

## **8th session of the Forum on Minority Issues**

### **Public Defender of Georgia on Item IV**

I am an executive secretary at the Council of National Minorities. The protection of ethnic and religious minorities directly or indirectly guaranteed by a number of laws of Georgia. In addition to the international human rights treaties ratified by the state. Moreover, the criminal code prohibits interference with the worship services, religious prosecution and interference with the establishment of religious organisations.

Today we can say that the number of religious hate incidents has reduced in Georgia, but the reality is that majority cases of the previous years were not efficiently investigated and often those were not brought to justice. About forty-five religious hate incidents, including physical assaults and harassment have been reported against (...) witnesses. While the majority of these cases' investigation was initiated, they were not carried out effectively and the resulting of the case being closed without pressing charges. Only two cases were prosecuted, and in both of these cases a guilty judgement was issued.

Many incidents motivated by religious intolerance against Muslims have been reported including well-known cases in (...) involving physical assault as well as deploying police officers to remove a mosque minority in the village of (...) in the region of (...) and use of unnecessary force against protesters in dispute over a building that once operated as a mosque in the municipality of(...).

The Court proceedings are still underway in the case involving a protest of against the opening of a boarding school for Muslim children in (...) in 2014. The local Orthodox population has expressed its disagreement with the establishment of the Muslim religious cult by the (...) closed door as well as holding protests preventing students entering the building. The police officers did not intervene during these acts and were reluctant to start an investigation to identify the perpetrators. I would like to note that it is very important to address these hate crimes in an adequate and in timely manner. Late or not adequate direction from the authorities is the result in the increased number of hate crimes and our reality is that violence and aggression still exist in our society.

I would like to take this opportunity to stress the importance of including recommendations 14, 31, 33 and 49 in the final document.

Thank you.