Georgia, or for the creation of alternative bodies of the authorities of Georgia; or who arbitrarily, publicly, and systematically presents themselves or another person as a representative of the authorities of Georgia; or who commits other public and systematic actions, if any of the above-mentioned acts provided for in this article are aimed at establishing a perception of the illegitimacy of the constitutional order or constitutional bodies of Georgia and harm the interests of Georgia, or are aimed at establishing such a perception and create a real threat of harming the interests of Georgia, shall be punished by a fine, by community service for a term of 400 to 600 hours, or by imprisonment for up to three years. A legal entity shall be punished by a fine or by liquidation and a fine.

Excessive monitoring procedures and freezing of assets

After the amendments to the Law on Grants and other legislation as laid out above, the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ABC) reportedly began to monitor over 80 civil society organisations in detail, demanding excessive and often confidential information.

We also received information about the seizure and freezing of bank accounts of civil society organizations in 2024 and 2025. According to the Tbilisi Court of Appeal, this measure was taken because "there was a reasonable doubt that the property has been obtained through criminal means; therefore, in order to prevent the commission of a new crime, as well as to preclude the concealment of the property, it is necessary to impose seizure of the aforementioned property for the third stage, for a term of 12 months." Both the Court and the Prosecutor's Office used details of specific purchases made by the affected associations (including safety equipment for protests observers and legal aid networks) as a basis for accusations of actions against the state and sabotage.

The judgement did not indicate factual circumstances clarifying why these measures were imposed in individual cases. Conversely, the assets concerned had reportedly been part of international cooperation grants, and reports to donors were up to date. Besides, we have received reports that authorities have allegedly been inquiring about these grants while interrogating civil society members, accusing their associations of receiving funds from foreign agents to organize protests.

The seizing of assets and freezing of accounts has reportedly put a heavy strain on the operational and administrative capacities of affected associations, who are allegedly no longer able to cover basic costs, including staff salaries and health insurance. Besides, associations appear to no longer be able to fulfil their institutional objectives, such as providing legal aid and other assistance and

advisory services. This in turn has reportedly limited the possibility of victims of human rights violation to seek redress and reparation.

Finally, we wish to highlight reports that for more than five years, civil society organizations and their staff, collaborators, members and leaders have allegedly been subjected to constant attacks, including threats of murder and rape. Such threats appear likely be linked to stigmatization and smear campaigns – such as labelling associations or individuals as 'enemies of the State', 'foreign agents' or 'blasphemers' – allegedly orchestrated by violent groups acting under instructions of the governing party.

Reprisals against Public Servants

Since December 2024, the Government has reportedly taken numerous measures to silence and punish public servants that expressed critical views about the actions or decisions of the ruling party, including through the publication of joint statements, participating in protest demonstrations or posting on social media. In 2024 and 2025, the ruling party dismissed more than 1.000 public servants from their positions due to their political views. The process of arbitrary mass dismissals is reportedly still ongoing. Numerous mechanisms are being used to dismiss critical mass from the public sector, such as termination of labour and administrative contracts, arbitrary institutional reorganizations and liquidations.

The amendments made to the "Law of Georgia On Public Service" changed the status of the head of the primary structural unit of a public institution and the deputy, from permanent professional civil servants to persons employed under an administrative contract. This change significantly simplified the process of terminating their employment relations.

On 30 November 2024, a joint statement signed by approximately 460 employees or former employees from around 50 public innstitutions that criticized the Government's decision to postpone the opening of negotiations with the European Union was circulated. Other similar statements were circulated between 29 November and 1 December 2024 signed by employees of other public institutions. A large number of these individuals were subsequently dismissed from their positions. The cases below are some emblematic cases that show the broad extent of this pattern in apparent reprisal for their exercise of the right to freedom of expression.

On 31 December 2024, outside of working hours, Nino Tkeshelashvili, the Head of the Department for Resocialization and Rehabilitation of Convicts and Former Prisoners at the National Agency for Crime Prevention, Execution of Noncustodial Sentences and Probation received a termination order for her administrative contract. She was actively participating in protest demonstrations and had signed a statement condemning the actions of the ruling party.

Tinatin Chilashili was also dismissed from the National Agency for Crime Prevention, reportedly in direct connection to her political views. Her

employment contract was terminated in December 2024 without being previously informed.

