

Georgian pensioner devastated after 'cutting Internet'

April 8 2011, by Irakli Metreveli



Hayastan Shakarian holds a handsaw near her native village of Armazi, around 15 km from the Georgian capital Tbilisi. Shakarian, arrested for single-handedly cutting off the Internet in Georgia and Armenia, has tearfully insisted she was innocent and said she had never heard of the web.

A 75-year-old woman arrested for [single-handedly cutting off the Internet](#) in Georgia and Armenia on Friday tearfully insisted she was innocent and said she had never heard of the web.

In a case that has attracted worldwide interest, pensioner Hayastan Shakarian is accused of forcing thousands of people in both countries offline for hours after hacking into a fibre-optic cable while digging for scrap metal.

But Shakarian, a Georgian of Armenian origin, told AFP that she was just a "poor old woman" who was not capable of committing such a crime.

"I did not cut this cable. Physically, I could not do it," she said, repeatedly bursting into tears as she spoke.

Shakarian, who lives in the poverty-stricken Georgian village of Armazi, around 15 kilometres (10 miles) from the capital Tbilisi, said that she had only been collecting firewood.

"I have no idea what the Internet is," she added.

The pensioner has been charged with damaging property and could face up to three years in prison if convicted.

"My mother is innocent. She is crying all the time. She is so scared," said her son, Sergo Shakarian.

The Georgian interior ministry said that despite her claims to innocence, Shakarian had already confessed to cutting the fibre-optic cable.

The incident on March 28 provoked lengthy debates on global Internet discussion forums after it was widely publicised this week.

Around 800 people posted comments about the case on the Engadget technology website, some arguing that the authorities should show leniency because of Shakarian's age and her impoverished situation.

The company that owns the fibre-optic cable, Georgian Railway Telecom, said that the damage was serious, causing 90 percent of private and corporate Internet users in neighbouring Armenia to lose access for nearly 12 hours while also hitting Georgian Internet service providers.

But although Georgian Railway Telecom insists that the 600-kilometre (380-mile) cable has "robust protection", this was not the first time that it has been damaged.

Many Georgians' Internet connections were also briefly cut off in 2009 by another scavenger who hacked into the [cable](#) while hunting for scrap metal to sell.

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