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Enabling Choices: Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development

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Intervention of Ms. S. Japaridze, Advisor on Human Rights and Gender Equality Issues to the Prime Minister

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to address one of the key trends observed in the region in terms of Inequalities, social inclusion and rights:

Harmful practices against women and girls:

Elimination of Child/Early marriage and Son preference and gender-biased sex selection have been placed on the public and government agenda in Georgia since 2014;

- The legislative changes stipulated official age of marriage at the age of 18 without exceptions;
- Special Task Force has been established at the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence for coordinating response measures among the government, international and national non-governmental actors;
- The solid body of evidence was generated through high-quality research, which served as a basis for designing prevention interventions;
- The recent (2017)¹ qualitative research on Harmful Practices² demonstrate that deeply rooted gender norms and economic factors are drivers of early/child marriage practice. The lack of adolescent agency, lack of economic and non-formal education opportunities in local communities, limit the potential of young people and make

¹ Trends in Sex Ratio at Birth in Georgia – An Analysis based on the 2014 General Population Census Data”

(2017) developed in cooperation with National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat) and UNFPA Georgia office

² “Exploring Harmful Practices of Early/Child Marriage and FGM/C in Georgia” - Results from a Qualitative Research. Tbilisi, Georgia and Washington, DC; National Center for Disease Control and Public Health, Promundo US, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) 2017.

them more vulnerable to early/child marriage, which has lifelong implication on education, health and wellbeing, often manifested in domestic violence.

- Interestingly, we have observed that gender-biased sex selection has been further encouraging and reinforcing child/early marriage practice because of “marriage squeeze” in rural closed ethnic minority communities.
- Therefore, the innovative approach was used in Georgia –addressing both harmful practices through a local communication campaign targeting adolescents, their parents and religious leaders in the selected regions of Georgia, which are affected the most. This has been a collaborative effort involving relevant line ministries, local self-governance bodies, civil society partners, religious confessions, local civic activists. The set of preventive measures are spelled out in the National Action Plan on Gender Equality approved by the Government;
- The recent trend observed in Georgia towards normalization of the Sex Ratio at Birth, which in 2016 reached its biological norm, might be of significance not only for Georgia, but for other countries of the region affected by this phenomenon: as evidenced by the recent research (2017), this positive dynamics can be attributed to a number of factors, such as strengthened state institutions and the social security system, improved economic conditions, a rise in fertility rate, economic empowerment of women, and the increased cultural influence of shared Western values.

The message is clear – we need to strengthen our efforts towards strengthening a harmonious society based on principles of human rights and gender equality, which is a cornerstone of sustainable development of our nations and countries.