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To the United Nations Office
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Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, allow me to express my congratulations to H.E. Ambassador Luis Alfonso de Alba who has been elected President of the 1st session of the Council, as well as other Members of the Council's Bureau. I align myself with previous speakers in wishing you and your team every success in your activities.

Mr. President,

It is my honour and privilege to address the newly established United Nations Human Rights Council. Georgia always supported the initiative to establish the Council, with a stronger mandate to monitor and ensure the implementation of commitments undertaken by Member States.

Human rights issues are among key priorities for Georgia. Having gained its independence, Georgia made its choice to build a state based on democratic values and the rule of law, to integrate into international community, European structures.

In general , the Constitution of Georgia and our laws meet human rights requirements and our international obligations in this sphere. Nevertheless, Georgia continues working to have them fully harmonized with international standards.

Today, Georgia is a State party to six main UN human rights instruments. Internal procedures are currently under way to ensure accession to the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

Georgia follows its international obligations with respect to the preparation and submission of state reports to the UN treaty monitoring bodies.

We have always fruitfully cooperated with the UN agencies and representatives dealing with human rights issues and we will continue following this way in the future.

At the regional level, Georgia is a State party to a series of the Council of Europe human rights instruments.

At the same time, we realize that it is even more important to translate our international obligations, constitutional and legislative human rights guarantees into practice.

Since the Rose Revolution of 2003, the new Government of Georgia has been expressing its commitment to improve the human rights situation in the country, and significant steps have already been made in this regard.

First of all, this is about measures aimed at combating corruption that actually undermined the enjoyment of human rights in our country. Many

corrupted public officials were brought to criminal responsibility and punished.

We are determined to further develop a strong independent judiciary where people are given fair treatment. The Georgian Government has declared 2006 the “Judicial Reforms Year” and significant measures are currently being undertaken to bring our judicial system in line with international standards and our international obligations.

Law enforcement bodies are also subject to reformation. A brand new structure – patrol police – has been established that managed to enhance public confidence to the law enforcement system.

State bodies are paying particular attention to human rights violations. In the Parliament of Georgia, the Committee on Human Rights and Civil Integration is established. Human rights units were set up at the Prosecutor-General’s Office and the Ministry of Interior. According to the Constitution, within the territory of the country the Georgian Ombudsman supervises the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Government of Georgia is taking steps to combat torture and human trafficking. National action plans to overcome these human rights violations were approved by the President of Georgia and tangible progress has been achieved in both spheres.

Georgian penitentiary has been a vital issue considered by the Georgian authorities. We are making every effort to bring the conditions in the penitentiary facilities in line with international standards.

Efficient steps were undertaken to fight against religion-based intolerance. Perpetrators who had violated the rights of various religious groups present in Georgia were brought to the court and punished in compliance with law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The most flagrant human rights violations still take place in the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which are currently *de-facto* out of control of the Government of Georgia. Many citizens of Georgia living there proved to be victims of gross human rights violations. In this context, it is necessary to remind that the final documents of Budapest (1994), Lisbon (1996) and Istanbul (1999) summits of OSCE contain strong condemnation of ethnic cleansing that resulted in mass destruction and forcible expulsion of the Georgian population in Abkhazia, Georgia.

The situation in Abkhazia, Georgia is a matter of our particular concern. CIS peacekeeping forces deployed in the region are unable (or unwilling) to put an end to the violence. Since the end of war activities and introduction of CIS PKF(1994), some 2000 ethnic Georgians were killed in the zone of responsibility of the CIS PKF.

There is an obvious need for active international reaction and monitoring of human rights violations in Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgia, especially in Gali district. This is about the establishment of joint UN/OSCE human rights office and deployment of UNOMIG civilian police component there, in conformity with UN Security Council resolutions. Special attention should also be paid to the instruction of mother tongue for the ethnic Georgian population in Gali district of Abkhazia, Georgia; nowadays, Georgians residing there are deprived of this essential right by the separatists and their political masters.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We highly appreciate the role the respective UN human rights institutions have been playing to further strengthen promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. But, even more can be done in the future.

In this regard, we would like to stress the significance of close contacts and interaction between the Human Rights Council and international organizations active in the field of human rights. First of all, this is about OSCE and the Council of Europe. At the same time, there are new sub-regional structures that might benefit from and contribute to the cooperation with the Council. Among them we are proud to mention a joint Ukrainian-Georgian initiative – the Community for Democratic Choice – and the Organization for Democracy and Economic Cooperation-GUAM to which Georgia is a Member State. The activities

of these structures are firmly based on the principles of democracy, and human rights protection and the rule of law are declared among their key objectives.

Finally, I would like to avail of this opportunity to wish every success to the new Human Rights Council and express our sincere hope for its fruitful activities.

Thank you for your kind attention.