

Georgia's Ministry of Culture Appoints Interim Director and Initiates Reorganization at Georgian National Film Center

Georgia [June 15, 2023]

The Georgian National Film Center (GNFC) has recently undergone significant changes with the appointment of Mr. Koba Khubunaia as its interim director, effective June 10. In addition to his new role, Mr. Khubunaia currently serves as the Head of the Economic Office at the Ministry of Culture and has a background in the penitentiary system. This appointment has been swiftly followed by a decision to terminate the positions of deputy directors, effective from July 12, marking the beginning of a comprehensive reorganization of the Film Center.

These developments come in the wake of the Ministry's ongoing efforts to assert substantial political control over Georgia's theaters, museums, and writers' organizations. The film industry has widely interpreted these actions as a means of exerting political influence over the country's film sector.

The Ministry's decision followed the publication of a letter on the GNFC's official website, expressing concerns raised by the organization's employees regarding the Ministry of Culture's persistent attempts to gain control over the GNFC. The employees advocated for the preservation of the organization's independence. However, the letter mysteriously disappeared from the website shortly after its publication, and GNFC employees found themselves denied administrative access to the platform.

On Monday, June 12, the discontent among Georgian film professionals reached a boiling point, leading to a gathering outside the GNFC office. Industry representatives have demanded that Mr. Khubunaia halt the ongoing reorganization process and engage in meaningful consultations with stakeholders from the film industry. Esteemed figures within the Georgian film community, including acclaimed directors, producers, and actors, have expressed deep concern over the alarming situation, emphasizing the potential threats facing the Georgian film sector.

In response to the escalating turmoil, a letter signed by up to 400 film industry representatives has outlined three key demands, underscoring the gravity of the situation.

"Today, a deliberate policy to discredit the National Film Centre is underway. Through this policy, the Ministry of Culture seeks to subordinate the independent organization and exploit it solely for predetermined goals," - reads the letter.

The letter calls for the following actions:

- Ceasing the reorganization of GNFC.
- Conducting a competitive selection process to elect the director, rather than relying on a unilateral decision by the Minister of Culture.
- Establishing a committee composed of film industry representatives to oversee the director's election.

Established in 2000 as the sole film funding institution in Georgia, the Georgian National Film Center plays a vital role in supporting the local film industry, fostering emerging talents, preserving the country's unique cultural identity, and fostering cross-border collaborations and cultural understanding. The recent developments have sent shockwaves through the film community, raising concerns about the future trajectory of the Georgian film industry and its broader implications.

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