The Head of the Legal Department at the Public Service Hall, Megi Katsitadze, and the Head of the Internal Audit Department, Tatia Udesiani, were arbitrarily fired from their positions, on ground of termination of their administrative contracts. Both had signed a joint statement published by the employees of the Public Service Hall on the effects of the reforms of the public service legislation. Ivane Kavelashvili, the Manager of the Public Service Hall of Lagodekhi was also fired and informed on the same workday that her contract was terminated.

Nino Eliauri, former Manager of the Public Service Hall of Rustavi, experienced the non-renewal of her administrative contract in apparent direct connection with a public statement signed by 95 per cent of her subordinates.

Ana Gurasashvili and Nino Giorgadze, former lawyers at the LEPL National Agency of Public Registry, were notified of the non-renewal of their employment contracts not long after signing a joint statement, which had been published by the employees of the National Agency of Public Registry that condemned some actions taken by the ruling party.

Numerous employees of the Tbilisi City Hall that were signatories of critical statements or who participated in pro-European rallies also saw their employment terminated. The permanent employment contracts of Lana Kardava and Tamar Makharashvili, employed at the Public Relations Department of the Tbilisi City Hall, were terminated under the pretext of staff reduction, with immediate effect since the notifications. Giga Sopromadze, Executive Secretary of the Tbilisi City Hall on Disability Issues, received a dismissal letter in December 2024 with no prior warning or opportunity for discussion. Nana Bregvadze, Tinatin Kiknavelidze and Salome Makharashvili were fired from the Municipal Services Development Agency under the pretext of abolishing their positions as part of a restructuring.

The Head of the International Relations Department of the Tbilisi City Hall, Liana Davitadze and her colleagues - Nino Beglarishvili, Ana Kereselidze and Lali Unapkoshvili expressed their disapproval of the decision to postpone negotiations with the European Union until 2028. In accordance with the arbitrary reorganization that was announced at the Tbilisi City Hall, the International Relations Department of the Tbilisi City Hall was dissolved.

On 10 March 2025, the Georgian Parliamentary Research Center was dissolved. According to the statement by the Center’s former Director during a staff meeting, the reason for the liquidation was the activism of several of its employees, including Salome Natroshvili, Nino Lezhava, Mariam Chachua, Nato Mirzashvili and Ema Todua. These employees had signed a joint statement from public sector employees and had actively participated in protest demonstrations. In the aftermath of the liquidation, a Research and Educational Department was established within the Parliament, which recruited a number of employees from the former Research Center, excluding these five individuals.

Maka Tokmazishvili, Lika Kvinchia, and other former employees of the Civil Service Bureau of Georgia publicly expressed their opposition to the actions taken by the ruling party and were signatories of the joint statement issued by public sector employees. On 1 April 2025, the Civil Service Bureau was dissolved, and its functions were transferred to the Administration of the Government of Georgia.

Ekaterine Udesiani, an employee of the Parliament of Georgia who had signed the joint statement from public sector employees, was fired from her position based on a reorganization.

Tamar Kavkasidze and Lamara Beridze were fired from the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia under the pretext of staff optimization, as part of a reorganization. They were the only employees of the Ministry who had signed the public statement and were the only ones subjected to dismissal.

On May 1, 2025, a reorganization process also began in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, leading to the dismissal of employees and diplomats who had signed the joint statement. One of these individuals was Ekaterine Megrelishvili.

Mikheil Ramazashvili, a former employee at the International Relations and Euro-Atlantic Integration Department of the Ministry of Defence of Georgia, was among the signatories of the joint statement. He was dismissed under the pretext of the reorganization that was announced at the Ministry of Defence in January 2025.

Elene Sekhniashvili, a former employee at the the National Intellectual Property Center of Georgia (Sakpatenti), was among the signatories of the joint statement. She was on her maternity leave from 24 March 2025. Her maternity leave was forcibly terminated in October 2025, prior to its completion, and she became the subject of the disciplinary proceedings on the unlawful grounds of failure to be at work. Ms. Sekhniashvili was not informed about the progress or results of the disciplinary proceedings. Termination of the administrative contract was the grounds for her dismissal.

