



# Persecution of Human Rights Defenders

## Through Arbitrary Investigative Actions



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## Contents

Introduction.....	1
Investigative Actions Conducted Against Human Rights Defenders .....	1
Investigative Measures Taken Against Charitable Foundations and Civil Society Organizations .....	2
Legal Analysis .....	3
Conclusion .....	4
Recommendations.....	4

## Introduction

The ruling party Georgian Dream began to widely use search and seizure investigative actions as one of the mechanisms for [persecuting](#) human rights defenders at the end of January 2025. However, the use of arbitrary investigative actions as a kind of strategy against protest movements dates back to 2024, before the parliamentary elections.

[On October 24, 2024](#) two days before the parliamentary elections - search and seizure investigative actions were conducted in the homes of two staff members of the American research organization The Atlantic Council, Sopho Gelava and Eto Buziashvili. On the same day, searches were conducted in the flats/offices of several other citizens. According to the Investigative Service of the Ministry of Finance, these search and seizure operations were linked to the so-called "[call center](#)" case.

[On December 4, 2024](#), the search and seizure investigative actions were carried out not only in the offices of political parties but also in the homes of civic activists - Ilia Glonti and Nancy Woland (the real name Kristine Botkoveili), as well as in the homes of active participants of pro-European protest rallies, some of whom remain in detention to this day on politically motivated grounds.

## Investigative Actions Conducted Against Human Rights Defenders

*(January 1 - May 1, 2025)*

In 2025, the Georgian Dream party resumed the practice of arbitrary investigative actions on January 31 with the search and seizure operations in the homes of civic activists [Nikoloz Latsabidze and Dato Futuridze](#). The Ministry of Internal Affairs launched an investigation against them on the grounds of allegedly inciting violent actions publicly and for writing slogans on several building facades in Tbilisi. As a result of the investigative actions, personal belongings, including clothing, were seized in both cases. During the investigative actions against Nikoloz Latsabidze, concerns were raised about the denied access to legal counsel and the restriction of his freedom of movement.

On February 2, 2025, a day before the planned protest at the *Tbilisi City Mall*, search and seizure investigative actions were conducted in the homes of [Ilia Glonti, the administrator of the Facebook group "Daitove", and Nancy Woland \(real name Kristina Botkoveili\)](#), the founder of the same group, as well as in the flats of civic [activists Isako Devidze, Nini Kekelidze, and Sandro Chitanava](#).

A lawyer did not attend the search in *Ilia Glonti's* house. Civic activist *Isako Devidze*, who was detained administratively on the same day, was not allowed to communicate with a lawyer. Furthermore, the search in *Nancy Woland's* flat was conducted in violation of international human rights standards - the police [demanded that the activist undressed completely](#), and neither she nor her mother were allowed to record

the investigative procedures. Nancy Woland's mother was [forcibly deprived of her mobile phone](#), after what the activist had to urgently call for emergency medical assistance.

As a result of the searches conducted in the homes of civil activists, personal belongings were seized, including the sources of their income: in case of [Nancy Woland](#), the computer on which all her drawings and projects - were stored, and in the case of [Isako Devidze](#) - 5 laptops and 2,000 GEL were withdrawn, which the family had taken as a loan for his mother's surgery.

The cycle of arbitrary search and seizure operations continued on February 24, 2025, with a search and seizure conducted in the home of sports commentator [Sandro Tsnobiladze](#).

On March 18, 2025, arbitrary search and seizure operations were also conducted in the home of [Levan Gatiashvili](#), one of the civil activists involved in the Guria rescue operations. On March 20-21, 2025, the police conducted active [personal searches of protest participants](#) on the streets. Additionally, on March 31, activist [Luka Kintsurashvili](#) was subjected to a personal search in the street and was taken to a police station without lawful grounds.

On April 24, 2025, the Investigative Service of the Ministry of Finance conducted search and seizure operations in the new and old offices of the [Trade Union "Labor"](#), in the home of the Union's founder, Giorgi Diasamidze, and at the Hualing, where the Trade Union assembly had taken place a few weeks prior to the search. The head of the Union linked these arbitrary search and seizure actions to their ongoing [support of pro-European protests and assistance](#) to the protesting miners in Chiatura.

