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Statement by Rusudan Chanturia,

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Forum on Minority Issues – “Minority Youth: towards Inclusive and diverse societies”

Dear Chairperson, Dear Special Rapporteur, Dear distinguished participants,

On behalf of the UN Association of Georgia, I am delighted to join minority youth forum. UNAG has worked since 1995 to support and safeguard democratic aspirations of Georgia, and advance tolerance and integration of ethnic and religious minorities.

During the last 10 years, UNAG has taken its work to different avenues for change - policy development, media advocacy, minority capacity building and youth activism - eventually, merging those into a common purpose of building a fair, free and inclusive society. UNAG works with people and institutions with a purpose to build an environment that empowers minority communities for participation, supports Youth Centers across the country, builds connections between the peers and families across ethnic communities and persists to monitor hate speech, xenophobia and discrimination.

UNAG in partnership with the Government of Georgia is committed to invest significant amount of efforts to promote access to higher education among ethnic minorities. Through improving quota system management at HEIs, UNAG supports ethnic minority students to improve their academic experience and be integrated into cultural, linguistic, social, and academic life. In 2017, UNAG and the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality also launched the internship program at state institutions for ethnic minority youth – a first-ever initiative for improving minority youth employability.

Despite government and civil society's consolidated efforts, there are challenges that remain to be persistent. The main problem for ethnic minorities in Georgia is a language barrier due to which their opportunity to communicate with other citizens and have an access to information is limited, while they become vulnerable for anti-Western propaganda. Other challenges include poor quality of education at schools, early marriages, low minority representation in decision-making, high rate of unemployment and inconsistent approaches of the Government.

In order to lessen these challenges, several measures need to be taken. First, it is crucial to implement cohesive and systematic educational and integration reforms, including further improvement of mitigation policy for ethnic minorities (1+4 system) to have an access to HE; create job coaching and career development initiatives, promote meaningful opportunities and programs for minority youth participation, and implement concrete measures to enable minority youth to exercise their active role. In addition, it is vital to recognize the role of non-formal education for youth engagement, and facilitate young people's access to funding mechanisms for youth entrepreneurship.