

Vienna, 5 December 2017

## **IOI CALLS UPON GEORGIAN AUTHORITIES TO REFRAIN FROM ATTACKS ON THE PUBLIC DEFENDER**

The International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) has become aware of the difficulties faced by one of its members, the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia and its current incumbent, Ombudsman Ucha Nanuashvili.

As the only global organization for the cooperation of 188 independent Ombudsman institutions worldwide, the IOI is committed to promoting and strengthening the concept of ombudsmanship and to further the cooperation and networking of colleagues around the world.

An Ombudsman offers independent and objective consideration of complaints, aimed at correcting injustices caused as a result of maladministration or violations of human rights. A further important objective of the Ombudsman is to improve services provided to the public by ensuring that systemic failings are identified and corrected. The IOI supports Ombudsman institutions in their effort to provide such redress in an independent, fair and objective way.

It is therefore with great concern that the IOI has learned that negative statements and damaging remarks have been made by Ministers, the Speaker of Parliament – even the judiciary – against the Public Defender and in reaction to the Office's investigative work and published reports.

It is inevitable that in the course of the work of any Ombudsman, reports will be produced that are critical of the actions of Government bodies. However, the linkage between the Ombudsman and Parliament is critical. It enables the Ombudsman to assist Parliament in holding public administration to account and protecting the rights of citizens. It is therefore in line with best international practice, that the Office of the Public Defender of Georgia informs the public and concerned authorities about the results of investigations by publishing such reports. In a democracy, there is an expectation that such reports will be properly considered and acted upon.

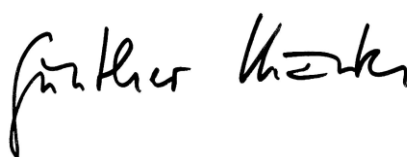
In order for Ombudsman institutions to successfully support Parliament in identifying and correcting systemic failings, they need to be heard. Damaging and dismissive remarks made by high-ranking officials have the potential to seriously undermine the Ombudsman's work. In the current case of our colleague Ombudsman Ucha Nanuashvili we must say that such development is being perceived internationally as evidence of a lack of respect for the Ombudsman institution and the rights of Georgian citizens using its services. This is all the more important considering the fact that elections of the next Georgian Public Defender are forthcoming.

The members of the IOI adopted the Bangkok Declaration in November 2016, confirming their mutual understanding that Ombudsman shall not be subject to any form of intimidation or threats that would limit their independence and undermine their ability to protect the fundamental rights of all persons. In line with this declaration the IOI expresses its deep concern over these recent developments and strongly condemns any personal attacks on Ombudsman Nanuashvili and the institution of the Public Defender as such.

Ombudsman institutions are a core element of every democracy and form an integral part of constitutional reality. In a state ruled by law it is in the best public interest to fully respect and support the independent investigative mandate of the Ombudsman. The IOI therefore strongly encourages the acknowledgement of the mandate of the Public Defender of Georgia and a reasoned and professional response to the Ombudsman's work.



Peter Tyndall  
IOI President



Günther Kräuter  
IOI Secretary General