

STATEMENT

By Mr. Irakli Jgenti, Deputy Permanent Representative of
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In Geneva

Forum on Minorities Issues, 6th Session (26-27 November 2013)

Madam Chair, First of all let me congratulate and welcome you in the capacity of the Chairperson of the 6th Session of the Forum of Minority issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Throughout its history Georgia was always commended for its tolerance. While continuing this positive trend the new Government unequivocally supports and does its utmost to protect the rights to religious freedom and belief.

Since the regaining of our independence little over 20 years ago, we have managed to move forward. To name a few steps:

All relevant crimes envisaged by the Criminal Code committed on the ground of racial, religious, national, ethnical intolerance or on any discriminating ground shall be considered to be committed in aggravated circumstances.

With regard to protection of civil rights of representatives of religious minorities, the amended Civil Code allows registration of religious groups as religious associations. In order to ensure non-discriminatory approach, the amendments set down objective and common sense criteria of eligibility. Since abovementioned amendments regarding religious associations passed, 22 such associations have been already registered as legal entity of public law and they already enjoy adequately all benefits and privileges, which are provided by Georgian legislation.

Ministry of Justice has drafted Law on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination. Recently, the draft was discussed with the relevant governmental institutions and presented to the diplomatic corps and civil society sector for recommendations.

According to the Law on elimination of discrimination and ensuring of equality shall be monitored and controlled by Inspector for Equality Protection – independent official elected by the Parliament. Inspector shall be entitled to examine applications and complaints of persons or institutions and make legally binding decisions, including imposition of fines for violation of provisions of the law, to carry out appropriate activities to raise public awareness on discrimination. The draft Law will be presented to the Parliament in the nearest future.

On the institutional level the Council of Religions was established in 2005 by the Memorandum concluded between the Public Defender and representative of various religious associations. The main goals of this mechanism are: facilitating a constructive multilateral dialogue between various religious groups, engaging religious minorities into the process of civil integration, protecting religious freedom, etc.

Recently, the inter-agency commission was established to regulate the legal relationship between the State and various religious organizations, so we will be able to avoid misunderstandings, such as legality of the construction of religious buildings, funding issues etc.

In fact, recently there was a case when the construction of the Minaret in Adigeni Municipality was stopped simply because the customs clearance procedures for the imported parts and building materials of the Minaret were violated. The Municipality has been duly informed about the facts of violation, followed by the legal steps from the part of the relevant authorities. Actions of the Government cannot be viewed as the violations of religious rights and freedoms. It had to insure that both, relevant national legislation and protection of the rights of religious minorities were duly observed.

Finally, let me stress that despite some shortcomings, Georgia will do its best to advance the agenda of protection of the rights of religious minorities.

Thank You