



Joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Georgia by PEN Georgia, PEN International and PEN America

For consideration at the 51st Session of the Working Group in January 2026

15 July 2025

I. Executive summary

1. PEN Georgia, PEN International and PEN America welcome the opportunity to contribute to the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Georgia. This submission evaluates the implementation of recommendations made in the previous UPR and assesses the Georgian authorities' compliance with international human rights obligations with respect to freedom of expression, particularly concerning:
 - Legislative restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly
 - Safety of writers, journalists and artists
 - The capture of cultural institutions
2. During its third UPR in 2021, Georgia accepted seven recommendations aimed at guaranteeing the right to freedom of expression.¹ It accepted three recommendations² and noted one recommendation³ to uphold the right to

¹ 148.120 (Uzbekistan); 148.121 (Australia); 148.123 (Czechia); 148.124 (Ecuador); 148.125 (France); 148.126 (Iceland); 148.127 (Libya). See Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review Georgia, A/HRC/47/15, Human Rights Council, 1 April 2021, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ge-index>

² 148.65 (Netherlands); 148.126 (Iceland); 148.128 (Australia). Ibid.

³ 149.10 (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela). Ibid.

peaceful assembly. It further accepted three recommendations on the protection of journalists⁴ and two recommendations pertaining to cultural rights.⁵ However, new laws adopted in the period under review severely curtail the rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly in Georgia. The safety of writers, journalists and artists remained a grave concern, with inefficient investigations into mounting cases of threats and attacks, including by law enforcement officials. Government intimidation, harassment, and interference in the work of critical voices in the cultural sphere increased significantly.

3. Several opposition politicians have been detained and sentenced to jail for refusing to recognize the parliament's legitimacy and appear before the 'Tsulukiani Commission', a parliamentary investigative committee set up in February 2025 to investigate alleged abuses by former government officials from the opposition United National Movement (UNM) party, which ran Georgia from 2003 to 2012. Refusing to comply with a parliamentary commission can be punished by up to one year in prison or a fine under Georgian law. Amnesty International has called the commission 'a tool of political repression, not of parliamentary scrutiny, used to lock away political opponents ahead of local elections.'⁶

II. Legislative restrictions on freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly

4. Georgia's Constitution guarantees the rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly. Georgia is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and therefore has obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the rights set out in these treaties. Yet new laws adopted in the period under review have led to an unprecedented crackdown on fundamental rights in Georgia, with the authorities weaponizing the criminal justice system against dissenting views as well as independent media.
5. On 3 April 2024, Georgia's ruling party, Georgian Dream, announced it would reintroduce a repressive 'foreign agents' law adopted by Georgia's parliament in its first hearing in March 2023, and subsequently withdrawn following mass

⁴ 148.102 (Austria); 148.122 (Belgium); 148.152 (United States of America). Ibid.

⁵ 148.12 (Honduras) (Luxembourg); 148.13 (El Salvador). Ibid.

⁶ Amnesty International, Georgia: Crackdown on government critics deepens as another opposition politician is jailed, 27 June 2025, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/06/georgia-crackdown-on-government-critics-deepens-as-another-opposition-politician-is-jailed/>

protests in Tbilisi.⁷ The move generated a national and international outcry, with many pointing out similarities with the Russian Federation's draconian legislation, which has been systematically used as a tool by the Russian authorities to muzzle civil society. On 14 May 2024, Georgia's parliament adopted the repressive Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence despite widespread objections and mass protests. Organisations receiving more than 20% of annual funding from sources outside Georgia must register as 'organisations pursuing the interests of a foreign power' and face draconian reporting requirements. Failure to register is punishable by fines of up to 25,000 GEL (approximately 8,700 EUR). The law further authorises Georgia's Ministry of Justice to conduct 'thorough investigations' to ensure the organisations comply. Civil society organisations in Georgia – including PEN Georgia – repeatedly denounced the devastating impact of the 'foreign agents' law on their work, with independent organisations and media bound to be smeared and stigmatized, and critical voices stifled.⁸ Most NGOs refused to register as 'foreign agents', prompting the authorities to enact increasingly draconian legislation in 2025 (see paragraph 9 below).

