



# GEORGIA

**Statement by Mr. Irakli Jgenti, Deputy Permanent Representative of Georgia to the UN Office and other international organizations in Geneva, 70th session of the UNHCR Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme**

**Geneva, 9 October 2019**

Mr. Chairman,  
Mr. High Commissioner,  
Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, let me express our sincere appreciation to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees its vital assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and stateless persons around the world. These efforts are of critical importance, especially against the background of new waves of mass displacement in different regions of the world.

Mr. Chairman,

This year marks the mid-way point of UNHCR's #IBelong campaign aimed to end statelessness within 10 years. In this respect, let me share Georgia's experience in this regard.

As a party to all UN Conventions aimed at preventing and reducing statelessness, Georgia has amended its citizenship legislation in compliance with international legal framework. Among the number of novelties introduced in 2014 was the Organic Law on Citizenship of Georgia that, inter alia, contains measures to prevent statelessness of children at birth and reduce statelessness by eliminating loss of citizenship due to the residence abroad. In addition, in March 2014 we adopted the Law on Legal Status of

Aliens and Stateless Persons, which includes provisions on the rights and obligations of stateless persons.

When it comes to the issue of international protection, Georgia has made significant reforms aimed at ensuring the protection of those who have been forcefully displaced from their countries of origin. The law of Georgia on International Protection, which is in line with 1951 UN Convention and its 1967 protocol, specifies general principles and strengthens procedural safeguards at all stages of the asylum procedure; it also guarantees special procedures for persons with specific needs; elaborates rights and freedoms of asylum-seekers, refugees and other persons in need of international protection, providing them with more favorable treatment.

In practical terms, since 2012, Georgia has received more than 8,100 asylum-seekers, of whom more than 1,400 asylum-seekers were granted international protection. Along with guaranteed safe stay in Georgia, asylum-seekers, refugees and humanitarian status holders benefit from the state universal healthcare program and enjoy labor and education rights. Furthermore, persons having international protection, receive monthly allowance during their stay in Georgia.

The Government of Georgia actively cooperates with UNHCR and other international organizations while guaranteeing efficient asylum procedure as well as socio-economic assistance to our persons of concern. With the aim of deepening the international cooperation, Georgia has already proposed the initiative of active cooperation with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). To this end, we count on UNHCR's support in facilitating this cooperation.

As for the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), we are confident that it will work as a way forward to the new pragmatic approach towards a global system, where the responsibility is shared to work together to build a safer, more humane and prosperous world for generations to come.

Mr. Chairman,

In light of the foregoing considerations, it should be noted that Georgia has its own difficulties with regard to the forced displacement. For more than 25 years, hundreds of thousands of Georgian citizens who as a result of several waves of ethnic cleansing had been expelled from Georgia's occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region continue to be deprived of their fundamental right to return to their homes in safety and dignity. While the Government of Georgia continues its efforts to promote the socio-economic integration and improve the living conditions of IDPs until their voluntary, safe and dignified return to their places of origin, we are continuously prevented from extending protection to the population residing in Georgia's occupied regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali, which is deprived of minimal safeguards and stripped of the fundamental rights and freedoms.

Mr. High Commissioner,

In this context, let me emphasize that we highly value your contribution in addressing the humanitarian needs of conflict-affected people, including those living in the occupied regions of Georgia as well as in adjacent territories to the occupation line. Active engagement of Tbilisi based UNHCR's office in the second working group of the Geneva International Discussions (GID) and firm stance on the issues related to the fundamental right of return of IDPs and refugees, as well as the grave human rights situation of local population, was particularly important throughout the recent years. In this regard, we express hope that this practice will be maintained in the future.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that the Government of Georgia is committed to further improvements in the field of statelessness. To this end, no later than 2021 the Government will carry out activities aimed at prevention and reduction of statelessness as well as protection of stateless persons in Georgia, namely the Government will:

- Facilitate naturalization for stateless persons by introducing legislative amendment to the law on Citizenship of Georgia aimed at reducing the 10-year residence period required for naturalization to half.
- The fee for statelessness determination procedures will be reduced to half in order to increase accessibility of the status determination procedure.
- Georgia will include the stateless status applicants in the emergency outpatient and emergency inpatient care of the State universal healthcare program.
- The stateless status applicants will enjoy the right to State free legal aid. With this aim, the stateless status applicants will receive both legal counselling and, representation to the administrative bodies and courts by the state funded agency -Legal Aid Service.
- The "door –to-door" campaign to identify and document stateless persons will be undertaken.
- Over the remaining years of the #Ibelong Campaign to end Statelessness, Georgia commits to work with UNHCR to raise awareness and foster common understanding about statelessness in a manner that is inclusive of stateless persons on its territory, among others through implementing relevant obligations under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which Georgian government already nationalized.

Excellences,

In light of the above-mentioned, we reiterate our full support to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in its endeavor to end the problem of statelessness within 10 years.

Georgia stands ready to contribute to these efforts. I thank you!