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**Statement by H.E. Mr. David Zalkaliani, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs  
of Georgia  
at General debate on the theme “Ensuring that no one is left behind”  
Ministerial meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable  
Development (HLPF), convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social  
Council (ECOSOC)**

**New York, 18 July 2016**

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Almost a year ago we agreed to leave no one behind by ensuring that every person – regardless of ethnicity, gender, race, physical condition, social position or other status – is guaranteed equal rights and is free from violence and discrimination. This High-Level Political Forum is an excellent opportunity for the international community to once again address the issue of equality and reaffirm its commitment, as well as consolidated position against the background of numerous emerging security and humanitarian threats across the globe, including the armed conflicts.

Georgia is one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse states in the region. Therefore, protecting all groups of population is one of the top priorities for my Government. Over the past years, Georgia has made important progress in protecting minority groups by enacting new legislation, including the anti-discrimination law, and elaborating policies to ensure equality and integration.

We are fostering inclusive education as it represents a milestone of successful civil integration. In order to promote access to all stages of education, special programs have been elaborated for teaching Georgian language to national minorities and to

promote enrolment of minority students in institutions of higher education. The Law on Higher Education was amended to establish a new system allowing better access for national minorities to institutions of higher education in Georgia.

Understanding that gender equality is fundamental to democracy and sustainable development, the Government of Georgia spares no effort to develop and implement higher standards for the full protection of women's rights. Recently adopted National Action Plan on Protection of human rights for the period of 2016–17, which has been elaborated in a transparent manner with the active engagement of civil society and international actors, incorporates chapters on gender equality and the empowerment of women, on prevention of domestic violence and violence against women and on implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325.

Georgia fully acknowledges the importance of the protection and full enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms by persons with disabilities. With the view to ensuring equal opportunities for persons with disabilities, the relevant National Action Plan was adopted and the State Coordination Council was established.

Excellencies,

While streamlining our efforts in order to leave no one behind, we should not forget a huge group of population affected by forced displacement and deprived of the right to safe and dignified return to places of origin.

The plight of the IDPs in Georgia dates back to the early 1990s, when hundreds of thousands of Georgian citizens of various ethnicities had to leave their homes as a painful consequence of devastating conflict. The Russia-Georgia War in 2008 and subsequent occupation of Georgian territories resulted in a new wave of forcible displacement of tens of thousands of people, those residing inside the occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions continue suffering from persistent violations of their fundamental rights, including but not limited to freedom of movement, education in native language and family life.

As I speak, a Georgian family is mourning a brutal murder of their son, Giga Otkhзорia, an IDP from Abkhazia, which has been recently shot dead by the so-called "border-guards" while trying to cross the occupation line. This tragic incident should serve as a strong reminder to all of us to refocus attention on the situation of IDPs and explore new approaches to protection and assistance at the national and international levels. It is also absolutely necessary to pay more attention to the root-

causes of forced displacement and opt for preventive rather than reactive measures to avoid crisis situations conducive to mass displacement. To this end, we welcome the outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit, where leaders committed to prevent and end conflicts and promote a new approach to displaced people, while recognizing that return to the places of origin under stable conditions is the overarching goal.

Distinguished delegates,

Leaving no one behind is our solemn commitment, which requires that all countries and actors work together effectively for everyone, every time and everywhere. Our objective can only be achieved if each of us remains adhered to the fundamental humanitarian principles and commitments under International Humanitarian Law.

I thank you.

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