6. On 17 September 2024, Georgia's Parliament adopted a bill on Protecting Family Values and Minors, despite widespread criticism. Already in June 2024, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe had urged the authorities not to proceed, warning that the bill could deepen the already hostile and stigmatizing atmosphere against LGBTI people in Georgia.⁹ The bill amended 18 existing laws, including the Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression, and contains numerous homophobic and transphobic measures. Notably, the new amendments prohibit broadcasters from disseminating content that 'promotes identification with a gender other than one's biological sex or relationships between individuals of the same biological sex based on sexual orientation', with penalties for individuals of 1,000 GEL (approximately 350 EUR) and for legal entities of 3,000 GEL (approximately 1,050 EUR). The amendments ban public gatherings or demonstrations that promote 'LGBT propaganda' and provide a legal basis for the authorities to censor films and books. The amendments further ban same-sex marriage, adoption by same-sex couples, and ban

⁷ Amnesty International, Georgia: Repressive 'foreign agents' bill withdrawn after protesters brutally dispersed, 9 March 2023, available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/georgia-repressive-foreign-agents-bill-withdrawn-after-protesters-brutally-dispersed/>

⁸ PEN International and PEN Georgia, Georgia: Drop repressive 'foreign agents' law, 17 April 2024, available at <https://www.pen-international.org/news/georgia-drop-repressive-foreign-agents-law> ; PEN International, Georgia: Repressive 'foreign agents' law approved amidst violent crackdown on protestors, 15 May 2024, available at: <https://www.pen-international.org/news/georgia-repressive-foreign-agents-law-approved-amidst-violent-crackdown>

⁹ European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), Opinion on the draft Constitutional Law on Protecting Family Values and Minors, 25 June 2025, available at: [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2024\)021-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2024)021-e)

gender-affirming medical care for trans people.¹⁰ On 18 September 2024, the day after Parliament passed the bill, Kesaria Abramidze, one of Georgia's most well-known transgender women, was killed in her home in Tbilisi. LGBTI rights campaigners raised concerns that the law, and the government rhetoric that preceded it, fuelled homophobic and transphobic crime.¹¹ Legislative amendments put forward by Parliament on 19 February 2025, and which entered into force on 2 April 2025, removed the words 'gender' and 'gender identity' from all existing laws in Georgia and renamed the 'Gender Equality Law' as the 'Law on the Equality of Women and Men'.¹²

7. Draconian amendment to the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations, the Code of Administrative Offences and Criminal Code of Georgia, which came into force on 30 December 2024, imposed further arbitrary restrictions on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Notably, the amendments introduced hefty fines for putting up protest slogans and posters, while law enforcement officials were granted power to detain individuals 'preventively' for 48 hours on suspicion of planning to violate the rules governing public assembly.¹³
8. Amendments to the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations, the Code of Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code, adopted through an accelerated procedure on 6 February 2025 and promulgated by the Parliament-elected President that same day, drastically increased fines for administrative offenses, extended administrative detention from 15 to 60 days, and introduced a new offence of insulting a public official, punishable by a hefty fine or up to 60 days in detention.¹⁴ Some legislative provisions, including the requirement of immediate notification for spontaneous assemblies, general prohibition of holding assemblies inside closed spaces or buildings without the owner's prior written

¹⁰ PEN International and PEN Georgia, Georgia: Relentless onslaught on fundamental rights condemned, 3 October 2024, available at: <https://www.pen-international.org/news/georgia-relentless-onslaught-on-fundamental-rights-condemned>

¹¹ Civil Georgia, Man Sentenced to Life for Brutal Murder of Transgender Model Kesaria Abramidze, 16 April 2025, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/676226>

¹² Social Justice Centre, The Removal of the Concepts and Principles of Gender and Gender Equality from Legislation Will Worsen the Situation of Women, 3 March 2025, available at: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/en/products/kanonmdeblobidan-genderisa-da-genderuli-tanastsorobis-terminebisa-da-printsipebis-gakroba-kalta-mdgomareobas-gaauaresebs> ; Law on the Equality of Women and Men, as amended on 2 April 2025, available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/91624?publication=11>

¹³ European Parliament resolution of 13 February 2025 on the further deterioration of the political situation in Georgia (2025/2522(RSP)), available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2025-0019_EN.html

¹⁴ OSCE, Urgent opinion on the amendments to the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations, the Code of Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code of Georgia (as adopted on 6 February 2025), 6 March 2025, available at: www.osce.org/files/f/documents/d/2/587466.pdf

agreement, the prohibition to erect temporary structures or blanket prohibition to cover one's face with masks or by other means, unduly impact the exercise of the right to peaceful assembly.