Karlo Tskitishvili, who had been serving as Head of the Division at the Border Police of Georgia (Ministry of Internal Affairs), was dismissed due to a reorganization process after openly expressing his opinions regarding the actions of the ruling party at work.

Irakli Ardashelia, a former employee of the Public Service Development Agency, publicly expressed disapproval of the ruling party's decision by signing a joint statement. His employment contract was terminated in December 2024.

In most of these cases, notification of these dismissals were delivered during non-working hours and with immediate effect.

As of 31 December 2025, at least 230 cases have been filed in court, including four collective lawsuits, in relation to the above-mentioned dismissals.

Crackdown on journalists

In recent months, Georgian journalists have faced physical violence and verbal abuse while covering protests, both by law enforcement officers and informal groups affiliated with ruling party, fines imposed under the pretext of "artificially blocking roads" as they were carrying out their journalistic work, censorship, unlawful dismissals from the Public Broadcaster, interference in the editorial policies of broadcasters and deprivation of financial resources for media organizations, among other breaches of their right to freedom of expression.

Journalists have also become targets of persecution in their workplace if their work is perceived to be too critical. From January 2025, twelve journalists working for the Public Broadcaster were dismissed and eight others were subjected to disciplinary sanctions for criticizing the editorial policies of Public Broadcaster. These journalists had previously expressed solidarity with protest participants and colleagues affected by attacks.

On 11 April 2025, Vasil Ivanov-Chikovani, the former host of the 6 p.m. "Moambe" program, and Nino Zautashvili, the host of "Realuri Sivrtse" (Real Space), were dismissed from the Public Broadcaster based on a "disciplinary examination." However, they were not informed of the results of the disciplinary proceedings. Both journalists were dismissed on the grounds of alleged violations of their contracts and internal regulations. They had been actively involved in the movement "Guardians of the Public Broadcaster", which criticized some of the Broadcaster's management decisions and editorial policies. Both individuals had expressed their concerns regarding the political influences within the broadcaster.

Ms. Zautashvili was not provided with compensation by the Public Broadcaster. Furthermore, on the morning following her dismissal, her corporate phone number and the insurance she had paid were deactivated. Six months prior to her release, the television project was transitioned into a radio format.

In the case of Mr. Ivanov-Chikovan, two months before his dismissal, on 4 February 2025, he was informed that he would no longer host the "Moambe" program, as producers no longer wished to continue collaboration with him.

This is an emblematic case of a broader pattern of actions that appear to be intended to silence critical, independent, and free media outlets. Reports indicate that between October 2024 and October 2025, 434 incidents were recorded against journalists, media outlets and civil society organizations working on media rights.

Without wishing to prejudge the accuracy of these allegations, we wish to express our deep concern that the individual and/or cumulative effect of these measures may entail or result in a violation of various obligations of Georgia under international

human rights law. Patterns of arrests and administrative sanctions against peaceful protestors, the use of surveillance technologies, the alleged deployment of undisclosed chemical agents including in water cannons during protests, the apparent retributive measures against civil servants for exercising their freedom of expression, the violence and apparently unjustified administrative sanctions against journalists, and the limitations imposed media actors and civil society organisations may namely amount to disproportionate and undue restrictions on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of association, freedom of expression, privacy, liberty and security of persons, and participation in public affairs, as protected under articles 7, 9, 17, 19, 21, 22 and 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), articles 1 and 16 of the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, as well as the corresponding guarantees under articles 5, 6, 8, 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and article 3 of Protocol No.1 to the ECHR. Georgia, as a State party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), is bound to respect, protect and fulfil the rights enshrined therein and prevent and investigate violations.

Furthermore, the reported mass dispersals and arrests in the context of peaceful protests since November 2024 raise concerns as to their compatibility with article 21 of the ICCPR. Due to their political nature, protests across Georgia merit a heightened degree of tolerance and accommodation by public authorities. Conversely, Alleged patterns of arrests, surveillance and sanctions appear, in certain instances, to penalise participation in peaceful protests rather than facilitate it as a protected right. We are particularly concerned that the prevailing approach to the regulation and policing of protests may have a chilling effect on the legitimate exercise of fundamental rights in a democratic society. In this sense, vague legal provisions, repeated administrative penalties and insufficient judicial scrutiny give rise to concerns regarding arbitrariness and resulting chilling effect on civil society and peaceful protesters. Furthermore, we are concerned that considering social media posts related to any given protests as proof of coordination or organization is disproportionate, as such posts cannot serve as the sole basis for detaining an individual or imposing fines.

