

ՀԱՅ ԱՌԱՔՆԱԿԱՆ ՈՒՂԱՓԱՆ ՍՈՒՐԲ  
ԵԿԵՂԵՑՈՒ ՎԻՐԱՀԱՅՈՑ ԹԵՄԻ ՄԵՏԱՎՈՒՅԹԻ,  
ԿՐԹՈՒԹՅԱՆ և ԵՐԻՏԱՍԱՐԴՈՒԹՅԱՆ  
«ՀԱՅԱՐՏՈՒՆ» ԿԵՆՏՐՈՆ



საქართველოში სომეხთა სამოციქულო  
წმიდა მართლმადიდებელი ეკლესიის  
კულტურულ-საგანმანათლებლო და  
ახალგაზრდული ცენტრი „ჰაიარტუნ“

CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL AND YOUTH CENTRE "HAYARTUN" AT THE DIOCESE OF ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC ORTHODOX HOLY CHURCH IN GEORGIA

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Mr. Chairperson,

Distinguished Members of the Delegations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Levon Isakhanyan, and I am Georgian of Armenian origin. The Armenian community of Georgia constitutes the third largest community with approximately 250 000 members. The vast majority of persons belonging to the Armenian community in Georgia can be characterised as persons belonging to a national, linguistic and religious minority.

Instances of discrimination against Georgian citizens of Armenian origin are multifaceted and include both direct and indirect discrimination.

Indirect discrimination is about the *de facto* consequences of policies adopted on the basis of *prima facie* non-discriminatory legal acts, which notwithstanding their seemingly neutral character cause a disproportionately negative impact only on specific segments of the society. With this regard I would like to recall the provisions of the Georgian legislation which state that Georgian is the only official and administrative language in Georgia (except the Abkhazian language in Abkhazia), which is considered as discriminatory. It constitutes a legal precondition for indirect discrimination of very large segments of the Georgian society, which due to the specific history of regions where they have been living since many generations, and the State's inability to provide adequate teaching of the Georgian language to these segments of society, do not speak the only administrative language, and thus are deprived of the possibility to be hired in public service. Even though the mentioned legal provision is not specifically aimed or directed at the Armenian community of Samtskhe-Javakheti, it nonetheless has disproportionately prejudicial effects on them, and for this reason it is discriminatory.

Furthermore, the low level of participation of persons belonging to the Armenian community at other levels of government, especially in the capital of Georgia where Georgian citizens of Armenian origin constitute the second largest group proves the unwillingness of Georgian authorities to allow for meaningful political participation of minorities.

Instances of direct discrimination concern the religious rights. Although the equality and non-discrimination have been included among the fundamental provisions of the Georgian Constitution, only the Georgian Orthodox Church receives state finances from the budget. Moreover, only the Georgian Church was able to secure restitution of property confiscated during the Soviet period. We believe that such an approach vis-à-vis religious organisations is discriminatory and constitutes direct discrimination.

Due to the ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the nationalism of significant segments of the ethnically Georgian population, the lack of civil cohesion in the society, and the consideration of minorities through the prism of state security, persons belonging to national minorities have been unable to secure their legitimate stake in the process of Georgian nation-building and democratic consolidation. Moreover, the authorities of the independent Georgia have proved unwilling to accommodate legitimate concerns of persons belonging to national minorities living under the Georgian jurisdiction. However, effective participation of minorities in the processes of democratic consolidation is a pre-requisite for Georgia to become a viable and functioning state. Without being able to secure a proper stake within the process of post-totalitarian nation-building in Georgia, minorities risk to stay the second-class citizens.

The existing low level of political participation of persons belonging to the Armenian community in Georgia does not allow for meaningful political representation at all levels of government. Moreover, Georgians of Armenian origin living in Javakheti province, where they constitute 95% of the local population, do not have sufficient command of the State language and for this reason they are deprived of any possibility of participation in public affairs. The Government of Georgia should consider a possibility of allowing the use of minority languages in local administration in those regions where the minorities constitute a significant part of the local population. It should be mentioned that the Constitution of Georgia, in the case of Abkhazian allows use of the Abkhazian language at local level. Thus, why other minorities which densely live in certain regions under Georgian jurisdiction should not be allowed to enjoy the same right?

In conclusion I would like to stress that all the above mentioned facts cause significant barriers for the formation of inclusive democracy in Georgia, and impede its development in the long-term perspective.

Our recommendations to the Georgian authorities would be:

- to increase the political participation of national minorities in Georgia at both local and central levels of government;
- to intensify efforts directed at teaching the State language in regions with dense minority population;
- to consider a possibility of allowing use of Armenian language at the level of local government in the province of Javakheti, where ethnic Armenians constitute 95% of the population;
- to elaborate and execute specific policies directed at fight against both direct and indirect discrimination, especially in the field of language rights, education and religion;
- to return the property of the Armenian Church and of other religious minorities, confiscated during the Soviet period.

Thank you for your attention!