

## The statement of the President of Georgia undermines the rule of law and fundamental principles of a democratic society

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***When addressing the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on January 28, the President of Georgia stated that Georgia was ready to host a delegation from the Russian Federation in May, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, by bypassing the Georgian Law on Occupied Territories.***

The Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories adopted after the August war determines the status of the territories that were occupied as a result of the military aggression of the Russian Federation and establishes a special legal regime for these territories. The special legal regime, inter alia, implies restrictions on the free movement of foreign nationals on the occupied territories. According to the law, it is allowed to enter the occupied territories only through the territory controlled by the Georgian authorities. Access to the occupied Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia is prohibited from all other directions.

According to non-governmental organizations, the declared intention of ignoring the law in favour of members of the state delegation of a country, the military aggression of which resulted in the occupation of territories, is alarming and contradicts the country's national interests.

In addition, the President's statement contradicts the principle of a legal state, the cornerstone of which is the rule of law. The idea of a legal state becomes pointless, if state power is not exercised on the basis of law or within the framework clearly defined by law. The disregard of legislation by the high ranking state-political official will be a message for both international and Georgian communities that the requirements of law are formality and that officials decide themselves when they can be violated.

Given that the Government, and not the President, is obliged to ensure enforcement of the Law on Occupied Territories, NGOs call on the Prime Minister to make clear and public statements on the ensuring implementation of the Law on Occupied Territories.

**Signatory organizations:**

***Democracy Research Institute (DRI)***

***Open Society Foundation (OSGF)***

***Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA)***

***Article 42 of the Constitution***

***Green Alternative***

***Multinational Georgia***

***Human Rights Center***

***Georgian Democratic Initiative (GDI)***