



89<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Opening Statement by H.R. Ms Khatuna TOTLADZE

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

at the consideration of the combined sixth to eighth periodic reports of Georgia

2-3 May, 2016, Geneva

Madam Chair,

Distinguished Members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to be here today as the Head of Delegation of Georgia presenting the combined sixth to eighth periodic reports of Georgia under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

There have been significant positive developments regarding Georgia's compliance with human rights instruments during the last years. Before going through Georgia's major achievements, I would like to highlight the importance Georgia attaches to cooperation with UN human rights mechanism.

A firm supporter of the UN and regional human rights machineries, Georgia has signed and ratified most human rights instruments. Georgia regularly submits its periodic reports to the human rights treaty monitoring bodies and pays utmost attention to the implementation of their recommendations.

In order ensure effective implementation of Georgia's reporting obligations before UN treaty and charter-based bodies we have developed an inclusive national reporting process with the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Permanent inter-agency working group as the national coordination mechanism has been set up in 2014, which brings together high and mid-level officials from the executive, judicial and legislative branches. We pay particular importance to the wider engagement of the non-governmental sector in this process.

In November 2015, Georgia went through the 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Georgia has accepted majority of recommendations it has received during the review. Namely, we have declared our support to 191 recommendations out of 203. In order to keep the international community

informed of the process of implementation the recommendations, we have pledged to submit a mid-term report.

Furthermore, in order to ensure co-ordination between its national agencies when working to implement recommendations of UN-treaty-based bodies and recommendations received as a result of the UPR, as well as Special Mandate Holders, the Georgian Government is planning to include these recommendations in a National Action Plan for the Protection of Human Rights for 2016-17. This Action Plan is now being finalized in consultation with civil society representatives and international organizations. In addition, the Georgian Foreign Ministry's Ambassador at Large on Human Rights is responsible for systematically monitoring the country's implementation of Human Rights Council resolutions, of recommendations made by Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts, and of the outcomes of the UPR Process.

Georgia enjoys fruitful levels of co-operation with UN special mandate holders, and issued a standing invitation to all Special Rapporteurs in 2010. The Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment paid a visit to Georgia last year, and this year we welcomed the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences and the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

## Major achievements and developments in human rights

In recent years significant measures have been undertaken by Georgia at the policymaking and institutional levels to ensure coordinated state action for the purposes of the effective enjoyment of human rights. Along with the Gender Equality Council chaired by a Vice-Speaker of the Parliament, special posts were also appointed such as the Human Rights Advisor of the President, the Assistant to the Prime Minister on Human Rights and Gender Equality Issues, and an Ambassador at Large on Human Rights within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both, the President and the Prime Minister, have appointed Advisors on National Minority issues. The Committee on Human Rights and Civil Integration, as one of the standing committees of the Parliament of Georgia, has broad powers to monitor and evaluate the human rights situation in the country as well as to examine individual petitions from individuals.

Considering Georgia's religious diversity, the State Agency for Religious Issues was established in 2014 in line with best European practices. The Agency fulfils its mandate by making recommendations based upon research as well as upon conclusions reached through inter-religious dialogue between religious associations in Georgia. Agency implements the project aimed at awareness-raising of public servants in secularism and religious neutrality. Furthermore, in order to support inter-religious activities and to promote awareness-raising, an



open format for the dialogue - inter-religious council, which brings together all religious communities, was established by the Agency in 2015.

In 2014, for the first time, Georgia adopted the comprehensive and long-term Human Rights Strategy (2014-20), and subsequent Action Plan (2014-15), elaborated in a transparent manner with the active involvement of the civil society and international actors. Its effective implementation and monitoring is ensured by the Human Rights Secretariat and the Human Rights Inter-Agency Council under the Prime Minister. Council consists of the ministers as well as civil society representatives and international organizations with the right to vote. The Council is accountable to the Parliament by annual reporting.

One of the most recent and important developments in the legislation of Georgia is the adoption of the comprehensive anti-discrimination law on May 2, 2014 by the Parliament of Georgia. Elaboration of the new anti-discrimination law started in 2012. All competent ministries and local and international NGOs actively participated in the drafting process of the law. Feedback and recommendations provided by international organizations and experts were reflected in the text of the final law.