Reports that individuals were transferred to and held in temporary locations further raise concerns regarding safeguards against arbitrary detention, as does the reported lack of prompt, effective and impartial remedies for protesters and media actors. The reported heavy reliance on body-camera recordings in judicial proceedings also raises serious concerns, particularly where legal safeguards, procedural guarantees and independent scrutiny mechanisms may be otherwise insufficient.

With regard to the legislative developments laid out above, we wish to discourage the adoption of vague legislation that includes provisions that can be implemented discretionary against political opposition and other associations that can play an important role in elections (such as civil society and the media). Similar concerns have been communicated to your Excellency's Government about other legislative reforms considered and adopted by the Parliament of Georgia between December 2024 and February 2025, including modifications to the Code of Administrative Offenses, the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations, and the Criminal Code. As indicated in GEO 2/2025, provisions contained in these laws are not compatible with a number of human rights standards, including liberty and personal

security, freedom of opinion and expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association – the guarantee of which is essential for the functioning of any democratic society and for compliance with the international obligations freely assumed by the Georgian State.

We are concerned that the proposed legislative amendments discussed above may be incompatible with Georgia's obligations under national and international human rights law. In particular, the introduction of administrative offences to entrepreneurial entities engaging in political activities outside of their business activities may unduly restrict the ability of individuals associated with such entities to express political views, raising concerns under article 19 of the ICCPR.

The reported provision prohibiting individuals from holding political party membership for a period of eight years on the basis of their prior involvement with organisations classified as "foreign-funded" may constitute a serious restriction on political participation and freedom of association, protected under articles 21, 22 and 25 of the ICCPR. These measures risk imposing collective limitations rather than individualised assessments grounded in necessity and proportionality. In this context, we also wish to express our concerns that proposed legislative amendments to the Law on Grants, the Criminal Code and the Administrative Code reportedly would expand restrictions on foreign funding, political activity and grants in ways that may be inconsistent with Georgia's international human rights obligations: The proposed amendments would reportedly broaden the definition of "grants", thus requiring government consent for residents or citizens of Georgia to receive a wide range of funds or assets from foreign States, national or legal entities for activities deemed capable of influencing public policy. Undue restrictions on funding of civil society organizations could result in undue restrictions of their right to freedom of association, as enshrined in article 22 ICCPR.

We are further concerned that the proposed broadening of the definition of "grant," requiring prior governmental consent for a wide range of funding or asset transfers, appears vague and overly broad. As described, the definition could encompass a broad spectrum of international or domestic cooperation, including support for civil society activities and human rights monitoring. Such a framework may impede the ability of civil society organisations to seek, receive and utilise resources, including from foreign sources as part of the right to freedom of association. The requirement of prior consent for activities potentially deemed capable of influencing public policy raises concerns regarding legal certainty and the risk of arbitrary application. In addition, restrictions that could hinder the engagement of foreign experts in human rights monitoring activities without prior governmental approval may further narrow civic space and weaken independent oversight, with broader implications for democratic governance and accountability.

The introduction of sanctions including substantial fines, community service and terms of imprisonment, particularly with enhanced penalties for repeat offences, appears potentially disproportionate to the stated aims of the legislation and may have a chilling effect on civic engagement and political participation. In the context of restrictions on fundamental rights, vague or overly broad definitions significantly heighten the risk of arbitrary or unnecessary interference and must not be interpreted or applied expansively. Taken together, these measures raise serious concerns regarding

their compatibility with the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality required under the Covenant, and their potential impact on civic space and democratic participation in Georgia.

We also express our concern at the apparent targeting of civil servants that expressed dissent or critical views with regards to political decisions or actions taken by the Government. We note that these large-scale dismissals appear to be uniquely motivated by the employees' exercise of their right to freedom of expression and seem to present multiple irregularities in the proceedings. We recall that the right to freedom of expression of expression includes commentary on public affairs and that any restrictions, including to civil servants' right to freedom of expression, must respect the requirements of legal certainty, necessity and proportionality.

