

To the Government of Georgia

Oslo, 13.01.2023

Statement

Calling for the release of Saakashvili on humanitarian grounds

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is concerned about the health situation of former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili who is currently held in prison. We address the Georgian authorities and ask to release him on humanitarian grounds and transfer him to a medical facility abroad to receive proper medical treatment.

- We are seriously worried by the grave deterioration of Saakashvili's health. Considering the limits of available healthcare in Georgia, we ask Georgian authorities to suspend his sentence on humanitarian grounds to provide Saakashvili's transfer abroad for treatment, as they have a duty to take all necessary measures for him to receive appropriate medical care, says Berit Lindeman, Secretary General of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

Saakashvili, 55, has been in a Georgian jail since October 2021 after his return to Georgia. He was tried in absentia and sentenced to six years in 2018 for abuses of power while in office. He faces two additional charges, pending trial, and unlawful border crossing, after he smuggled himself back into Georgia in 2021. Saakashvili has rejected all those charges, calling them trumped up.

Saakashvili's had led the country until his party's defeat in elections in 2012, then left Georgia to avoid facing prosecution. His first presidential term from 2004 to 2008 was characterised successful reforms in Georgia.

Local and international doctors say Saakashvili is suffering from speedily progressive dementia as his health has deteriorated since his imprisonment. He has undergone repeated hunger strikes to protest his incarceration, which his supporters call politically motivated. Due to the declining health, he has reportedly suffered significant weight loss and is unable to move without help.

Last month, the Ombudsman's office in Georgia voiced alarm over Saakashvili's worsening health, citing a report published on 6 December by a group of experts monitoring the former president's treatment. One of Saakashvili's doctors warned that the patient suffers from symptoms that doctors couldn't diagnose in Georgia.

Numerous demonstrations have taken place in Georgia and in front of Georgian diplomatic missions in several European cities in past weeks demanding his immediate release due to the deteriorating state of his health, which they claim could have fatal consequences. His lawyers have sought to have his sentence suspended in order for him to be moved abroad for more intensive care.

Saakashvili's health condition has also drawn wider international attention. The European Parliament, in their 14 December resolution, urged the Georgian government "to release former President Mikheil Saakashvili and allow him to receive proper medical treatment abroad [...] on humanitarian grounds and as a means of reducing political polarization. "

US State Department also said it advocates with relevant persons "to take necessary steps for Saakashvili's health and well-being" as part of the recommendations of the medical experts of the Ombudsman.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has asked Georgian authorities "to be merciful" and transfer Saakashvili, who is a Ukrainian citizen, to a medical facility abroad "given the deteriorating state of his health".

A court in Tbilisi continues to hold hearings for further witness testimonies, including medical experts, and decide whether to defer or suspend Saakashvili's case.