The purpose of the law shall be elimination of all forms of discrimination and to ensure for every person equal enjoyment of rights prescribed by law irrespective of race, color, language, national, ethnic or social belonging, sex,

sexual orientation or gender identity, marital or health status, disability, age, nationality, origin, place of birth, place of residence, social status, religion or belief, political or any other ground. Any form of discrimination, be it direct, indirect or multiple, are to be prohibited. It also prohibits discrimination in both the public and private sector and imposes responsibilities not only on public institutions, but also on any legal entities and individuals. Elimination of discrimination and ensuring of equality must be monitored and controlled by an independent body – the Public Defender of Georgia. For the monitoring of the implementation of the law, the Public Defender's Office created an Equality Department. In order to ensure effective fulfillment of the new tasks assigned by the law, the budget for the Public Defender's Office has already been considerably increased by 77% as compared to 2013. Namely, if the total budget of the office amounted to 3 million GEL – in 2013, in 2015, the budget reached 5.3 million GEL. Number of human recourses has been also increased by 23% in 2015 as compared to 2013.

Furthermore, in addition to criminalizing violation of Equality and Racial discrimination, in accordance with the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Criminal Code of Georgia was amended in 2012. According to the amendments, all crimes by the 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.

Human Rights Secretariat of the Administration of the Government of Georgia with the support of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, continues awareness raising campaign for the local municipalities and non-governmental organizations throughout the regions of Georgia, on human rights, including on anti-discrimination legislation.

During 2014-2016, numerous trainings have been organized in cooperation with international organizations and the Public Defender's Office for the law enforcement personnel, including prosecutors and police officers on relevant anti-discrimination standards, including on the new anti-discrimination law. In addition, a first distance learning course on discrimination- related issues was launched for prosecutors in 2016.

As a result of number of awareness-raising activities, in recent years, there are significant improvements with regard to the proper legal qualification of discrimination facts. The number of investigations on religious crimes increases annually. During the current year, there are already 9 criminal cases involving religious intolerance and in 6 cases, 9 individuals have been charged.

### **Internally displaced Persons**



The Government spares no effort to ensure decent living conditions for all IDPs, however, the only durable solution for them is a voluntary, safe and dignified return, as reaffirmed in UN General Assembly Resolutions on the “Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia”. Recently the UNHCR office in Georgia published an intentions survey among IDPs to hear their voices and perceptions on voluntary return and alternate durable solutions. As a result, 88% of IDPs expressed willingness to return to places of their origin in a safe and dignified manner. Despite Georgia's efforts, no progress has been achieved within the second working group of the Geneva International Discussions, designed to address the return of IDPs and refugees.

The Government is committed to ensure the protection of IDP rights. Relevant governmental strategies and action plans have been developed. IDP allowance has doubled and is being applied universally. IDPs are no longer evicted from their temporary places of residence. After the adoption of the new Law on Internally Displaced Persons in 2014, 10,708 displaced families living in temporary residences, received the residential area in the private ownership.

Significant progress has been made in terms of finding long-term solutions to promote the integration of IDPs and to ensure the protection of their rights during displacement. The new housing policy of Georgia, regarding IDPs established transparent procedures and criteria for beneficiary selection and



housing allocation. Durable Housing Solutions are tailored to IDP needs and entail different kinds of innovative options. State budget allocation for IDP durable housing solutions has dramatically increased. More than 15,000 IDPs have received accommodation throughout the country in the last two years. 690 housing units have been purchased in rural areas in 2014-2015 for IDP families. In the course of 2016, 813 IDP families will receive apartments in newly constructed buildings and 485 - in rehabilitated housing units in different regions of Georgia. Despite receiving accommodation from the government, IDPs will maintain their status until their return to their permanent places of residence.

Under the pilot Mortgage Loan Repayment project launched in 2015, the Government covered mortgage loan of up to 20,000 GEL for 49 IDP applicants. Furthermore, the Government is providing different financial assistance for vulnerable IDP families.

The Livelihood Strategy and respective Livelihood Action Plan for 2016-2017 envisage different activities to facilitate the employment and self-employment of IDPs. To this end, IDPs will be encouraged to enroll in different State Programs aimed at livelihood support, such as vocational education and training and small enterprises support programmers.