Finally, we express great concern at the reported episodes of physical and verbal violence suffered by journalists carrying out their professional duties, both by State security forces and non-State groups, as well as the administrative measures, including fines and dismissals, imposed on journalists seen as critical for merely performing their journalistic work. The combination of violence, punitive administrative measures, editorial interference and other kinds of reprisals, such as deprivation of economic means and dismissals, appear to indicate there is a concerted effort intended to silence critical, independent, and free media outlets. These worrying developments have created a serious chilling effect across the media in Georgia and present a very concerning picture about the state of press freedom in the country.

We recall that States parties are required to ensure that the rights contained in article 19 ICCPR are upheld and given effect to in the domestic law, and that States have a duty to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression and we call on your Excellency's Government to take the necessary measures in this regard.

In connection with the above alleged facts and concerns, please refer to the **Annex on Reference to international human rights law** attached to this letter which cites international human rights instruments and standards relevant to these allegations.

As it is our responsibility, under the mandates provided to us by the Human Rights Council, to seek to clarify all cases brought to our attention, we would be grateful for your observations on the following matters:

1. Please provide any additional information and/or comment(s) you may have on the above-mentioned allegations.

2. Please provide detailed information on the legal and factual basis for arrests and administrative detentions carried out in connection with protests since November 2024, including the specific legal provisions invoked, the evidentiary basis relied upon and the outcomes of the relevant proceedings.

3. Please clarify the legal framework governing the use of facial recognition and other surveillance technologies in the context of assemblies,

including safeguards, oversight mechanisms and available avenues for redress.

4. Please provide detailed information regarding the substances used in crowd-control operations since November 2024, including their chemical composition, the legal basis for their use, their compliance with applicable international standards, and the results of any independent, impartial and transparent investigations into alleged health consequences.

5. Please describe measures taken to ensure the independence and impartiality of judicial proceedings in protest-related cases, including safeguards to protect the rights of journalists and media workers reporting on assemblies.

6. Please provide information on any investigations initiated into allegations of excessive use of force, arbitrary detention or ill-treatment in the context of assemblies, including the status and outcomes of such investigations, the measures adopted to ensure accountability, and the practices taken or envisaged to prevent recurrence.

7. Please provide any clarification on how the amendments of the above-mentioned laws are compatible with international human rights standards, including with respect to freedom of association, freedom of expression and political participation.

8. Please provide detailed information on the factual and legal grounds for the dismissal of public servants, including explaining what measures have been taken to review their dismissals on the account of the allegations that these appear to have taken place in direct retribution for expressing critical views of the Government's decisions or policies. Please explain whether and how can these dismissals be compatible with international human rights law, notably article 19 ICCPR, including the principes of legal certainty, necessity and proportionality for any restrictions.

9. Please provide detailed information about the measures taken to investigate the allegations of attacks against journalists, both by State security forces and non-State groups, and to prevent their re-occurrence, ensuring the safety of journalists while carrying out their work. Please also explain the legal basis for the administrative measures, including fines or dismissals, taken against journalists in apparent direct connection with their journalistic work. Please explain the measures your Excellency's Government intends to take to guarantee the right to freedom of expression as enshrined in article 19 ICCPR, including the right of media to operate freely.

This communication, and any response received from your Excellency's Government, will be made public via the communications reporting website at the 60 days mark. Should Your Excellency's Government respond within 60 days, both the

communication and the response, may be published before the 60 days mark. The communications and responses will also be made available in the subsequent periodic report to be presented to the Human Rights Council.

While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations.

We may publicly express our concerns in the near future as, in our view, the information upon which the press release will be based is sufficiently reliable to indicate a matter warranting immediate attention. We also believe that the wider public should be alerted to the potential implications of the above-mentioned allegations. The press release will indicate that we have been in contact with your Excellency's Government's to clarify the issue/s in question.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Gina Romero
Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association

Irene Khan
Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

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Annex

Reference to international human rights law

In connection with above alleged facts and concerns, we would like to draw the attention of your Excellency's Government to the relevant provisions of international human rights law, including articles 6, 9, 14, 19, 21 and 22 of the ICCPR, which provide for the rights to life, to liberty and security of the person, not to be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention, to be promptly informed of the reasons for the arrest and of any charges against him or her, to be brought promptly before a judge, to a fair trial within a reasonable time, and the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association. These articles shall be read individually and together with article 2.3. of the ICCPR, which provides for the right to an effective remedy for every person whose rights contained in the Covenant have been violated.

