

## **Criminal Investigations into the Killings of Journalists in Georgia, 2006-2018**

In 2017 Georgian government informed UNESCO that three journalists Stan Storimans, a Dutch national, Alexander Klimchuk and Grigol Chikhladze, Georgian nationals were killed during the August 2008 Russia-Georgia armed conflict. There have been no fatalities taking journalists lives recorded in Georgia ever since.

As of the date, criminal investigation is ongoing into the killing of the three journalists at domestic level. Meanwhile, the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) of the International Criminal Court has opened investigation into the situation in Georgia over 2008 armed conflict following the relevant authorization by the Pre-Trial Chamber (PTC) of the Court in January 2016. OTP has been authorized by PTC to investigate crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the context of the 2008 armed conflict in Georgia from July 1, 2008 to October 10, 2008.

At this stage, it is very likely that the killings of the three journalists fall within the scope of the OTP investigation in terms of temporal, territorial and subject matter frames of the PTC authorisation.

Georgia notified UNESCO earlier, the preliminary findings of the Georgian investigation suggest that Stan Storimans was killed as a result of the Russian aerial attack on the Georgian town of Gori on 12 August 2008. There is a bunch of evidence suggesting that cluster munitions were used in bombing and there was no military presence in the area under attack at the time. Klimchuk and Chikhladze were shot dead allegedly by Russian and/or Ossetian ground troops while approaching the town of Tskhinvali on 10 August 2008. The two wore distinctively civilian clothing and the press signs while being shot.

Given the above circumstances, there is reasonable doubt to believe that the killings of the three journalists constitute war crimes and occurred at places and time relevant to the OTP investigation.

Killings of Stan Storimans, Alexander Klimchuk and Grigol Chikhladze have also been investigated by the Office of the Chief Prosecutor of Georgia as part of the wider investigations over the war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed during 2008 armed

conflict. The Investigation authorities of Georgia faced a number of serious difficulties in the process of investigation. Major challenges that emerged throughout the investigations were the lack of access to evidence given the continued occupation of relevant areas by Russia and the inability of Georgian authorities to obtain co-operation from the Russian authorities. In March 2015, Georgian authorities notified ICC about the challenges concerned. This notification has allowed ICC to launch its investigation.