

# State Agency for Religious Issues



## LEPL STATE AGENCY FOR RELIGIOUS ISSUES OF GEORGIA

### 2023-2025 Annual Report

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# Freedom of Religion and Belief in the Occupied Territories of Georgia in 2023-2025

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## 1. General Overview

In the occupied territories of Georgia, both in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia (hereinafter referred to as the A/R) and in the occupied part of Shida Kartli (Tskhinvali region), the situation in terms of freedom of religion is extremely difficult, namely: the freedom of religion of ethnic Georgians, freedom of expression, manifestation of faith through confession, preaching, observance of rules and rituals, freedom of movement and the right to receive education in their native language are violated. There are numerous Georgian Orthodox churches in the occupied territories of Abkhazia and Samachablo (Tskhinvali region), which have been subject to multiple cases of arbitrary transformation and damage.

It is worth noting that since the Georgian government's jurisdiction does not extend to the occupied regions of Georgia, obtain information is difficult. Consequently, monitoring cannot be carried out and the condition of only some cultural heritage monuments located there is known, while the fate of most of the monuments is unknown. Moreover, there is no information about the condition of archaeological monuments there. It is clear that all the historical monuments remaining there are vulnerable and under threat today. Nevertheless, the Agency has obtained information from various sources about the religious situation in the occupied territories, which is provided below.

The situation in terms of freedom of religion in the occupied territories of Georgia, the occupied A/R of Abkhazia and the occupied part of Shida Kartli (Tskhinvali Region), remains extremely difficult. The number of internally displaced persons from both regions is approximately 500,000.

The fact is that ethnic and religious discrimination and segregation of Georgian Orthodox Christians has been ongoing for years in the occupied territories. This is clearly evidenced by the decision of the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights on January 21, 2021 in the case (case No. 38263/08)<sup>1</sup> "Georgia v. Russia". The State of Georgia won the case against the Russian Federation, related to the August 2008 war. During the armed conflict with Georgia, the Russian Federation violated the following articles of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Additional Protocol No. 4 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, and Additional Protocol No. 1 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms:

- **Right to life (Article 2);**
- **Prohibition of torture (Article 3);**
- **Right to liberty and security (Article 5);**
- **Right to respect for private and family life (article 8);**
- **Freedom of movement (article 2 of the 4<sup>th</sup> additional protocol);**

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<sup>1</sup>[https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?fbclid=IwAR0y\\_72uhd5rMqFRMQ44ttzAFp5c3uEfmW9MFzqSwa5WfPEXybZ40m\\_19f4#{%22appno%22:%2238263/08%22},{%22itemid%22:%22001-207757%22}}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?fbclid=IwAR0y_72uhd5rMqFRMQ44ttzAFp5c3uEfmW9MFzqSwa5WfPEXybZ40m_19f4#{%22appno%22:%2238263/08%22},{%22itemid%22:%22001-207757%22}})

- **Protection of property (Article 1 of the 1<sup>st</sup> Additional protocol).**

The Russian Federation has also failed to cooperate with the European Court of Human Rights, thereby violating Article 38 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (case review).

The Grand Chamber of the Court found that Russia exercised effective control over the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia and, therefore it was responsible for violating the rights of Georgian citizens. Accordingly, the Court upheld Georgia's claim that the Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia are integral parts of Georgia and are occupied by Russia. In addition, and most importantly, the Court found that Russia carried out ethnic cleansing of Georgians during the 2008 war.

Following the Strasbourg Court's ruling, on December 16, 2022, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court in the Hague, Karim Khan, announced the completion of the investigation phase of the "Situation in Georgia" that on June 30, 2022, the First Pre-Trial Chamber issued arrest warrants for three suspects relating to the illegal deprivation of liberty, torture, ill-treatment, hostage-taking and subsequent illegal transfer of ethnic Georgian civilians during the occupation of Georgia by the Russian Federation in August 2008 (one of the suspects is a citizen of the Russian Federation and two are the representatives of the separatist regime). It also affirms the mass looting and destruction of Georgian villages and houses belonging to Georgians, and the denial of the right of return of the Georgian population of the Tskhinvali region. The above facts indicate another significant success of the Georgian side against the Russian Federation<sup>2</sup> in international courts.