9. The Foreign Agents Registration Act, which came into force on 31 May 2025 with a view to replacing the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, introduced criminal penalties for individuals or entities that refuse to register as 'foreign agents,' in a dramatic bid to stifle independent civil society and media. The bill requires those considered 'agents of a foreign principal' to register within 10 days in a special registry administered by the Anti-Corruption Bureau. It further requires them to submit detailed annual financial declarations and two copies of any public statement to the authorities. Registered individuals and entities must also mark their public statements as coming from a 'foreign agent.' Failure to do so is punishable by fines of up to 10,000 GEL (approximately 3,100 EUR) and/or to a maximum five-year prison sentence. Failure to file financial reports or violating labelling requirements would trigger a 5,000 GEL (approximately 1,600 EUR) criminal fine or deprivation of liberty for up to six months.¹⁵
10. The Foreign Agents Registration Act, as well as amendments to the Law of Broadcasting (adopted by Parliament on 1 April 2025¹⁶) and to the Law on Grants (adopted by Parliament on 16 April 2025¹⁷) severely impact on media freedom in Georgia. NGOs and media organisations are now required to obtain 'the consent of the government or an authorised person/body designated by the government' before receiving any foreign grants. Even the provision of free training to journalists by international organisations is expected to be ruled a breach of the law. Meanwhile, the amendments grant the National Communications Commission to intervene in the broadcaster's editorial policy and employ punitive measures, including license revocation. National and international organisations warned that the severely repressive legislation would lead to the dismantling of all independent media in Georgia.¹⁸

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, Georgia: Drop Repressive 'Foreign Agents' Bill, 26 March 2025, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/03/26/georgia-drop-repressive-foreign-agents-bill>

¹⁶ CSO Meter, Georgia: GD's proposed changes pose a major threat to civil society and media, 10 March 2025, available at: <https://csometer.info/updates/georgia-gds-proposed-changes-pose-major-threat-civil-society-and-media>

¹⁷ JAMNews, What does Georgia's new grant law entail? 1 May 2025, available at: <https://jam-news.net/what-new-georgian-law-on-grants-entails/>; ICNL, Georgia: Amendments to the Law on Grants, 11 April 2025, available at: https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/ICNL_Brief_on_Georgia_Draft_Amendments_to_the_Law_on_Grants_SF.pdf

¹⁸ PEN International and PEN Georgia, Georgia: Independent media face new wave of repression as new laws come into effect, 17 June 2025, available at: <https://www.pen-international.org/news/georgia-independent-media-face-new-wave-of-repression-as-new-laws-come-into-effect>

11. Amendments to the Organic Law on Common Courts, which were rushed through parliament and came into force on 30 June 2025, prohibit photo, video, and audio recording or broadcasting in courthouses, courtrooms, and surrounding areas – except when authorised and conducted by the court. The Media Advocacy Coalition, a group of civil society organisations, warned that the amendments would ‘severely restrict media work and effectively eliminate public oversight of the judiciary.’

III. Safety of writers, journalists and artists

12. Under international human rights law, states have an obligation to facilitate peaceful assemblies. Any use of force must comply with fundamental principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, precaution and non-discrimination, and those using force must be accountable for each use of force.
13. During its third UPR in 2021, Georgia supported two recommendations on ensuring prompt and impartial investigations into all incidents of excessive use of force by law enforcement authorities against protesters and journalists. Yet the period under review witnessed a brutal crackdown with entrenched impunity. Law enforcement officials stood accused of acts of torture and other ill-treatment against protesters and journalists seeking to report on the protests.
14. Mass protests against the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence in April and May 2024 were met with unlawful use of force by police against peaceful protesters, resulting in injuries amongst the protestors and dozens of unjustified arrests, as well as violent attacks by unknown individuals on prominent government critics in what appeared to be a coordinated campaign. Rati Amaglobeli, a poet and co-founder of PEN Georgia, and Lasha Bugadze, a writer and playwright, were amongst the leading figures of the peaceful protest movement who reported being threatened and harassed. ‘Enemy of the nation’ graffiti were notably painted outside their residences. The Georgian Special Investigation Service said it had opened a case into claims of use of excessive force by police.¹⁹
15. On 28 November 2024, Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze announced that Georgia would pause its accession to the European Union until 2028, in response to a European Parliament resolution denouncing Georgia’s parliamentary elections on 26 October as having ‘numerous and serious electoral violations’, which ‘[could not] be considered as free and fair’. The resolution notably called for the elections to be re-run within a year under international supervision. Thousands of pro-EU protesters subsequently took to the streets in Tbilisi, with protests spreading across the country. According to media reports and human rights groups, protests were violently dispersed by law enforcement officials, who fired water cannons

