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Intervention

Bishop Rusudan Gotsiridze
Evangelical Baptist church of Georgia

Agenda Item: 2 Legal Framework and Key Concepts

Thank you Madam Chair,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at the UN Minority Forum. My name is Rusudan Gotsiridze, Bishop of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia. But I will not only talk on behalf of my religious community but also The Religious Council of Georgia.

As it is mentioned in the Draft Recommendations 820 major Human Rights Conventions and Declarations have been ratified and signed by Georgia and translated into domestic legislation. • But as it has been addressed in UPR recommendations in 2011 minority rights, especially religious minority rights need to be better protected and promoted. In Recommendation A 105.62 it says in particular: **Ensure equal enjoyment of the right of freedom of religion or belief, both de**

jure and de facto². Georgian state has accepted the recommendation, but we would like to raise awareness in the Forum the shortcomings of its implementation.

For the last 13 months different minority communities have been the subject of religious extremism. Since last October 5 local Muslim Communities have been attacked, incidents of violence against Jehovah's Witnesses have increased. We have witnessed intolerance and aggression from the population. But there have not been adequate measures taken by the authorities who hold responsibility to protect the right of the religious minority communities. Unfortunately the state had little action to convert national educational environment into inclusive and nondiscriminatory system for those belonging to religious minorities. All these hostility against religious minorities is rooted into poor education and lack of awareness.

² UPR Recommendations

³ Muslim communities in villages: Village Nigvziani, Samtatskaro, Tsintskaro, Tjela; May 17 attack on demonstration against homophobia; ban of the initiative to build a shelter for the homeless...

The only instrument we can rely on is the Georgian legislation and international support. But In the beginning of November this year the Interior Ministry of Georgia has taken a lead in fighting blasphemy⁴. This amendment to Georgia's civil code, addresses anything from desecrating religious institutions and symbols to publicly offending the feelings of the faithful. The law has been introduced as an instrument to protect the .minorities from aggression. We agree on Draft Recommendations 23 that **State have to protect minorities against religious hatred, incitement to religious discrimination and hostility**. But no Blasphemy Ban or even Hate Speech Criminalization can ensure any protection especially in a society of immature democracy, where this will be only used against freedom of speech and expression.

We therefore want to use the opportunity and to urge this Forum to call on the government of Georgia:

- a) To withdraw the so called Blasphemy Law from parliament and to consider the threats and negative consequences of the legislation.
- b) to prioritize the awareness raising and education as an important mean to increase tolerance and nondiscrimination in Georgian society

Thank you

⁴ Georgia's Civil Code 169.1