**Ms. Lela Akiashvili**

**Adviser to Prime-Minister of Georgia**

**on Human Rights and Gender Equality Issues**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

I would like to thank distinguished delegates for the comprehensive questions. I will address part of them now and the remainder in my second intervention a bit later.

I would also like to expand our most profound gratitude to **national and international partners**, who work with us to further advance the framework of the human rights protection in Georgia.

We immensely value our regular **cooperation with NGOs** and appreciate their involvement in everything that **the Prime Minister’s Human Rights Council** does, as the national mechanism for monitoring, evaluation and reporting of human rights in Georgia. Continuous functional enhancement of the Human Rights Council ensures increased coordination of human rights protection.

I would also like to highlight our valuable cooperation with the **public defender’s office** and their continuously increasing mandate.

And thank my colleagues, **public servants** for their increased engagement in bringing human rights to the heart of their activities and would like to inform distinguished delegates that within the reporting period, the Government of Georgia has put special emphasis to **building knowledge** and **increasing capacity of public servants** on human rights through various means.

STRATEGY

As we finalize work on the on **the second-ever** National Human Rights Strategy of Georgia for 2021-2030, it is planned for the document to be adopted in the first half of 2021. The Strategy will serve as the main document defining the core human rights priorities and strategic directions of the Government until 2030.

The document will define **four key strategic priorities**, including **strengthening institutional democracy**, **economic and social protection**, promoting **equality,** with special focus on the protection of rights of minorities and elimination of all forms of discrimination. And protecting **population affected by the Russian occupation**.

GENDER, WOMEN’s RIGHTS

While observing the global backlash and increased risks amid the pandemic, Georgia is further **enhancing** gender equality at the highest **political** and **policy** levels.

During the pandemic, we ensure that on one hand the **information on reporting GBV** is available for the population, including **minority languages**. And on the other hand, we guarantee that state-provided free services are available for **all** victims of domestic violence, be it **VAW, sexual minorities, children, or older persons.**

Women’s Economic Empowerment, Child marriages, WPS agenda, cooperation with local government and gender mainstreaming are among other priorities that we are currently working on.

In response to the newly established regulations prohibiting sexual harassment, state entities began establishing **sexual harassment response mechanisms.**

Adopting **quotas at central and local level** was yet another important milestone in supporting women’s political participation. 60% of Georgian population support increased participation of women in politics.

LGBTQI, ANTI-DISCRIMINATION, EQUALITY

Equality and anti-discrimination is a priority of the Interagency Human Rights Council. We have enhanced the **cooperation with NGOs** in this regard**.**

Building on the best international practices and values, in 2020Georgia has adopted **the first-ever policy document on SOGI rights** as part of the National Human Rights Action Plan.

During the COVID-19 crisis, with the support of the EU, UNDP and Swedish Government, in partnership with NGOs we have set up a **rapid response mechanism** and now are working on long-term solutions to this instrument.

**Homophobic attitudes** continue to persist among the population. **More than half of women and 8 in 10 men** report they would **never have a homosexual friend**.

Access to existing services is also a challenge for many lgbtqi+ people.

Hence, **elimination of discrimination** through raising awareness and building tolerance remains high on the agenda.

A number of **awareness raising** and **tolerance building** campaigns are been conducted on central and local levels. Establishing equality as a national value is the end goal here.

Law enforcement agencies continuously advance prevention and response to crimes committed on grounds of gender identity.

LAW on PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Adoption of the new **Law on Protecting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (2020) has significantly increased the standard of PwD rights protection in Georgia.

Currently, the Government of Georgia is finalizing its work on establishing **the National Coordination Mechanism** under the CRPD. We closely cooperate with NGOs in the process. We are also working to ratify the Optional Protocol to CRPD.

Since 2015, a **monitoring body** has been established at Public Defenders Office, with whom Government also cooperates.

While numerous challenges remain, including stigma, overall, rights of PwDs are progressing. For example, the **election administration** is continuously guaranteeing the right to vote for PwDs by introducing various tools.

Recent data demonstrates that **public attitudes towards people with disabilities are gradually changing**. We hope that a **systemic approach** and **awareness-raising** will further decrease stigma and improve the daily lives of PwDs.

RIGHTS OF CHILD

**The Code on the Rights of the Child**, adopted in 2019, is based on the best interest of a child and recognized all rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The code will enhance coordination between the national, regional and local governments to ensure better education, healthcare and social security opportunities for children and their families.

Since 2012, poverty rate has declined in Georgia by 10 percentiles and children poverty by 9 percentiles. Despite the recent progress, social and economic support to children and their families remains to be a priority in post-COVID world.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Constitution of Georgia guarantees freedom of religion.

Both, **State Agency for Religious Issues at the Administration of the Government** and the **Public Defender’s Office** have Advisory Groups to ensure coordinated work with religious denominations. Number of activities are regularly conducted to raise awareness and build tolerance. For example, free Georgian language courses are offered to religious minority leaders, who also belong to ethnic minority groups and does not speak Georgian.

As for the formula for the restitution, the process of finalization of such formula is undergoing. More than 200 Mosques and all the Synagogue are already being transferred back. However, challenges in this regard remain that are being solved continuously.

Strict policy applies to crimes committed with religion-based intolerance motive. Launched investigations, as well as prosecution action and increased awareness among state employees corelates with increased response to such discrimination. However, stigma still prevails.

