



Oslo, 2 December 2009

Norwegian PEN, the Human Rights House Foundation and the Norwegian Helsinki Committee are alarmed by the information that representatives of Special Operative Department (SOD) of Adjara region within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia have attempted to exert pressure and blackmail Tedo Jorbenadze, head of the investigative reporting team of the “Batumelebi” Newspaper. We call upon the Georgian authorities to promptly investigate both this and previous incidents of pressure on “Batumelebi” and to take all appropriate measures to ensure a safe and enabling environment for all journalists in Georgia.

According to information given by the South Caucasus Network of Human Rights Defenders and the Human Rights House Tbilisi, Tedo Jorbenadze, was invited to the office of Special Operative Department (SOD) of Adjara region within the Ministry of Interior of Georgia in the evening of November 25, 2009. They told him that the special services of foreign countries – in particular, Russia and Turkey - were interested in information about the newspaper. When Jorbenadze refused to cooperate, the law enforcers threatened to blackmail him to send compromising pictures and video materials to his relatives and co-workers and upload them on Internet to discredit him. It should be noted that this is not the first time journalists of "Batumelebi" have been threatened. The newspapers received written death threats in June 2008 and in January, 2009 one journalist was detained after refusing to delete photos from her camera.

“Batumelebi” is a regional newspaper covering the Adjara region since 2001. It is well-known for its quality reporting, objectivity and professionalism, both on a national and international level. “Batumelebi” has received several international awards, including the 2008 Fritt Ord and ZEIT-Stiftung Free Press Award (Norway and Germany) and the Signal for Europe award from Reporters without Borders.

We hereby respectfully remind the government of Georgia that interference with the work of journalists is a criminal offence prohibited by the Georgian Criminal Code. Moreover, inviolability of personal life, honor and dignity is guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia and international instruments to which Georgia is a party.



**HUMAN RIGHTS HOUSE
FOUNDATION**

We call upon the Georgian Prosecutor's Office to make certain that:

- the pressure on the employees of the newspaper Batumelebi is immediately stopped,
- the allegations of pressure on the journalist and the newspaper Batumelebi are promptly investigated
- violators of journalistic freedom are brought to justice

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Secretary General
Norwegian PEN

Maria Dahle
Executive Director
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Bjørn Engesland
General Secretary
Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Copies have been sent to:

UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders
UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression
High Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe
Press Division of the Council of Europe
The OSCE/ODIHR, Warsaw
EC Office in Tbilisi
The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Norwegian Parliament
The Norwegian Embassy in Baku
The Human Rights House Network
IFEX