## **Ethnic Minorities**

According to the results of census conducted in 2014, by the Department of Statistics of Georgia excluding occupied regions, ethnic composition of Georgia is the following: Georgians 87.8%, Azerbaijanis 6.3%, Armenians 4.5%, Number of Russians, Ossetians, Yezids, Greeks, Kists, Ukrainians, Jews, Abkhazians, Assyrians, Kurds and others amounts to less than 1% for each ethnic group.

The effective implementation of a state policy for equality and civic integration is an important priority for the country. The Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality coordinates the process of the implementation of state policy towards ethnic minorities. The Georgian Government adopted a new Civic Equality and Integration Strategy and respective Action Plan for 2015-2020. Prior to the submission for adoption of the document to the Georgian Government, it was actively considered and discussed by different actors, including target groups. A new State Strategy and Action Plan build upon earlier experiences and introduce some new approaches to work efficiently. It is based upon the principle of equality and the 'more diversity, more integration' approach, and aims to contribute to the provision of equality; ensure the full participation of ethnic minorities in all spheres of public life; and preserve the culture and identity of national minorities. The new strategy pays special attention to Georgia's Roma population, and notably to their social and economic integration.

Ethnic minorities in Georgia have access to all stages of education, also in their native languages (Azerbaijani, Armenian, Russian). There are 213 non-Georgian public schools and 77 non-Georgian sectors functioning in Georgia.

To support and include ethnic minorities in higher education institutions special mitigation program “1+4” (the so-called quota system) has been elaborated and implemented for ethnic minority students since 2010. Program allows Armenian and Azerbaijani minority students to pass one exam on their mother language. They are then enrolled in a year-long intensive Georgian-language program before starting their undergraduate studies. Full state scholarship is available for them as well. Due to the mitigation system number of ethnic minority students has been considerably increased. Together with Armenian and Azeri students, Abkhazian and Ossetian minority students will have opportunity to participate in the program from 2016.

Cultural identity of ethnic minorities, including their linguistic rights, is preserved and well-protected. At this stage, the standards and programs of language instruction for smaller ethnic minorities groups (Ossetian, Kist/Chechen, Kurdish, Udi, Avar, and Assyrian languages) are approved and introduced at secondary schools. At the same time special programs that aim at improving state language instruction and civic integration of ethnic minorities are implemented at non-Georgian schools and are intended for ethnic minority public servants in the regions compactly populated by ethnic minorities.

Television and radio news programs in five national minority languages (Armenian, Azerbaijani, Russian, Abkhazian, Ossetian) are daily aired on the Georgian Public Broadcaster and "Public Radio". Printed media in Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian languages is also supported by the state.

2016 marks the year of parliamentary elections in Georgia. The Government of Georgia ensures the full engagement of voters representing ethnic minorities in electoral process through various projects and educational activities. During the 2012 Parliamentary, the 2013 Presidential and the 2014 Local Government elections representatives of national minorities were provided with equal electoral rights. Central Election Commission provided them with all the necessary information and documents in ethnic minority languages.

The ethnic minorities are represented in the executive, legislative and other public bodies. Currently, 7 ethnic minority representatives are represented in the Georgian Parliament. As indicated by the report of the Public Defender of Georgia, representatives of national minorities hold responsible positions in city councils and district administrations in the regions populated by minorities. The advisors of the President and the Prime Minister on National Minority issues are self-declared national minorities. At the same time it should be noted that State authorities do not register person's affiliation with a national minority on account of the right of self-identification. Therefore, only estimated figures are available based on self-identification and different surveys or reports.



Ethnic minorities have full and equal access to social-economic programs and benefits; they are provided with the information on state healthcare programs and social benefits in their native languages. Infrastructural projects have also been implemented. The legal aid centers were opened in regions populated by ethnic minorities.

The state supports activities aimed at preserving identity and promoting culture of ethnic minority groups, as well as inter-cultural dialogue. The Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia has been implementing the program “Supporting the Culture of National Minorities”, which supports museums, theatres and cultural centers of ethnic minorities as well as various cultural activities, programs and projects.