### **Investigative Measures Taken Against Charitable Foundations and Civil Society Organizations**

[On April 29, 2025](#), in the morning hours, search and seizure investigative actions were conducted simultaneously in the homes of: the Executive Director of Human Rights Center, Aleko Tskitishvili; the founder of the "Nanuka's Foundation," Nanuka Zhorzholiani; civil activists Mariam Bajelidze and Mariam Geguchadze ("Shame Movement"); Lasha Arveladze, a representative of the "Prosperity Georgia"; and Guga Khelaia, the founder of the foundation "For Each Other 24/7."

The investigative actions were preceded by initiating the investigation by the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia on February 8, 2025, based on the complaint of the movement "United Neutral Georgia." The investigation was initiated into sabotage, attempted sabotage under aggravating circumstances, assistance to a foreign organization or an organization under foreign control in hostile activities, and mobilization of funds for activities directed against the constitutional order and foundations of national security of Georgia. On March 17, 2025, as part of this investigation, the bank accounts of several charitable foundations and civil society organizations were frozen, including *Human Rights House Tbilisi, the "Nanuka's Foundation," "Prosperity Georgia," the foundation "For Each Other 24/7", and the "Shame Movement."* These

organizations had been assisting participants of ongoing protests in paying administrative fines, when necessary.

- On April 29, 2025, the Executive Director of the Human Rights Center, [Aleko Tskitishvili](#), was first searched by the employees of the Prosecutor's Office in the street near his home — he was taken off a bus and had his mobile phone confiscated. Following this, an arbitrary investigative search was conducted in his flat. As a result, Aleko Tskitishvili's work laptop and various legal and other documents related to the activities of the [Human Rights Center](#) were seized.
- Investigative actions in the home of [Mariam Bajelidze](#), one of the founders of the "Shame Movement," were initiated by the police first through deception and then under threat of forced entry into the apartment. At the initial stage, Mariam Bajelidze was not informed of the legal basis for the search in her apartment. Furthermore, she was not allowed to fully record the search using her mobile phone, nor was her lawyer permitted to attend the process. It is also noteworthy that Mariam Bajelidze was seven months pregnant at the time of the search, which was carried out in the [presence of her minor child](#).
- During the investigative actions conducted in the flat of activist [Mariam Geguchadze](#), police officers did not allow either the activist herself or her lawyer to attend the search.
- Investigative actions in the home of [Nanuka Zhorzholiani](#), founder of the "Nanuka's Foundation," which began at 8 a.m., proceeded for several hours without the presence of her lawyer. At the start of the search, Nanuka Zhorzholiani's minor child and her father were present in the apartment. Additionally, employees of the Special Investigative Service were present during the search.

### Legal Analysis

The investigative actions carried out on April 29, 2025, in the homes of representatives of civil society organizations and charitable foundations, as well as other search and seizure activities conducted between October 24, 2024, and May 2025, were marked by numerous [procedural violations](#): The subjects of the investigative actions were *prohibited* to record videos of the search process; in most cases, the investigative actions were conducted with restrictions on *the right to have a lawyer present* — meaning they took place without legal counsel; The court orders presented for the purposes of the search and seizure were general in nature and did not include information about the *specific objects of the search*. This served as the basis for seizing numerous personal items (such as mobile phones, laptops) belonging to the subjects of the investigation, as well as items belonging to individuals (including minors) who were not specified in the court orders. In several cases, representatives of the relevant agency *entered the apartments of for the purpose of searching by deception*.

According to the Article 112, Paragraph 3 of the [Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia](#), a court order authorizing a search or seizure *must specify the probable object, item, substance, or other material to be discovered and seized during the search*, as well as its identifying characteristics. According to the Article 120, Part 5 of the same Code, during a search, the subject, document, substance or other object containing

information *specified in the ruling or resolution* shall be searched for and seized. The investigative actions discussed in this report were conducted in gross violation of these procedural norms. Furthermore, *to ensure transparency and credibility* of the search and seizure processes, the responsible authorities failed to take appropriate measures — several subjects of the investigative actions were not allowed to record the search, and their lawyers were not permitted to attend the procedures.