Article 19 of the ICCPR guarantees the right to hold opinions without interference and the right to freedom of expression, which includes the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media". This right applies online as well as offline, protects the freedom of the press as one of its core elements and includes not only the exchange of information that is favourable, but also that which may criticize, shock, or offend.

In its general comment No. 34, the Human Rights Committee stated that States parties to the ICCPR are required to guarantee the right to freedom of expression, including "political discourse, commentary on one's own and on public affairs, canvassing, discussion of human rights, journalism, cultural and artistic expression, teaching, and religious discourse" (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 11). The Committee states that article 19 also covers the right of a free press and other media able to comment on public issues without censorship or restraint and to inform public opinion and a corresponding right of the public to receive media output.

The Committee further asserts that there is a duty of States to put in place effective measures to protect against attacks aimed at silencing those exercising their right to freedom of expression (para. 23). Recognizing how journalists and persons who engage in the gathering and analysis of information on the human rights situation and who publish human rights-related reports, including judges and lawyers, are frequently subjected to threats, intimidation and attacks because of their activities, the Committee stresses that "all such attacks should be vigorously investigated in a timely fashion, and the perpetrators prosecuted, and the victims, or, in the case of killings, their representatives, be in receipt of appropriate forms of redress" (para. 23).

Any restriction on the right to freedom of expression must be compatible with the requirements set out in article 19(3) ICCPR. Under these requirements, restrictions must (i) be provided by law; (ii) pursue one of the legitimate aims for restriction, which are the respect of the rights or reputations of others and the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals; and (iii) be necessary and proportionate for those objectives. The State has the burden of proof to demonstrate that any such restrictions are compatible with the Covenant, and

restrictions must always be "the least intrusive instrument among those which might achieve their protective function" (CCPR/C/GC/34, para. 34).

Article 19(3) may never be invoked to justify the muzzling of any advocacy of democratic tenets and human rights (para. 23). Nor, under any circumstance, can an attack on a person, because of the exercise of their freedom of opinion or expression, including such forms of attack as arbitrary arrest and torture, be compatible with article 19 (para. 23). The Human Rights Committee also explicitly noted that the penalization of a media outlet or journalist solely for being critical of the government or the political social system espoused by the government can never be considered to be a necessary restriction of freedom of expression (para. 42).

We wish to recall to Your Excellency's Government that the right to peaceful assembly is fundamental in its own right and is essential for the realisation of other human rights in a democratic society. As affirmed by the Human Rights Committee in its general comment No. 37 (2020), restrictions on the rights to peaceful assembly and association are often indicative of repression and democratic backsliding (CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 1- 2).

States party to the ICCPR have both negative and positive obligations under article 21. They must refrain from unjustified interference with peaceful assemblies, including by prohibiting or dispersing them without a legitimate basis consistent with the Covenant. At the same time, they are required to take positive measures to facilitate and protect assemblies, ensuring an enabling legal and institutional framework to facilitate the right. Such measures may include providing appropriate security arrangements or redirecting traffic (CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 23-24). States furthermore have an obligation not only to refrain from violating the rights of individuals involved in an assembly, but to ensure the rights of those who participate or are affected by them, and to facilitate an enabling environment (A/HRC/31/66 para. 13).

In light of the inherently expressive function of assemblies, particular protection is afforded to gatherings conveying political messages (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 32).

For the purposes of article 21 of the ICCPR, an assembly is considered "peaceful" where its organisers and participants have peaceful intentions and the assembly does not involve violence. "Violence" must be understood as the use of physical force against persons or property that is likely to result in injury, death or serious damage (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 15). Any determination that an assembly is no longer peaceful must be based on credible and objective evidence that participants are engaging in, inciting or intending imminent violence.