### **Roma population**

Relevant activities have been implemented for the registration of Roma population. In 2012-2015, 275 Roma were registered and provided with appropriate legal status; they are also provided with free legal consultations. In parallel, measures are undertaken towards their inclusion in education system and developing special educational programs for them. Ministry of Education implements program “Social Inclusion” aiming to support integration of vulnerable groups into the formal education. One of the focus groups and

beneficiaries of the program are Roma children. As a result of the program, the number of Roma children attending school has been increased: If, in 2014, 88 Roma children attended school, this figure has increased up to 155 in 2015. Furthermore, Crime Prevention Centre under the Ministry of Justice ensures the engagement of children working and/or living in the streets in educational, cultural and sport activities through various programs.

Within the EU funded project, "Reaching Vulnerable Children in Georgia - children living and working on the streets" the following services have been functioning under the Social Rehabilitation and Child Care State Program: 3 mobile teams in Tbilisi; 2 day-care centres, with capacity to provide service to 41 beneficiaries; 2 crisis intervention (with the capacity of 20 beneficiaries) centres; 2 transition centres in Tbilisi and Rustavi (with the capacity of 35 beneficiaries). In 2014-2015, within the State Program on "Social Rehabilitation and Child Care" day care centre in Tbilisi, one mobile team and day care centre for children living and working in the streets in Kutaisi have been developed.

The aim of the project is to develop the relevant mechanism and services to support children living and working on the streets, in particular, to offer them immediate support and protection and work with them and their families with the ultimate goal of integrating them into existing social and child protection services such as foster care and small group homes or to reintegrate them into their biological families.

Moreover, in order to address various issues related to the children working and/or living in the streets, including those who are from Roma community, the legislative package has been elaborated under the Inter-agency Council on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, which is presented to the Parliament for approval.

#### **Situation of non-citizens: migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and stateless persons**

A series of important measures have been also taken over the past few years to facilitate the integration of persons holding refugee and humanitarian status. Relevant legislation was strengthened and aligned with international standards.

On April 2, 2014, the Georgian Parliament ratified the 1961 UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. In order to support the harmonization of the Georgian legislation with the Convention, the Organic Law of Georgia on Citizenship was amended based on the principles of the Convention setting up of a number of mechanisms to prevent and reduce the number of stateless persons. Simplified procedure for granting citizenship of Georgia to refugees has been established.

As of November 28, 2014, asylum seekers are provided with the temporary identification cards, which legally equals to an identity document and at the same time represent a resident permit.

Asylum-seekers, refugees and humanitarian status holders enjoy the same rights as citizens of Georgia in the field of education: they are provided with pre-school education, as well as general education programs.

Georgia's Migration Strategy for 2016-20 and its respective Action Plan foresee the provision of integration programmes and state services such as education and healthcare for asylum seekers, refugees and humanitarian status holders. Moreover, the beneficiaries of these programmes also have access to Georgian language courses. Asylum-seekers, refugees and humanitarian status holders are provided with an accommodation, social assistance and free legal aid services as well.

In 2016, the special Working Group on Foreigners' Integration was set up within the framework of the State Commission on Migration Issues. The main focus of the Working Group is to develop and refine the policy on integration of foreigners legally residing in Georgia as well as to study the needs and develop respective recommendations/legislative amendments.

#### Health care services



Health services in Georgia is regulated by the Law of Georgia “On Health Care” under which the discrimination of the patient on the basis of race, language, sex, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property and title, place of residence, disease, sexual orientation or negative personal attitude is prohibited. The legislation of Georgia also protects the right to health care services of non-citizens.

In February 2013, the Universal Health Care Programme was launched, representing a major step towards improving access to health services for the entire population. The beneficiaries of the Universal Health Care program are citizens of Georgia, person who holds neutral ID card, neutral travel document; non-citizens residing in Georgia and having the status, refugees and humanitarian status holders.

In 2015, the Government of Georgia launched unprecedented Hepatitis C Elimination State Programme providing for free screening, examination and treatment of Hepatitis C with the latest generation of expensive medicines.

In order to improve accessibility and awareness on leading health care programmes including Universal Health Care and Hepatitis C Elimination State Programme, information campaign for ethnic minorities were implemented.

Information brochures were prepared and printed in Georgian language as well as in languages of ethnic minorities (Armenian Azerbaijani, Russian languages).

