**Statement by Ms. Lia Gigauri**

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**for Reconciliation and Civic Equality**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the great pleasure and honor - of having this opportunity to briefly address you today - I would like to start by underlining that the State Minister’s Office is committed to continue effective implementation of the Policy on Civic Equality and Integration. Human rights and dignity are core values of our Policy, which is in line with international standards and established best practices.

One of the key instruments of this policy is the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and respective Action Plan, which aims to further strengthen the equality and tolerant environment, ensure full participation of ethnic minorities in civic, political and socio-economic processes, as well as to protect cultural diversity. Effective implementation of the Strategy is coordinated by the State Minister through the Government Commission.

It should be underlined that in order to achieve relevant strategic goals, we have established specifically tailored and state funded civic integration policy mechanisms, which is considered to be as a unique practice. Among those, I would like to single-out: providing quality education in mother tongues, teaching of small minority groups’ languages ​​in schools, offering different programs for the purposes of: state language comprehensive learning, access to vocational and higher education, special internship in public sector, as well as media-products accessible in native languages.

Nowadays, as a result of the positive dynamic of this policy, we already have a significant number of educated, highly qualified ethnic minority youth with good command of state language and necessary skills to be actively involved in various spheres of public life.

While emphasizing the progress achieved, we acknowledge remaining challenges as impetus to further pursue inclusive policy, to strengthen human rights-based democratic, fair and multicultural society, where every citizen has equal opportunities.

**In response to the question raised by the representative of Sweden**, it should be noted that the participation of ethnic minorities in civic, political, socio-economic processes has improved significantly in recent years. Notable is the creation of ethnic minority public advisory councils in regional administrations and launch of special internship program in public sector, as well as large-scale awareness-raising campaigns on state programs and services in minority languages ​​that significantly improve socio-economic opportunities. Ethnic minorities participate equally and fully in the elections held in Georgia.

**In response to the question from a representative of the Netherlands**, it should be noted that the State supports cultural diversity, among others, by funding theaters, museums and cultural centers of ethnic minorities, as well as by various events. Strengthening and promotion of intercultural dialogue is one of the priorities of the new State Strategy.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic related needs the Government of Georgia will continue further protection and support of ethnic minority representatives through access to information and various services, including health and education.

Thank you for your attention!