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GGA43148.E

Georgia: Update to GGA32976.E of 7 October 1999 on the situation of homosexuals
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Although Georgia has decriminalized homosexuality (HRIDC 16 Nov. 2004; Embassy of the United Kingdom 12 Nov. 2004), and on 25 February 2004 newly elected president Mikhail Saakashvili was cited as saying that his government would not permit "any kind of discrimination" against homosexuals (BBC 25 Feb. 2004), homophobic attitudes persist (IHF 5 Nov. 2000; Georgian AIDS [Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome] and Clinical Immunology Research Center 2001; HRIDC 16 Nov. 2004; RFE/RL 29 July 2003). In a 1998 survey of four hundred thirty of Tbilisi residents, eighty-four per cent were negative in their view of homosexuality, fourteen per cent were neutral and two per cent were positive (IHF 5 Nov. 2000). According to a United Nations-funded report by the Georgian AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center, negative attitudes are particularly strong in the case of "passive" homosexuals, although homosexuality in general is the subject of a "strict social taboo" (2001). In correspondence dated 16 November 2004, the executive director of the Human Rights Information and Documentation Center (HRIDC), a Tbilisi-based non-governmental organization founded in 1996 whose mandate includes human rights monitoring and fighting against "discrimination and intolerance" (HRIDC n.d.), similarly indicated that social attitudes towards homosexuality are "quite negative," and the "issue itself is not acceptable for the wide range of society, so their problems are mostly hidden." The executive director further stated that, because of this, he has not received any reports of mistreatment (ibid. 16 Nov. 2004). The executive director's statements corroborate assertions made by the director of the Liberty Institute, a non-governmental human rights organization based in Tbilisi, who claimed that

[I]t's absolutely impossible to speak about the rights of homosexuals because it's hidden. It's not reported. Nobody complains about violations, but you can detect this hate on every corner. I think it's hate toward people who are different. When these hate speakers want to stigmatize someone, they are portraying their opponents as homosexual, Armenian, Jehovah's Witnesses, Freemasons (RFE/RL 29 July 2003).

In correspondence to the Research Directorate, a professor of sociology at Tbilisi State University provided the following information concerning the situation of homosexuals:

[H]omosexuals remain one of the most discriminated [against] social groups in Georgia, and homophobic views are more than common amongst practically all segments of the society. Perhaps there has been a very slight shift in attitudes towards homosexuals amongst the privileged stratum, the so-called cultural elite, but this does not change the overall picture. Not a single person in Georgia has dared to publicly come out. Print and broadcast media branches are saturated with homophobic views and negative stereotypes. Homosexuality remains a scandalous issue for the yellow press. And what makes the situation worse is that virtually all powerful organisations that work on the advancement and defence of human rights avoid the gay issue in their rhetoric and campaigns, perhaps due to fear of becoming discredited. However, I am aware that some of these organisations store data on instances of violence against homosexuals (physical, verbal, often displayed by the police in recent years), which they do not verbalise in public but [they] still try to discretely assist the victims (20 Nov. 2004).

The professor noted that the state has not taken any measures to promote the human rights of homosexuals, adding that the only non-governmental organization she knows of that "more or less openly touches upon gay rights" is the Women's Initiative Supporting Group (Professor 20 Nov. 2004; ibid. 23 Nov. 2004). While this organization deals principally with women and gender-related issues, it also "provides information on the rights of sexual minorities" (ibid. 20 Nov. 2004).

The professor also indicated that while there is a "large" gay community in Tbilisi,

it is an absolutely underground subculture, very much closed off for outsiders and predominantly comprised of gay men. Lesbian communities are even more invisible. Fortunately, we have not seen [the] emergence of organised groups specifically practicing gay-bashing; however, virtually any public display of homosexuality risks outbursts of verbal and physical violence (ibid. 23 Nov. 2004).

A number of reports published between 2002 and 2004 refer to incidents in which individuals were publicly labelled "homosexual" (Internews Georgia 20 Oct. 2003; *ibid.* 27 July 2004; *Human Rights in Georgia* Mar. 2002), including a case in February 2002 in which Nugzar Sajaia, head of the Security Council of Georgia, reportedly committed suicide after the minister of defence, in an interview with a Tbilisi newspaper, accused him of being homosexual (*ibid.*).

Information on resources and services available to homosexuals was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. The executive director of the HRIDC stated that there are no organizations in Georgia dealing specifically with homosexuals' human rights (16 Nov. 2004). According to Rachel Peterson, an expatriate affiliated with the US Agency for International Development (USAID), who has lived in Tbilisi for one year, the capital has a "small but flourishing gay community" (Real Post Reports June 2004). Postings on the Internet-based Gay Tbilisi Forum refer to a number of clubs catering to homosexuals, including Bunker Bar (12 Nov. 2004) and Success Bar (Gay Tbilisi Forum 18 Apr. 2004).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Professor of Sociology, State University of Tbilisi. 23 November 2004. Correspondence.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Unsuccessful attempts to contact two oral sources.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International, Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD), *Civil Georgia* [Tbilisi], European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), International Gay

and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), Internews Georgia, Ministry of Internal Affairs, PlanetOut, Prime News, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), Rex Wockner International News.

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