CLIMATE CRISIS

In order to protect human rights from adverse effects and adapt to climate change, Georgia started a nation-wide process for integrated climate risk management approach centered around risk reduction, prevention, and preparedness through the establishment of a multi-hazard early warning system and enhanced use of climate information in planning and decision-making across all sectors. This process will ensure increased protection for 1.7 million people from the heightened risks of climate change.

Questions:

STRATEGY

**Germany:** When does Georgia expect the new **human rights strategy** for the period after 2020 to be adopted? What are its priorities?

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

**Germany:** In July 2018, the Georgian Constitutional Court ruled the privileged position of the Georgian Orthodox Church vis-à-vis other religious groups to be unconstitutional. When does Georgia intend to adopt corresponding new regulations and which aspects will be addressed?

**Poland:** In light of reports by some non-governmental organizations the freedom of religion or belief in Georgia is affected at some instances by decisions issued by the state or municipal authorities that refuse authorizations to build new places of worship by religious minorities.

*What measures are going to be adopted by the Georgian authorities to address this issue with a view to enable all country’s inhabitants to enjoy this fundamental freedom?*

**US:** What steps has the Government of Georgia taken, and what additional steps does it plan to take, to ensure that individuals of all faiths, including those belonging to religious minority groups and those of no faith, are able to fully exercise their freedom of religion or belief in Georgia?

Belgium: How does the government of Georgia intend to effectively ensure an equitable and non-discriminatory formula for the restitution of all religious organizations’ property confiscated during the USSR era?

UK: What steps is the Government of Georgia taking to ensure religious establishments are treated equally under law and that individuals are free to practice and express their religious faith or non-belief in public and private, without facing any discrimination?

LGBTQI, ANTI-DISCRIMINATION, EQUALITY

**Germany:** A major challenge remains the negative attitude towards LGBTI persons in large parts of society. LGBTI activists who wanted to exercise their right to assembly were confronted with violence or threats of violence in the past. Is Georgia planning to take measures to reduce prejudice against LGBTI persons?

**US:** As discrimination, harassment, and violence against members of minority groups, women, persons with disabilities, LGBTI persons, and other members of vulnerable communities continue, what measures are in place to ensure access to justice for affected individuals? What is the Government of Georgia doing to ensure equality for all?

Canada:

What concrete steps have been taken by Georgia since its last UPR to improve the implementation and enforcement of the Law on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination, and ensure the protection of individuals against violence on the basis of gender or sexual orientation?

UK: What further steps will the government take to investigate allegations of violence and discrimination and to ensure LGBT persons are able to exercise their human rights, and express their identities without risk or fear?

GENDER, WOMEN’s RIGHTS

**Spain:** Which are the plans of the Georgian authorities in 2021-22 to modify the definition of rape, in such a way that is based on consent, in compliance with the Istanbul Convention?

**Belgium:** Which concrete measures is the government of Georgia envisaging in order to implement the principle of equal pay for work of equal value? Is the government of Georgia planning to intensify its efforts to prevent and combat all forms of gender-based violence?

**Netherlands:** The Netherlands would like to ask Georgia what plans the government will undertake to guarantee free and equal access of women and girls to rights and justice as well as their protection against all forms of violence;

RIGHTS OF CHILD

**Poland:** In 2017 the Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended to Georgia to “undertake awareness-raising campaigns […] to combat the stigmatization of and prejudice against children with disabilities, promote a positive image of such children and strengthen knowledge of the specific services available”.

*What actions have been undertaken by the authorities of Georgia to fulfill this recommendation? Will they be continued or enhanced in the future?*

Belgium: Which measures has the government of Georgia taken to improve the access to education for children from vulnerable groups, such as children in situations of poverty, those from ethnic minorities and those with disabilities as well as young mothers after childbirth?

LAW on PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**US:** What steps is the Government of Georgia taking to implement the newly passed Law on Persons with Disabilities and mitigate the discrimination, harassment, and violence faced by persons with disabilities?

CLIMATE CRISIS

How does Georgia protect human rights from the adverse effects of the climate crisis?

დღეს გაეროს ადამიანის უფლებების საბჭოს ფარგლებში 105 ქვეყანასთან ერთად, ვიმსჯელეთ საქართველოში ადამიანის უფლებების მიღწევებსა და გამოწვევებზე. საერთაშორისო საზოგადოებას გავაცანით ბოლო წლების განმავლობაში გატარებული ისეთი მნიშვნელოვანი სიახლეები, როგორიცაა

გაეროს წევრი ქვეყნები ადამიანის უფლებრივ მდგომარეობას შეაფასებენ.

უნივერსალური პერიოდული მიმოხილვის (UPR)

წევრი სახელმწიფოები ადამიანის უფლებათა დაცვის მდგომარეობის გასაუმჯობესებლად საქართველოს რეკომენდაციებს გაუზიარებენ.

აეროს უნივერსალური პერიოდული მიმოხილვის მესამე ციკლის ფარგლებში ქვეყანაში არსებული ადამიანის უფლებათა მდგომარეობის შესაფასებლად საქართველოში მოქმედი 11 არასამთავრობო ორგანიზაცია/კოალიცია ჩაერთო. 📣

✅სამოქალაქო სექტორმა მიმოიხილა არსებული გამოწვევები ადამიანის უფლებათა დაცვის კუთხით და რეკომენდაციებით მიმართა საერთაშორიო პარტნიორებსა და დიპლომატიურ კორპუსს, გაეროს წევრი ქვეყნების მიერ უნივერსალურ პერიოდულ მიმოხილვაში რეკომენდაციების ასახვის მიზნით.