

UN Forum on Minority Issues
Geneva, 15 December 2010

Topic: Meaningful and effective participation in economic and development
policy-making

Participation of the Georgian ethnic minorities in the economic life of Georgia

Statement by the Public Movement “Multinational Georgia”

(original: Mr. Chairman) Madam Chairperson, thank you for the opportunity to speak at this High Assembly. Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Agit Mirzoev and I represent the Georgian NGO “Multinational Georgia”.

I would like to focus my remarks on issues related to the effective participation of minorities in economic life and the decision-making processes in this area. Ethnic minorities form 16% of the total population of Georgia and populate the country both in compact and dispersed groups. Some regions densely populated by ethnic minorities suffer from daunting socio-economic conditions, low levels of infrastructure and information isolation from the rest of the country.

I would like to draw your attention to paragraphs 12, 15, 18, 21 and 25 of the draft recommendations on the Effective Participation of Minorities in Economic Life. Despite the considerable achievements of Georgia in the sphere of socio-economic reforms, namely progress in establishing a positive climate for business and investment, infrastructure development and the fight against poverty, the major problem of the low level of involvement of minorities in decision-making processes on the socio-economic issues affecting them directly still remains. An issue of inadequate representation of minorities particularly concerns the state apparatus, and local authorities; on the local government level, where their representation is slightly stronger, minorities are limited in making real decisions in the socio-economic sphere and remain dependent on the central authorities in the area of budgeting and local development programmes due to the underdevelopment of the Georgian local government system.

The occurrence of these problems is preconditioned by the quality of education of ethnic minorities and access to creations of the intellect, including awareness of their rights and mechanisms for their protection.

The minority policy and especially the linguistic policy, existing until recently, led to the fact that minorities living in Georgia are not sufficiently proficient in the state language, which leads to indirect discrimination against them in the field of education, particularly higher education and as a consequence, discrimination in employment and economic self-realisation resulting in unemployment, poverty and increasing level of illegal migration from the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities. Georgia is currently implementing a number of preferential conditions for the members of ethnic minorities with regard to enrolment in higher education, but the existing efforts are insufficient and do not prevent the indirect discrimination in the education system and the outflow of young people belonging to ethnic minorities from the country. Lack of proficiency in the state language is also one of the main reasons of underrepresentation of minorities in governmental bodies and at the positions in the public sphere.

To solve these problems, we recommend to:

1. involve representatives of ethnic minorities in the implementation and monitoring of the recently adopted National Action Plan for civic integration and the development of tolerance, particularly in the area of economic advancement of minorities, as well as enhancing the role of local governments in this process;

2. Establish a responsible person/entity in the Ministry of Economic Development, who would work on increasing the numbers of participating minorities in the decision-making process in the socio-economic sphere;

3. ensure a segregated system of producing statistics is in place, covering areas of employment, running a small business, education etc., distinguishing ethnic minorities;

4. Continue using affirmative action in relation to enrolment of members of ethnic minorities in higher education;

5. Involve ethnic minorities in the decision-making processes on issues of distribution of foreign technical assistance, in particular, in the framework of the millennium development goals, more concretely, in the creation of a working group bringing together representatives of minorities and donor organisations.