Isolated acts of violence by individual participants do not suffice to render an entire assembly non-peaceful. Only where violence is widespread may the protection of article 21 cease to apply to the assembly in its entirety. Moreover, the use of force by law enforcement officials does not characterise an assembly as violent (CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 18-19). There should be a presumption in favour of the peaceful character of assemblies (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 17). Measures that sanction an assembly in its entirety without an individualised assessment of participants, including blanket bans or overly broad restrictions, are presumed to be disproportionate and therefore incompatible with article 21 ((CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 38). As such, the

reported mass dispersals and arrests in the context of protests since November 2024 raise concerns as to their compatibility with article 21 of the ICCPR.

Any restrictions on peaceful assemblies must comply with the cumulative requirements of legality, necessity and proportionality, and must pursue exclusively one of the legitimate aims exhaustively set forth in article 21: national security, public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals, or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others (CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 36 and 41). Prohibitions of assemblies must be a measure of last resort, adopted only after less restrictive means have been insufficient. The aim of "public order" refers to the fundamental rules essential for the functioning of society and must not be invoked in a broad or vague manner to justify vast limitations. By their nature, assemblies may entail a degree of disruption, and States must tolerate such disruption as part of the exercise of the right (CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 36, 37, 41 and 44).

We wish to recall that the use of force by law enforcement officials should be exceptional, and assemblies should ordinarily be managed with no resort to force (A/HRC/31/66, para. 57). Any use of force by law enforcement officials in the context of assemblies must at all times comply with the principles of legality, necessity proportionality, precaution and non-discrimination, and must be consistent with the obligations arising from articles 6 and 7 of the ICCPR. Domestic legal frameworks governing the use of force must conform to international standards, including the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials and the United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 78). In addition, we refer to a report of the former Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association which indicated that "States should facilitate and protect peaceful assemblies, including through negotiation and mediation. Wherever possible, law enforcement authorities should not resort to force during peaceful assemblies and ensure that, where force is absolutely necessary, no one is subject to excessive or indiscriminate use of force (A/HRC/RES/19/35, para. 6)" (A/HRC/20/27, para. 89).

Law enforcement authorities must prioritise de-escalation and the use of non-violent means. Prior warning must be given before any resort to force, unless doing so would be manifestly ineffective. Only the minimum force necessary for a legitimate purpose such dispersing a violent assembly, preventing a specific crime, or effecting a lawful arrest, may be used. Officers must also receive specific training in human rights-compliant policing. The reported use of chemical agents through water cannons, resulting in long-term and persistent injuries, raises serious concerns regarding compliance with these standards. Such mixing of undisclosed and unregulated chemical weapons in water cannons would be considered an experimental weapon in violation of article 7 of the ICCPR, which explicitly provides that "no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation." Given their inherently indiscriminate effects, water cannons should be used only as a measure of last resort and following verbal warnings allowing bystanders to leave the area (CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 78-80 and 87; see also A/78/324).

States are under an obligation to ensure accountability for law enforcement conduct. Allegations of excessive or unlawful use of force must be investigated promptly, effectively, impartially and transparently. Each use of force should be

properly documented and reviewed in order to assess its necessity, proportionality, effectiveness and consequences, in accordance with international law (CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 89-91; see also A/72/178).

In all instances where sanctions are imposed in connection with peaceful assemblies, they must be non-discriminatory, proportionate and based on sufficiently precise legal provisions. Individuals must have access to timely and effective remedies before competent courts or tribunals, including in cases involving fines or detention. Detention in the context of assemblies must remain exceptional, strictly necessary and aimed at preventing imminent violence. Mass or indiscriminate arrests are presumptively arbitrary and incompatible with article 9 of the ICCPR (CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 67, 69 and 82).

It is further essential under article 21 that, at all stages of an assembly, there be independent and transparent oversight of relevant authorities, as well as access to effective and timely remedies, including judicial remedies (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 29).

We wish to recall that journalist and media play an essential role in reporting on and monitoring assemblies. Their work contributes to transparency, accountability and the protection of human rights. They are specifically protected under articles 19 and 21 of the ICCPR and must not face reprisals for carrying out their professional functions in the context of assemblies. Even where an assembly is declared unlawful or dispersed, journalists retain the right to monitor and report on events (CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 30). Therefore, the reported arrests and sanctions imposed on journalists and media outlets therefore raise serious concerns under the Covenant.