### **Forcefully deported persons**

The significant progress has been achieved in the context of the fulfillment of obligation on repatriation of forcefully deported persons from the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia by the former USSR in the 1940s.

5841 persons from 7 countries have applied for the Repatriate status to Georgian authorities in accordance with the legislation of Georgia. The status of repatriate has already been granted to 1 533 forcibly displaced people. Some 494 Azerbaijani citizens have repatriate status and obtained Georgian citizenship. The process is under way.

In 2010, the Georgian Government adopted a simplified procedure for the acquisition of Georgian citizenship by individuals with returnee status. In 2013, the procedures for applying for the citizenship of Georgia were further simplified. In 2014, the repatriation strategy based on the principle of the equality of all citizens, non-discrimination and the promotion of integration was approved.

Currently, drafting process of the strategy action plan is completed and internal inter-institutional agreement processes are underway. In order to be adopted, the Action Plan will be soon represented to the Government of Georgia.

The issue of the extension of the two-year term for the completion of citizenship procedures for the people forcibly deported in the 1940s is under examination, with the involvement of the relevant government agencies.

### **Overview of human rights situation in the occupied territories**

Currently, the territories of two regions of Georgia – Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali Region, Georgia are occupied by the Russian Federation. These two regions still remaining under foreign military occupation constitute above all dangerous “black holes” in verifying human rights violations and holding the violators accountable.

From the early 2008, the security and human rights situation in the regions drastically aggravated, which have gradually led to unbearable living conditions for the local ethnic Georgian population still remaining there, in spite of the foreign power-backed ethnic cleansing in early 1990s.

The terrorizing and discriminatory acts included, but were not limited to the occasional incidents of armed attacks on the ethnic Georgian villages, instances

of arbitrary detention and ill-treatment of their residents, arbitrary restrictions on the freedom of movement, cutting the humanitarian access and the utility supplies to the villages, followed by their heavy shelling in the immediate lead-up to the war.

The human rights violations acquired an indiscriminate character during the war and resulted in the new wave of ethnic cleansing. These unlawful actions carried out by the Russian armed forces and proxy regimes are documented by international and non-governmental organizations, among them: the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, United Nations, European Union, Council of Europe, OSCE, and Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group.

Quite recently, the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in the Request for authorization of an investigation pursuant to article 15 (dated 13 October 2015) emphasized that crimes against ethnic Georgians were committed “with particular cruelty and on discriminatory grounds, as evidenced by patterns of close range killings and executions as well as the infliction of serious bodily injuries, together with the widespread and systematic destruction and looting of ethnic Georgian property. The victims were typically intimidated and humiliated, and forced to watch their homes being razed to the ground.” As a result of this campaign of violence, the civilian population of ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia was substantially reduced. “The



Prosecution estimates that the ethnic Georgian population living in the conflict zone was reduced by at least 75%.”

The international community has been calling on the Russian Federation to bear responsibility for violations of human rights in the territories of Georgia which are under Russia’s effective control. The UN Human Rights Committee issued recommendations to the Russian Federation on the issue at its 97<sup>th</sup> (2009) and 113<sup>th</sup> (2015) sessions.

The occupation line along the administrative boundary line (ABL) with Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region separates Georgia from its two occupied territories. Russia continues to place undue restrictions on the local population, particularly ethnic Georgians wishing to cross the occupation line. The process of the installation of barbed wire fences by the Russian Federation along the occupation lines in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region mainly targets ethnic Georgian groups and violates their rights to free movement, property, family life and education in the native language.

The operating crossing points along the occupation line allow crossings only to individuals having one of the types of so called “documents” recognized by the occupying power and based on vague criteria as to the validity of these documents. According to information of the Press Office of the Russian FSB Border Guards, throughout the year 2015, the Russian FSB officers identified

more than 7000 people, most of them ethnic Georgians, wishing to cross so called “the Georgian-Abkhazian state border” without “proper documentation”. Worrying statements were made in Abkhazia region on possible future introduction of the so-called visa regime for ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia region or on complete closure of administrative boundary line.

