



Batumi Georgia

30 November 2009

As the Georgian special services continue to pressure the employees of our newspaper, Gazeti Batumelebi, we have been forced to appeal for support to you, the international community, because our security is no longer guaranteed.

On November 25, 2009, representatives of Georgian law enforcement bodies tried to blackmail and entice Tedo Jorbenadze, the head of the newspaper's investigative reporting team; this blackmail was probably intended to secretly interfere with the newspaper's editorial independence.

To blackmail Tedo Jorbenadze, the Georgian special services used methods similar to the Soviet KGB - because a stigma regarding sexual orientation prevails in Georgia, representatives showed Jorbenadze photos of undressed men and told him that he was one of them. They also told him that they also have video materials and that if he refuses to cooperate with them, they will send these materials to his parents and co-workers and upload them to the Internet.

They also told Jorbenadze that the special services of foreign countries, namely Russia and Turkey, were interested in Gazeti Batumelebi. As one of the newspaper's decision-makers, they told Jorbenadze he had to cooperate with them. After he declined the request, the policemen started to insult him and demanded that he not make the conversation public.

We have informed the Georgian public about this. In this case, as with previous incidents, the publishers of Gazeti Batumelebi will act in accordance with Georgian legislation and will request that the prosecutor's office investigate the issue. Unfortunately, we no longer believe that this issue be investigated lawfully.

This is not the first case where the journalists of Gazeti Batumelebi have been threatened; its reporters have received death threats in the past, and have been threatened by representatives of law enforcement bodies, among

others.

Despite this, we have never been under as much psychological pressure as in this case. To see the Georgian special services flagrantly break the law and show total disrespect to the dignity of a journalist and human being, one gets the strong impression they have returned to the past - to the era of the all-powerful KGB.

We fear that the actions taken against Tedo Jorbenadze and Gazeti Batumelebi will continue. We do not rule out that, even in the nearest future, Tedo Jorbenadze or other employees of Gazeti Batumelebi will be subject to violence and other types of blackmail at the hands of the special services.

Based in Batumi, Georgia, Gazeti Batumelebi has been published since 2001. The newspaper has received several international awards for its professionalism and ethical journalistic practices, including the 2009 Fritt Ord and ZEIT-Stiftung Free Press Awards (Norway and Germany) and the Signal for Europe award from Reporters Without Borders.

Gazeti Batumelebi and the independent media in Georgia in general have always greatly appreciated support from international media organizations and human rights organizations. We hope that you will support us once again, and that you will help us to defend the rights and freedoms that we have as human beings and professionals.

Sincerely,



Mzia Amaglobeli
Publisher, Newspaper Batumelebi