

(Check against delivery)



**Statement by Ms. Elene Agladze
Deputy Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations
GA High-level plenary meeting
on the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Right and
Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and
Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
18 December 2018, New York**

Thank you Madam President,

I would like to thank [You] the President of the General Assembly for convening the High-level plenary meeting on the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

We strongly believe that human rights defenders play a vital role in democratic societies. The active engagement of individuals, groups and organizations is essential for the continuous progress towards the fulfilment of international human rights. Accordingly, human rights defenders perform important legitimate functions in democratic societies.

The government of Georgia is committed to ensure the accessible environment for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to freely operate and promote the protection of human rights in the country. Along with the legislation providing all the necessary guarantees for CSOs, the respective practical process is also in place.

In this context, the clear example of CSOs participation in the decision-making process should be highlighted. A large number of CSOs and independent experts were actively involved in the development of National Human Rights Strategy and respective Governmental Action Plan on Human Rights. The engagement of CSOs is ensured in all phases of policy-making process, starting from policy development and ending with the monitoring and evaluation.

We underline the importance of strengthening NGO's role and safeguarding the space for civil society to ensure that their voices are heard.

Let me also highlight the important role of national human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights. National human rights institution of Georgia – Public Defender's Office is a constitutional institution, which supervises the protection of human rights and freedoms in Georgia, identifies human rights violations and contributes to the restoration of the violated rights and freedoms.

Dear Colleagues,

Regrettably human rights defenders continue to face many challenges and often are the subject of reprisals. Georgia joins the call of international community for an immediate end to reprisals. There is an urgent need for all States to take necessary measures to prevent intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders and take appropriate actions to provide remedies for all acts of intimidation and reprisals. The challenge is particularly acute in the territories where the sovereign states are deprived of the opportunity to exercise effective control, namely the Russian occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia, where the human rights defenders are persecuted and silenced for their criticism. The case of the civil activist Ms. Tamar Mearakishvili is the latest example of this practice.

Finally, we reaffirm Georgia's strong commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights with an aim to ensure the full and equal enjoyment

of all fundamental rights and freedoms and underline readiness to join international community to strengthen the promotion and protection of the rights of human rights defenders.

I thank you.