The Russian FSB officers regularly carry out arbitrary detention for so called “illegal border crossing” along the occupation line. In most cases detention takes place with regard to ethnic Georgians. There are numerous cases suggesting ill-treatment by the Russian FSB officers of detainees predominantly ethnic Georgians.

The issue of homes and property of ethnic Georgians lost during the conflicts in Georgia remains unsolved. For years, the right to property of ethnic Georgians has been subject to systematic and gross violations in the occupied regions of Georgia; hundreds of houses of ethnic Georgians were burned/destroyed deliberately during and after the August War of 2008. The situation with regard to the right to property remains the same throughout last years.

As for the right to education in the native language, the situation remains alarming. In the Gali district of Abkhazia, which is predominantly populated by ethnic Georgians, there are 31 schools. By the end of the academic year 2014-2015, 97.57 per cent pupils and 91.78 per cent of employees of these 31 schools

were ethnic Georgians. From 31 schools only 11 schools had the status of Georgian schools until the end of the academic year 2014-2015. From the beginning of September of the academic year 2015-2016, drastic changes were made in the curriculum of these 11 schools, namely now all subjects are taught in the Russian language in the first four grade classes i.e. in first grade, second grade, third grade and fourth grade classes. Due to the complications with learning subjects in Russian, some families were forced to migrate from Gali district to the territory controlled by the central government in order to have access for their children of the Georgian language schools.

It should be particularly emphasized that a new wave of so called “passportisation” is taking place in the occupied region of Abkhazia. Residents of Gali district, which are predominantly ethnic Georgians, fear this so called “passportisation” will further deteriorate their condition. Undoubtedly, this so called “passportisation” may result in a situation where individuals, not eligible to so called new “Abkhaz passports” or so called new “residence permits”, face more complications regarding the right to property and the freedom of movement across the occupation line. On 3rd November 2015, Mr Khajimba, leader of the Sokhumi occupation regime, declared that he is concerned about a big number of residents of Abkhazia with Georgian citizenship. According to him, the exact number of Georgian citizens residing in Abkhazia should be known and they should adapt to local reality and for that reason a “law on legal status of foreigner” will be adopted in the near future. Ethnic Georgians



residing in the occupied region of Abkhazia have all grounds to be concerned about such perspective; status of a “foreigner” can at least restrict their right to property and deteriorate prospects of movement across the occupation line and, in the worst case, become ground for another wave of ethnic cleansing.

For years, the Georgian authorities have been advocating the involvement of international organizations in the issue of the protection of human rights in the occupied regions of Georgia. The Georgian government continues to emphasize the significance of the access of international human rights monitoring mechanisms in Abkhazia, Georgia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia. It is deplorable that the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia is prevented from monitoring inside the occupied regions, as provided by the Mission's mandate. The occupying power, exercising effective control, continues to prevent numerous international organizations, including humanitarian, from entering those territories. As of 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia started to issue quarterly reports based on open sources on the human rights situation on the occupied territories for the purpose of a wider engagement of the international community in improving the human rights situation in these areas.

The Government of Georgia is highly committed to adequately protect human rights and freedoms throughout its entire territory including the occupied regions. For example, the system of health care of Georgia operates a program



that ensures free of charge medical treatment of people living in the occupied regions of Georgia. They are offered to participate in the Hepatitis C elimination program. According to existing data, hundreds of residents from the occupied region of Abkhazia benefited from this medical system on the territory controlled by the central government.

In the framework of the 4+1 program, the Government gives an opportunity to the students living in the occupied territories to enroll study in high education institutions across Georgia through simplified procedures.

The peacemaking policy pursued by the Government of Georgia has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of citizens of the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia who cross administrative borders to use services offered free of charge by the Georgian Government. Unfortunately, local residents face serious problems from the occupation regime after returning back to their communities.

The Georgian Government has implemented the various projects in the following fields in the villages and settlements bordering the occupied regions: natural gas infrastructure; water supply; health care; scholarships for high education; library rehabilitations; school bus infrastructure; state subsidies for local farmers; opening of public service centers. It should be noted here that

multi-profile, fully equipped modern university clinic and a multifunctional trade centre are being constructed in the village of Rukhi.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have presented the approach of Georgian Government in the key areas of the Convention. My delegation is ready to provide detailed information on the questions the Committee may have.

Thank you for your attention.