¹⁹ PEN International and PEN Georgia, Georgia: Repressive ‘foreign agents’ law approved amidst violent crackdown on protestors, 15 May 2024, available at: <https://www.pen-international.org/news/georgia-drop-repressive-foreign-agents-law>

and tear gas at protesters. Men wearing balaclavas were seen running into the crowds and beating individuals. Journalists reported being deliberately targeted by security forces, with several brutally attacked and requiring hospitalisation. The Ombudsperson of Georgia called for an end to 'revenge and intimidation' by law enforcement officials, denouncing acts of torture and other ill-treatment.²⁰ Unlawful use of force by police against journalists and protesters continued unabated and with impunity at the time of writing.

16. PEN Georgia documented the brutal beating of Zviad Ratiani, a poet and translator, by police on 29 November 2024 in Tbilisi. Ratiani – who suffered serious injuries, including fractures to his nose and back – was sentenced to eight days of administrative detention by the Tbilisi City Court on 2 December 2024 on alleged charges of petty hooliganism and disobeying lawful police orders (Articles 166 and 172 of the Administrative Offences Code of Georgia). Also on 2 December 2024, Georgia's Interior Ministry announced that 224 protesters were being detained on administrative charges and three were arrested on criminal charges. Amongst those detained was Tornike Chelidze, a poet and teacher, and Data Kharaishvili, were arrested and severely beaten by police. Chelidze was sentenced to a seven days' administrative detention, also on alleged charges of petty hooliganism and disobeying lawful police orders.²¹ Kharaishvili was hospitalized with multiple injuries.
17. The Georgian authorities have increasingly used hooliganism and assault charges to crack down on peaceful protesters, with human rights groups documenting how legal proceedings have flouted fair trial standards. Zviad Ratiani was detained by police on 23 June 2025 after he slapped a police officer while taking part in a protest outside parliament in Tbilisi. Ratiani has been charged under Article 353(1) of the Georgian Criminal Code (Assault on a police officer, a special penitentiary service employee, or other representative of the government or public institution), which carries between four and seven years in prison. On 25 June 2025, the Tbilisi City Court placed Ratiani in pre-trial detention. His next hearing has been set for 14 August. PEN International and PEN Georgia reviewed video footage of the incident, which showed the slap posed no harm to the police officer involved – who sustained no injuries. Over 200 members of the literary community have signed a statement by PEN Georgia and the Georgian Book Association in solidarity with Ratiani.²²

²⁰ PEN International and PEN Georgia, Georgia: End violent crackdown on journalists and peaceful protesters, 4 December 2024, available at: <https://www.pen-international.org/news/georgia-end-violent-crackdown-on-journalists-and-peaceful-protesters>

²¹ Ibid.

²² PEN International and PEN Georgia, Georgia: Release renowned poet and translator Zviad Ratiani, 1 July 2025, available at: <https://www.pen-international.org/news/georgia-release-renowned-poet-and-translator-zviad-ratianinb-sp>

18. According to Mapping Media Freedom, at least 13 journalists have been detained since 28 November 2024 on various charges. Since that date, 246 journalists have been subjected to attacks including physical harassment, smear campaigns, obstruction of work, legal harassment, and fines.²³ At the time of writing, prominent Georgian journalist Mzia Amaglobeli remained unjustly held in pre-trial detention since her arrest in January 2025. She faced up to seven years in prison on grossly disproportionate charges of assaulting a police officer if convicted.²⁴ Suffering from keratoconus, a degenerative eye condition, she was said to be losing her eyesight in detention.²⁵
19. On 17 March 2025, the Georgian authorities froze the accounts of Nanuka's Fund, Prosperity Georgia, and Human Rights House Tbilisi, which notably provided financial assistance to individuals fined for participating in protests or dismissed from their jobs as a result of their activism. The assets of Each Other 24/7 and Shame Movement were also frozen. Georgia's Prosecutor's Office subsequently issued a statement claiming the five NGOs had financed illegal activities during protests, encouraged civil unrest and other unlawful activities. The move was widely condemned as an attempt to muzzle independent civil society.²⁶
20. Peaceful protesters and journalists have been repeatedly fined on alleged charges of blocking roads during rallies. The fine (5,000 GEL – approximately 1500 EUR) is more than twice the average monthly income in Georgia. Some activists have been fined multiple times. According to the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA), from 28 November 2024 to 18 March 2025, fines imposed on protesters accused by the authorities of blocking roads reached 2 million GEL (approximately 615,000 EUR). GYLA called the fines 'draconian', arguing that the authorities were using the 'roadblock' as an excuse to crack