Both the substantive and procedural aspects of the investigative actions carried out against [human rights defenders](#) violate the right to private and family life and contravene international standards prohibiting arbitrary and unlawful interference by the state in a person's home. These actions are in breach of the [Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), which prohibits arbitrary interference with a person's privacy, family life, home, or correspondence. They also violate Article 17 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), which, like the Universal Declaration, prohibits arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence, as well as unlawful attacks on a person's honor and reputation.

## Conclusion

Since October 2024, the systematic nature of the arbitrary investigative actions deliberately carried out against human rights defenders indicates that, in the absence of legitimate legal grounds and in violation of procedural norms, search and seizure measures are being used as a tool of intimidation and persecution. This practice has effectively become an explicit part of the state policy.

## Recommendations

➤ *To the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders (Ms. Mary Lawlor):*

Call on the Georgian Dream Party to prevent *arbitrary and illegal* conduct of investigative actions aimed at intimidating and persecuting human rights defenders and civil activists; also to ensure the identification of those responsible for violations of both substantive and procedural norms of search and seizure measures and to ensure appropriate legal response to their actions;

➤ *To the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe (Dr. Michael O'Flaherty):*

- To examine arbitrary and unlawful search and seizure measures against human rights defenders and civil activists and the relevant substantive and procedural violations;
  - To Address the Georgian Dream party in the form of a recommendation/statement and call on them to cease the arbitrary and unlawful conduct of investigative actions against human rights defenders and civil society activists; and to ensure the identification of those responsible for the violations committed during the search and seizure operations, followed by appropriate legal accountability.
  - Monitor the implementation of the recommendations by the political party “*Georgian Dream.*”
- *To the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR):*

Call on the “Georgian Dream” party to refrain from conducting arbitrary and unlawful investigative actions against human rights defenders and civil society activists for the purpose of intimidation and persecution. Also, urge the party to ensure the identification of those responsible for substantive and procedural violations committed during the previously conducted search and seizure operations, and to take appropriate legal action.

#### **To the bodies responsible for implementing various functions at the local level**

- *To the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the Investigation Service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia:*
- Search and seizure investigative actions should be carried out in compliance with both substantive and procedural norms, as well as the principles of transparency and credibility, in order to prevent these measures from being conducted arbitrarily or unlawfully and from being used as a tool of persecution.
  - Identify the officials who participated in the arbitrary search and seizure investigative actions against human rights defenders and civil society activists, and launch an investigation into the procedural violations committed by them.
  - Ensure the re-training of those employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the Investigation Service of the Ministry of Finance who are involved in investigative actions, specifically on the standards for conducting search and seizure procedures, in order to promote prevention of violations of procedural norms.
- *To the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia:*
- The necessity of conducting search and seizure investigative actions must be duly justified. In particular, motions requesting search and seizure measures should be based on the standards established by the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia (*including the specification of the item or object to be discovered or seized in the motion*), in order to prevent investigative actions from being carried out arbitrarily or unlawfully.

- In cases where it is not possible to identify the individuals involved in arbitrary investigative actions conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Investigation Service of the Ministry of Finance, the following investigative measures should be undertaken:
  - For the purposes of the investigation, the Prosecutor's Office should establish the identities of the officials who participated in arbitrary search and seizure actions against human rights defenders and civil society activists;
  - After establishing the identities of the aforementioned individuals, investigate abuse of powers by them as well as other violations of norms that occurred during the conduct of the investigative actions;
  - The investigation should be conducted fully and objectively, based on a swift, effective, and comprehensive examination of the violations that occurred during the process of conducting investigative actions.

➤ To the Common Courts of Georgia

When the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia submits a motion to conduct search and seizure investigative actions, the grounds and corresponding justification for the motion should be properly assessed. At the stage of preparing the order, the court should not rely solely on the Prosecutor's motion but must issue the order in full compliance with the relevant substantive norms, including specifying the item or object to be discovered or seized during the search and seizure investigative actions in the court order.