Concerning the use of surveillance technologies, while such tools may pursue legitimate aims related to public safety, their deployment must not result in violations of the right to privacy or produce a chilling effect on participation in peaceful assemblies (CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 94). The right to privacy under article 17 of the ICCPR applies equally in public spaces and in digital contexts. Accordingly, technologies used to identify individuals participating in assemblies, including facial recognition systems and body-worn cameras, must be grounded in a clear and accessible legal framework, and their use must comply with the principles of necessity and proportionality, subject to independent and effective oversight, in order to ensure compatibility with the Covenant. Data collected in the context of assemblies must be strictly limited to legitimate purposes and must not be used in a manner that deters, penalises or otherwise discourages the exercise of protected rights (CCPR/C/GC/37, paras. 61-62).

We furthermore wish to recall to your Excellency's Government that the ability of political parties to act and "access and use financial resources is protected under the right to freedom of association, enabling their adequate and discrimination-free competition, and the exercise of their right to be elected. Rules governing the access to funding and resources of political parties must be non-discriminatory and transparent, and their implementation should not be arbitrary or jeopardize party independence and the ability to genuinely compete in elections" (A/HRC/59/44). Elections cannot be deemed free and fair unless the rights to freedom of assembly and association are fully guaranteed.

In this sense, we wish to recall that the former Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association in a report called upon States to "ensure that associations – registered and unregistered – can fully enjoy their right to seek, receive and use funding and other resources from natural and legal persons, whether domestic, foreign or international, without prior authorization or other undue impediments – including from individuals, associations, foundations and other civil society organizations, foreign Governments and aid agencies, the private sector, the United Nations and other entities" (A/HRC/50/23, para. 64(a)).

The Special Rapporteur also called upon States to "repeal laws and regulatory measures imposing restrictions contrary to international human rights standards, including measures:

(i) Imposing blanket prohibitions on accessing foreign funds.

(ii) Imposing prior authorization, registration, or licensing requirements for fundraising activities, domestic or foreign.

(iii) Requiring additional burdensome and overly intrusive reporting or public disclosure obligations from civil society organizations seeking to access or use foreign funds.

(iv) Imposing caps or additional tax on the income from foreign funding.

(v) Stigmatizing or delegitimizing the work of foreign-funded and other groups of civil society organizations, including compelling recipients of foreign funding to adopt negative labels such as that of "foreign agents", with the aim of suppressing the legitimate activities, such as human rights and democracy promotion, of those associations" (A/HRC/50/23, para. 64(d)).

The former Special Rapporteur has also held that States must ensure that any restriction on civil society organizations' right to access funding and resources complies with international human rights requirements of legality, legitimate aim, necessity and proportionality in a democratic society, as set out in article 22(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Laws that restrict foreign funding, including "foreign agent laws", generally fail to establish with sufficient degree of foreseeability what funding and what sources of funding would qualify as "foreign funding" for the purposes of registration as a "foreign agent" and allow for and overbroad and unpredictable interpretation of the law in practice. Restrictions to foreign funding based on the protection of State sovereignty, which is not listed as a legitimate ground for restrictions under the Covenant, generally fail to meet this requirement. (A/HRC/53/38/Add.4 paras. 22, 24 and 26).

We also wish to refer your Excellency's Government to the fundamental principles set forth in the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, also known as the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. In particular, articles 1 and 2 of the Declaration state that everyone has the right to promote and to strive for the protection and realization of human rights

and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels and that each State has a prime responsibility and duty to protect, promote and implement all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We also wish to refer to Human Rights Council resolution 22/6, which reiterates that domestic law should create a safe and enabling environment for the work of human rights defenders (PPs 10-13).

Finally, during the 3rd UPR cycle (November 2020), the Government of Georgia supported a number of recommendations relating to civil society and human rights defenders, including to 'increase the efforts of political leaders to publicly acknowledge and protect the important role of human rights defenders and independent human rights institutions in the democratization process'; to 'further develop measures to ensure a safe environment for human rights defenders, including protection measures, as part of the national human rights action plan'; to 'continue to allow and safely facilitate peaceful protests without discrimination'; and to 'ensure prompt and impartial investigations into all incidents of excessive use of force by law enforcement authorities against protesters and journalists'; and to 'strengthen the representation of civil society in the decision-making processes of the country', among others.