²³ PEN International (joint statement), Georgia: Independent media face new wave of repression as new laws come into effect, 17 June 2025, available at: <https://www.pen-international.org/news/georgia-independent-media-face-new-wave-of-repression-as-new-laws-come-into-effect>

²⁴ PEN International and PEN Georgia, Georgia: Prominent journalist Mzia Amaglobeli on hunger strike as she faces prison term, 24 January 2025, available at: <https://www.pen-international.org/news/georgia-prominent-journalist-mzia-amaglobeli-on-hunger-strike-as-she-faces-prison-term>

²⁵ PEN Georgia's Statement on the Deterioration of Mzia Amaglobeli's Health Condition, 25 June 2025, available at: <https://pengeorgia.ge/en/2025/06/25/pen-georgias-statement-on-the-deterioration-of-mzia-amaglobeli-is-health-condition/>

²⁶ Civil Georgia, Funds Supporting Protesters Frozen, 17 March 2025, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/669696> ; Statement by the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia, 17 March 2025, available at: <https://pog.gov.ge/news/saqartvelos-prokuraturis-gantskhadeba-4736>

down on peaceful protesters.²⁷ Paata Burchuladze, a world-renowned opera singer and prominent civil activist, has been fined 39 times (5,000 GEL each). In June 2025, Burchuladze announced that his lifelong monetary stipend resulting from the prestigious Rustaveli National Prize (awarded to him in 1991) had been suspended as a result of his activism.²⁸

21. Actors Andro Chichinadze (New Theatre) and Vepkhia Kasradze (Tshinvali Professional State Drama Theatre) who had been taking part in peaceful protests, have been detained since 4 December 2024 on alleged charges of 'organising, leading, participating in, and publicly calling for violent actions'. No evidence has been presented to date. Their trial has been postponed several times.²⁹
22. On 3 August 2024, the Georgian authorities arrested Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Sadygov and subsequently placed him in a deportation centre in Tbilisi. National and international organisations warned the authorities that Sadygov would be at real risk of human rights violations if returned to Azerbaijan, and that his extradition would violate Georgia's obligations under international law. Sadygov was released on bail on 16 April 2025, after the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued a ruling prohibiting Georgia from extraditing Sadygov until a final judgment is issued. Sadygov ended his 161-day hunger strike shortly after hearing the ECtHR's decision.³⁰

IV. The capture of cultural institutions

23. During its third UPR in 2021, Georgia supported two recommendations on ratifying the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – which it had yet to do at the time of writing. The Georgian Labour Code prohibits discrimination, including harassment and dismissal due to political or other opinions. Yet, during the period under review, the Georgian authorities demonstrated a concerning pattern of targeting individuals in the cultural sphere who expressed views at odds with the government's line, including artists, writers, and other cultural experts. The Ministry of Culture has used staffing, budgetary, and organisational changes to wield control across a

²⁷ Civil Georgia, GYLA: Fines Imposed on Protesters – Severe Violation of Freedom of Assembly, 19 March 2025, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/670184>

²⁸ Front News Georgia, Georgian operatic bass Burchuladze accuses Ivanishvili of freezing Rustaveli prize in political retaliation, 27 June 2025, available at: <https://frontnews.ge/en/news/paata-burchuladze-chamomartves-rustavelis-premia-uphro-stdorad-dami-qadagha-bidzina-ivanishvili>

²⁹ QvemoQartli.ge, Andro Chichinadze's case, 9 February 2025, available at: <https://qvemoqartli.ge/language/en/andro-chichinadzes-case/>

