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## Tbilisi Evictions Battle.

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Families say they were stripped of apartments without even being informed. Temur Lolashvili and his family have been waiting for an apartment of their own for 50 years. Under the administration of former president Eduard Shevardnadze, they were finally given one on Marjanishvili Street in Tbilisi.

Lolashvili is disabled and the rest of his family are unemployed. Their income is so low that they qualify for support from a government poverty programme and the city authorities gave the family a New Year's gift of a television. But, two weeks later, the family was informed that the very same authorities were evicting them from their apartment.

Sixty-nine other families who received apartments have found themselves in the same situation, with many now appealing the decision. The authorities, meanwhile, insist that they are correcting a past injustice.

In November, the Tbilisi city court convicted the former mayor of abuse of office and recommended that decisions he had made be reconsidered, prompting the new city authorities to annul his allocation of apartments.

The families represent a wide cross-section of Georgian society, from well-known local figures to the very needy. Amongst them are members of parliament and head of the parliament's human rights committee, Elene Tevdoradze.

The families are outraged, saying that not only is it unjust to deprive them of their apartments, but that they were not informed about the court decision.

'From the court verdict it's clear that the case was opened on November 20, all the procedures were finished on November 20 and the court gave its verdict on November 21,' commented well-known lawyer and head of the Republican Party Tina Khidasheli. 'This is quite incredible.'

Khidasheli also expressed astonishment that Sheradze had been found criminally liable for abuses he had committed, but only given a one-year conditional prison sentence and not fined.

The family of actor Zaza Kolelishvili began their wait for an apartment in 1992 and after a ten-year bureaucratic marathon, was finally allocated a place in a new block of flats on Tsereteli Prospekt. In the mean time, the family of seven - two parents and five children - had been living in a rented apartment.

Kolelishvili's wife, Natia Gogochuri, said she found out that she had lost the promised apartment from a conversation in a shop.

'On that day the salesman asked me if the rumours that we had lost our apartment were true,' she said. 'Then we found out that the court had annulled Sheradze's decision and that as a result we were without an apartment.'

Kolelishvili was one of a number of those affected who were received by speaker of parliament Nino Burjanadze.

`For the time being, I am not stating my views because I hope Mrs Burjanadze will help us,' he said. `But if she doesn't, you will see what comments I can make.'

Mamuka Akhvlediani, the deputy mayor of Tbilisi, defends the decision to take away the apartments, saying they were allocated illegally in the first place by the former administration. And he suggested that some cases could be reconsidered.

`Those who are really entitled to the living space will keep it. This issue will be discussed and we will take the appropriate decision,' Akhvlediani told IWPR.

Many of the residents are already applying to the appeal court and they have been promised a verdict within two months. Lawyer Paata Kikvidze who is representing them said he would argue that the Tbilisi government had flouted the law.

Khidasheli says this case is part of a wider trend in which the authorities make far-ranging decisions without going through the proper legal channels.

`This and many other events of recent times suggest a tendency that the government is taking big sweeping decisions, without taking an interest in the real situation,' she said.

David Kiria, a 27-year-old resident of Tbilisi, who is not affected by the row over the apartments, said the dispute had given him a poor opinion of the government.

`The authorities have a clear problem about communicating with the people, with society,' he said. `They have to explain to people why first they gave them apartments and then they took them away.

`Maybe this wasn't done by the letter of the law, but that is not the fault of specific people. The authorities ought to be in the habit of explaining to society how this or that decision is motivated. But they never ever do that.'

Even people who disapprove of the earlier decision have been critical of the recent one.

`There are very respected and needy people [who have lost their apartments] and this decision is unjust. But that's not the main point. The main thing is that they did it without telling anybody,' said Maka Bekua, 46, another Tbilisi resident.

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