

His Excellency Mikheil Saakashvili
President of Georgia
Tbilisi, Georgia

4 December 2009

Your Excellency,

We are writing on behalf of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers and the World Editors Forum, which represent 18,000 publications, 15,000 online sites and over 3,000 companies in more than 120 countries, to express our serious concern at reported attempts by the special services to blackmail and intimidate investigative journalist Tedo Jorbenadze.

According to reports, on 25 November Mr Jorbenadze, head of independent newspaper Gazeti Batumelebi's investigative journalism team, was summoned by the Interior Ministry's Special Operations Department to its local Adjara office. During the interview, officers threatened to send sexually compromising photographs and videos of Mr Jorbenadze to his colleagues and parents, and to upload them to the Internet.

On 30 November, in an open letter to the international media community – and presented to our 62nd World Newspaper Congress and 16th World Editors Forum taking place in Hyderabad, India – Gazeti Batumelebi claims that its "security is no longer guaranteed" and that it fears that employees "will be subject to violence and other types of blackmail at the hands of the special services". The newspaper also believes that the blackmail was "probably intended to secretly interfere with the newspaper's editorial independence".

We are seriously concerned that Georgian security services would seek to blackmail a journalist and interfere in editorial freedom. Such tactics are reminiscent of the Soviet-era KGB and have no place in a modern democracy.

We respectfully call on you to ensure that a thorough investigation is carried out and that those responsible are brought to account. We urge you to do everything possible to ensure the safety of Mr Jorbenadze and his colleagues at Gazeti Batumelebi, and to ensure that your government fully respects the principles of a free and independent press.



We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Gavin O'Reilly
President
World Association of Newspapers



Xavier Vidal-Folch
President
World Editors Forum

WAN-IFRA is the global organization for the world's newspapers and news publishers, with formal representative status at the United Nations, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. The organization groups 18,000 publications, 15,000 online sites and over 3,000 companies in more than 120 countries.

