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## Georgia: Tbilisi Pride cancelled Pride march after office attacked by far-right groups

On 5 July 2021, LGBTQI+ rights defenders had been forced to cancel the "March for Dignity", the final event of the Tbilisi Pride week, after far-right groups stormed the offices of **Tbilisi Pride**, Shame Movement and [Human Rights House Tbilisi](#), and attacked a number of journalists. As a result, more than 50 people, including journalists and one human rights defender, were injured, many of whom needed medical treatment in hospital. On 11 July 2021, one of the journalists who was attacked, cameraman Alexander Lashkarava, was found dead in his home.

[Tbilisi Pride](#) is the union of LGBTQI+ people and allies that organizes the annual pride week in Tbilisi. They also carry out media campaigns, advocate for policy changes and strive for the rights of LGBTQI+ people to be recognised.

On 1 July 2021, LGBTQI+ activists launched five days of LGBTQI+ Pride celebrations and had planned the "March for Dignity" for Monday 5 July in the centre of Tbilisi. However, hundreds of members of right-wing groups attempted to disrupt Pride events. For instance, on 1 July 2021 guests and diplomats who attended the screening of the *March of Honour* documentary about the problems faced by sexual minorities in Georgia were insulted and pelted with eggs. On the same day, the leaders of the Georgian Orthodox Church publicly opposed Pride events being held, and called on their believers to come for a prayer service on 5 July to show their renunciation of LGBTQI+ issues. As a result most events were held in safe spaces.

On 5 July 2021, hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Tbilisi against the Pride march and attacked activists and journalists, accusing them of spreading "anti-Georgian sentiments." More than 50 people, including journalists and one human rights defender, were injured, many of whom ended up in hospital. Most have severe injuries: a cracked skull, concussions, damaged eyes, knocked out teeth and bruises. On the same day, anti-LGBTQI+ protesters climbed onto the balcony of the office of Tbilisi Pride, tore a rainbow flag apart, broke the windows and ransacked the Tbilisi Pride office. A [video](#) of the results of the vandalism was published by member of Tbilisi Pride, Tamaz Sozashvili.

The staff members of Shame Movement, who were hosting the Tbilisi Pride organizers, were forced to evacuate. Anti-LGBTQI+ protesters also threw an incendiary device into the courtyard of the organization Human Rights House Tbilisi, which was another organizer of Tbilisi Pride.

During the anti-LGBTQI+ demonstrations and attacks, small groups of police couldn't provide enough support and protection for the activists and journalists. Instead of guaranteeing their security, the Interior Ministry called on Tbilisi Pride participants to refrain from marching. As a result, the Tbilisi Pride team declared that it could not endanger the lives of people and cancelled the march.

On 6 July 2021, several thousand civic activists and ordinary citizens came to Rustaveli Avenue outside the Parliament building for a "silent rally" to show their support for LGBTQI+ rights defenders, journalists and Pride organizers. Homophobic protesters kept trying to break police lines and threw stones, glass and other items at participants of the silent rally. Dozens of anti-LGBTQI+ protesters were detained, but it was not clear whether they were taken to police stations or not.

On 11 July 2021, journalist Alexander Lashkarava, who was amongst those, including journalists, beaten during the attacks on the offices of Tbilisi Pride, Shame Movement and Human Rights

House Tbilisi on 5 July 2021, was found dead in his home. According to his colleagues he had sustained multiple injuries and had to undergo surgery, but he returned home from hospital on 8 July. Police have launched an investigation into Alexander Lashkarava's death.

This is not the first time that violence has broken out over a Pride march in Tbilisi. In 2013, thousands of ultra-conservative supporters of the Orthodox Church attacked a Pride parade to mark International Day Against Homophobia. LGBTQI+ human rights defenders and activists had to board buses provided by police to escape the mob, which charged after them across the capital's main square, hurling stones, breaking windows and threatening to kill them. In 2019, hundreds of far-right activists burned rainbow flags in Tbilisi, protesting against the screening of an Oscar-nominated LGBTQI+ film.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the attacks against LGBTQI+ rights defenders and the offices of Tbilisi Pride, Shame Movement and Human Rights House Tbilisi, as it believes they are being targeted solely as a result of their work in promoting and protecting LGBTQI+ rights in Georgia. Front Line Defenders condemns the intimidation and targeting of LGBTQI+ rights defenders and journalists, which may have a chilling effect on civil society, and is not conducive to the creation of a safe and enabling environment in which human rights defenders and journalists can carry out their work in Georgia.

#### **Front Line Defenders urges the Georgian authorities to:**

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of members of Tbilisi Pride, Shame Movement and Human Rights House Tbilisi;
2. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the attacks against LGBTQI+ rights defenders, journalists and the offices of Tbilisi Pride, Shame Movement and Human Rights House Tbilisi, as well as the death of journalist Alexander Lashkarava, with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
3. Take measures to ensure that government officials and other public figures refrain from making statements or declarations stigmatising the legitimate work of LGBTQI+ human rights defenders and publicly condemn slander of LGBTQI+ human rights defenders;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Georgia are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.