

Dear Sir/Madam

The Office of Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia expresses its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and has the honor to address you with the following:

The Ombudsman of Georgia welcomes the adoption of the resolution 21/3 on promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms through a better understanding of traditional values of humankind. Albeit states vary in history, culture and religion, all cultures and civilizations share common set of values that belong to the entire human race such as dignity, freedom and responsibility. These values have made important contribution to the development of human rights norms and standards.

With due respect to the adoption of the resolution 21/3, the Public Defender expresses his hope that a better understanding of traditional values shared by all humanity can contribute to more successful promotion and protection of human rights in every society. Likewise, Public Defender expresses his hope for a correct discourse of traditional values in human rights norms to be one of the prerequisites for more successful implementation of human rights commitments into national legal and social contexts. As cultural traditions shall never stand as justifications for human rights violations, the Public Defender of Georgia believes that, if applied correctly, traditions and customs in compliance with international human rights standards can be exploited as tools for human rights promotion and protection and not as instruments for undermining them.

Notwithstanding Georgia's strong cultural peculiarities and multiethnic representations, values of dignity, freedom and responsibility are fruitfully applied in human rights protection activities by the Office of Public Defender of Georgia (PDO). These activities include, but are not limited to awareness raising campaigns, round table discussions as well as examination of individual or general human rights cases. PDO has predominantly developed best practices in the application of traditional values while promoting and protecting human rights and upholding human dignity in the sphere of women's rights.

In particular, the Constitution of Georgia, the main legal act in the country provides legal guarantees for the equality and non-discrimination. In order to eradicate violence in the family, the Parliament of Georgia adopted law on *Eradicating Violence in the Family, Protecting and Assisting Victims of Violence*. Along with the guarantees of equality among the family members, this legal act endeavors to prevent domestic violence, ensure access to justice for victims of violence, to establish mechanisms for victims' and oppressors' assistance and rehabilitation.

Notwithstanding existing legal guarantees of equality and non-discrimination, traditional attitudes according to which women are regarded as to have stereotyped roles still are matters of concern in Georgia. Family violence and abuse facilitate the maintenance of women in subordinate roles; in many instances these practices deprive women the equal enjoyment of human rights and are incompatible with their dignity. Such practices mainly include physical and psychological forms of coercion, impairing equal participation of women in family life. Violence is not reported by reason of preserving family honor, fear of segregation from family and the community. In addition, these concerns are mainly regarded as private problems of women and their families. The unfortunate persistence of such attitudes and practices are attributable to their deeply rooted nature into the cultural context.

As human rights education plays crucial role in the promotion and protection of women's rights and for the elimination of stereotyped attitudes toward them, PDO launched educational activities, involving different stakeholders in discussing individual cases on family violence on the basis of better understanding of traditional values. These stakeholders comprised of the agents of the Council on Ethnic and Religious Minorities under the PDO. The involvement of Council on Ethnic and Religious Minorities were essential for cooperating with ethnic and religious leaders and for transmitting the messages to their communities.

In particular represented communities included "Society of Jew Women", "Women of Multiethnic Georgia", "Evangelic-Baptist Church of Georgia", and "Inner Georgia", along with the police and the Social Service Agency. PDO, in conjunction with these communities utilized concepts of dignity, freedom and equality for eradicating domestic violence. The participants discussed these notions through the canons of their religious denominations. In addition, PDO employed the concept of a *participatory action*, by means of which representatives of the target group of change initiate/are engaged in transformation themselves. By elaborating these notions representatives of the target groups analyzed the causes of the problem. They, along with the government, established an action plan on detailed activities and feasible results for eradicating violence in the families of their particular communities. This in itself has led to relief for many women and brought reduction of stereotyped attitudes toward women in these specific groups. Besides, the discussion has led to launching a dialogue between different groups, which ensured perseverance of cultural diversity and promotion of universal human rights.

In addition, PDO carries out gender sensitive trainings for different target groups in order to raise awareness on women's rights. The training manuals always incorporate the notion of indivisibility of human rights. These activities resulted in increase in the level of reporting of violations of women's rights both at the PDO and at the police.

The Public Defender expresses hope for a productive input on best practices in the application of traditional values while promoting and protecting human rights and upholding dignity.

Hereby, the Office of Public Defender of Georgia would like to avail itself of the opportunity to express its readiness for future active cooperation in this sphere and willingness to facilitate the implementation of relevant international standards in national legislation as well as in practice in Georgia.

Respectfully,

Ucha Nanuashvili

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