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Georgia: Sentencing of protestors reveals abuse of justice system to silence dissent

Reacting to the sentencing of twenty protestors in Georgia, yesterday and today, to prison terms for participating in anti-government rallies, including today's conviction of opposition activist Saba Skhvitaridze and actor Andro Chichinadze, Denis Krivosheev, Amnesty International's Deputy Director for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, said:

"The trials of Andro Chichinadze, Saba Skhvitaridze and the others show that the Georgian government is instrumentalizing criminal justice to punish protestors and silence dissent. Protestors in Georgia have suffered human rights violations through torture and other ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and unfair trials." ¹

"Their cases also reflect the systematic denial of justice to the hundreds of protestors who have reported being tortured or otherwise ill-treated in detention. Saba Skhvitaridze, sentenced to two years in prison in violation of his right to a fair trial, has also been denied effective investigation into his allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, including prolonged solitary confinement.

"The Georgian authorities must quash these unfair convictions and release or give fair retrials, including fair bail hearings, to Saba Skhvitaridze, Andro Chichinadze and the others. All those detained solely for the exercise of their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and expression must be immediately released."

Background

On 2 and 3 September, in two separate proceedings, a court in Tbilisi sentenced eight and 11 individuals including Andro Chichinadze to prison

terms for alleged public order disturbance. Saba Skhvitardze was also sentenced on 3 September for causing minor bodily harm to an officer.

An active participant of ongoing anti-government protests, Saba Skhvitardze was initially arrested on 5 December 2024 without a warrant. He reported being tortured in custody by masked officers to extract a confession. Despite medical evidence confirming his injuries, no effective investigation into his alleged torture was ever carried out.

Andro Chichinadze was arrested at his home in Tbilisi on 5 December 2024 following his participation in pro-European protests. He was accused of throwing “an object” (possibly a stick) toward police officers. Initially, he was charged with participating in “group violence” under Article 225 of the Criminal Code together with 10 other defendants; their charges were later re-qualified as disruption of public order (Article 226). All were given two years of prison. A day before, eight individuals were also convicted of similar public disturbance charges and sentenced to prison terms of between two and two-and-a-half years each.

The trials have been marred with fair trial violations, including torture-tainted confessions, violations of the presumption of innocence, the imposition of state-appointed lawyers and denying the defence sufficient time to prepare. Defendants were denied legal safeguards, including the application of youth justice procedures for defendants aged under 21.

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