³⁰ PEN Georgia, Immediately release Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Sadigov, 4 February 2025, available at: <https://pengeorgia.ge/2025/02/04/saswrafod-gaatavisuflet-sindisis-patimari-azerbajjaneli-jurnalisti-afgan-sadigovi/>; Civil Georgia, Azerbaijani Journalist Afgan Sadygov Released on Bail, 17 April 2025, available at: <https://civil.ge/archives/676473>

wide range of cultural sectors: literature, visual art, museums, cinema, and theatre.³¹

24. Following the appointment of Tea Tsulukiani in March 2021 to the position of Minister of Culture, Sport, and Youth Affairs, her office made policy changes that have undermined the independence of national cultural institutions. The Ministry of Culture issued a series of orders in 2021 that called for the reorganisation of entities within its jurisdiction. The order included the creation, in April 2021, of a new five-person Directorate of the National Museum of Georgia empowered to make decisions on all matters, including those related to research and scientific processes, for the 14 museums in its network. The directorate currently consists of officials drawn mostly from the Ministry of Justice, penitentiary system, and sports institutions, many of whom appear to lack qualifications and experience in the management and oversight of museums and cultural institutions. The creation of the directorate effectively siphoned authority away from individual museum and institute managers and centralized decision-making with the Ministry of Culture.³²
25. The annual Litera contest, Georgia's most consequential literary awards hosted by the state-run Writers' House of Georgia, was cancelled after the ministry revised policies on government-supported competitions. In June 2021, the Ministry of Culture revised its policies to require that a representative of the ministry participate on the jury of any government-supported competition, and that the ministry approve the composition of the jury.³³ PEN Georgia expressed disapproval of the policy changes, describing it as echoing Soviet-era 'appointments of representatives of the Soviet state to contest juries, mandated to reject submissions incompatible with party ethos.' PEN Georgia ultimately held an alternative Litera award the following year, supported by a crowdfunding campaign and assistance from local and international civil society donors. Litera was held under the PEN Georgia umbrella in 2024, with the support of PEN America, and will be held under the PEN Georgia umbrella again in 2025.
26. In February 2022, a Ministry of Culture decree stipulated that its directorate would take control over the application process for, and implementation of, grants awarded for projects in its museums.³⁴ This decree resulted in the Ministry blocking 13 grants which were previously approved.

³¹ PEN America, Taming culture in Georgia, 2 November 2023, available at: <https://pen.org/report/taming-culture-in-georgia/>

³² Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, Fight At The Museum: The Georgian Government Takes On The Arts, 9 September 2022, available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-museum-government-cultural-attack/32026232.html>

³³ Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, Literary Competition 'Litera' Will Not Be Held This Year, 2 August 2021, available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/31389554.html>

³⁴ Available at: https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/5373762?publication=0&fbclid=IwAR35C9uzOyhMV_i_n-F3tQ8Bf1qOm8d7_T4KGsliH1rKVdV1HfwskBZbDeAE

27. Staff and leaders of national cultural institutions have been dismissed from their positions for political beliefs and free expression. In August 2023, Natasha Lomouri was dismissed as director of the Writers' House of Georgia. The Ministry of Culture chose to end its contract with Lomouri three months before it was set to expire. Lomouri was terminated via phone, given five days of notice before her termination was effective. She had served as director of the state-run Writers' House since 2011. On 10 August, the Ministry of Culture announced on Facebook the appointment of Ketevan Dumbadze as its new director. Dumbadze is a member of parliament for the Georgian Dream party and has supported her party's efforts to target 'foreign influence' over funding for Georgian civil society initiatives. After Lomouri's dismissal as director, Writers' House issued a statement protesting the appointment, which had not been supported by its staff, emphasizing that 'the direct appointment of a new director in the organisation jeopardises the free and uncensored management' of Writers' House projects. Over 80 Georgian writers, translators, publishers and people employed in the literary field issued a joint statement condemning the move.³⁵ Natasha Lomouri now serves as PEN Georgia's executive director. Reports of reprisals faced by cultural workers who dared speak out against the government continued at the time of writing.³⁶ In April 2025, The Ministry of Culture dismissed director David Doiashvili from his position as the head of the Vaso Abashidze Music and Drama Theatre. The decision came as the theatre and its troupe played a prominent role in ongoing protests.³⁷
28. In 2021, the Ministry of Culture initiated 'reorganisations' in multiple museums across Georgia's National Museum System. These initiatives included asking staff about their political affiliations and if they had publicly criticized the Georgian government or the Ministry of Culture on social media. The reorganisation process led to the firing of over 100 staff across different museums, some of which have been deemed unjust dismissals by Georgian courts.³⁸
29. During the period under review, the Georgian authorities infringed on free expression and cultural rights of individual artists in ways that repress their artistic work. Artist Sandro Sulaberidze was criminally investigated by the Ministry of

³⁵ Georgia Today, 11 August 2023, Writers, translators & publishers protest against appointment of GD MP as head of Writers' House, available at: <https://georgiatoday.ge/writers-translators-publishers-protest-against-appointment-of-gd-mp-as-head-of-writers-house/>

³⁶ PEN International and PEN Georgia, Georgia: Prominent journalist Mzia Amaglobeli on hunger strike as she faces prison term, 24 January 2025, available at: <https://www.pen-international.org/news/georgia-prominent-journalist-mzia-amaglobeli-on-hunger-strike-as-she-faces-prison-term>

³⁷ Georgia Today, Ministry of Culture dismisses theater director Davit Doiashvili, 17 April 2025, available at: <https://georgiatoday.ge/ministry-of-culture-dismisses-the-rebellious-theater-director-davit-doiashvili/>

³⁸ PEN America, Taming culture in Georgia, 2 November 2023, available at: <https://pen.org/report/taming-culture-in-georgia/>

Internal Affairs in February 2023 after he performed a protest at Georgia's National Gallery. On the opening night of an exhibition at the museum, on 4 February 2023, Sulaberidze removed his own self-portrait from the gallery wall and painted in its place the phrase 'Art is alive and independent!' In response, 20 police cars were mobilized to the gallery. The Ministry of Internal Affairs launched an investigation against Sulaberidze, alleging that his actions amounted to 'theft that caused significant damage.' Other artists who participated in the exhibition signed a statement in support of Sulaberidze, criticizing the government's 'antagonism and repression.' His supporters also organized a demonstration on 12 February 2023 in front of the gallery. PEN Georgia issued a statement condemning the criminal investigation of Sulaberidze. GYLA expressed sharp concern about the impact of the case against Sulaberidze on free expression for all Georgians, stating that the investigation appeared designed to put pressure on artists and warn 'other persons to refrain from expressing their positions on certain issues.'³⁹ On 14 February 2023, the authorities closed the investigation without bringing any charges against Sulaberidze.

V. Recommendations

30. PEN Georgia, PEN International and PEN America call on the authorities of Georgia to bring laws, policies, and practices pertaining to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly fully in line with their international obligations and commitments.
31. Specifically, PEN Georgia, PEN International and PEN America urge the authorities of Georgia to:
 - Repeal the Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence, the Foreign Agents Registration Act, and the Law on Protecting Family Values and Minors;
 - Repeal repressive amendments to the Organic Law of Common Courts, the Law on Grants and the Law of Broadcasting;
 - Repeal repressive amendments to the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations, the Code of Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code, which came into force on 30 December 2024 and 6 February 2025.
32. Release all writers and journalists detained for peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.
33. Provide safe and enabling environment for all journalists and ensure they can report the protests without obstruction.
34. Publicly, unequivocally, and systematically condemn all acts of violence and targeted attacks against writers and journalists.

³⁹ GYLA's statement regarding the case against Sandro Sulaberidze and the protest of 12 February 2023, available at: <https://gyla.ge/en/post/saias-ganckhadeba-sandro-sulaberidzis-tsinaaghmdeg-aghdzrul-sagmesa-da-2023-tslis-12-tebervlis-protesttan-dakavshirebit#sthash.TMLWq1xB.dpbs>

35. Ensure impartial, prompt, thorough, independent, and effective investigations into all alleged attacks against writers and journalists and hold those responsible to account. Dedicate the resources necessary to investigate and prosecute attacks.
36. Commit publicly to ensuring that people with the appropriate expertise evaluate staff hires for cultural institutions in a lawful, fair, legitimate, and transparent manner.
37. Reinstate cultural workers to their previous positions if they have been dismissed unlawfully, as determined by court proceedings, unless such reinstatement is no longer legally possible. Ensure effective enforcement of judicial decisions regarding dismissed cultural workers and similar cases in a timely manner, including payment of compensation.