On May 19, 2016, in the vicinity of the occupation line, in the territory controlled by Georgia, the so-called Abkhazian border guard Rashid Kanji-Oghli killed Giga Otkhзорia, an unarmed, peaceful Georgian citizen. After the incident, Rashid Kanji-Oghli, along with his accomplices immediately fled to the occupied territory of Abkhazia. The so-called Military Prosecutor's Office of the de facto Republic of Abkhazia launched an investigation into the Otkhזורia's murder case. The court of the de facto republic of Abkhazia imposed house arrest on the accused Rashid Kanji-Oghli as a preventive measure. On May 31, 2017, the Georgian authorities became aware that the de facto military Prosecutor's Office of Abkhazia had terminated the investigation and criminal prosecution of Giga Otkhזורia's case, citing a lack of evidence. Regarding the aforementioned murder case, G. Otkhזורia's family members filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights on January 11, 2018. The European Court of Human Rights began the substantive hearing of the murder case of Giga Otkhזורia on November 8, 2018. On December 19, 2023, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in the case of Matkava and Others v. Russia (no. 3963/18)<sup>3</sup>, finding a violation of Article 2 (right to life) of the European Convention on Human Rights and awarding Giga Otkhזורia's family EUR 130,000 in compensation for non-pecuniary damage. In the present case, a violation of Article 38 was also found, as the Russian Federation failed to submit the relevant criminal case materials to the court. Due to Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and the exercise of effective control over the occupied territory, it is the Russian Federation that bears responsibility for human rights violations in the territory of the

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/prosecutor-international-criminal-court-karim-aa-khan-kc-announces-conclusion-investigation>

<sup>3</sup> <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22001-188046%22%5D%7D>

de facto Republic of Abkhazia and for the actions committed by the representatives of the de facto authorities of Abkhazia. It is noteworthy that the European Court of Human Rights upheld the applicants' petition and ordered the Russian Federation to provide full copies of the investigative materials obtained by the de facto authorities of Abkhazia in the framework of the investigation into the murder of Giga Otkhozoria. Despite this, the Russian Federation failed to comply with its obligation.

It is noteworthy that the separatist murderer "Border Guard" has still not been punished, despite the fact that in 2016 the Zugdidi District Court fully accepted the evidence presented by the Prosecutor's Office and found fugitive Rashid Kanji-Oghli guilty in absentia of premeditated murder and illegal acquisition, storage and possession of firearms under Article 108 and Parts 2 and 3 of Article 236 of the Criminal Code of Georgia and sentenced him to 12<sup>4</sup> years of imprisonment. By the decision of the Kutaisi Court of Appeal on March 7, 2017, Rashid Kanji-Oghli was found guilty of the premeditated murder of Giga Otkhozoria and illegal acquisition and possession of firearms and was sentenced to 14 years in prison. As of today, Rashid Kanji-Oghli is wanted by Interpol under a red notice. The de facto government of Abkhazia refuses to extradite Rashid Kanji-Oghli to the Georgian government.

On April 9, 2024, the European Court of Human Rights in the interstate dispute "CASE OF GEORGIA v. RUSSIA (IV) (Application no. 39611/18)<sup>5</sup> " (the so-called "Ongoing Occupation Case"), held Russia fully responsible for the mass harassment, detention, attacks, murders and toleration of such acts against the Georgian population in the occupied territories and along the occupation line, which is taking place against the background of the occupation and "borderization" of Georgian territories.

In the case "Georgia v. Russia (IV)", the Strasbourg Court ruled that "borderization" was illegal; any restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities were declared incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights; Russia was found to have violated the right to life, liberty and security, property and freedom of movement, as well as the prohibition of torture and ill-treatment. Also according to the decision of the European Court of Human Rights, Russia must pay Georgia more than 253 million euros for human rights violations caused by the tightening of border lines after the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict. According to them, more than 29,000 people were affected<sup>6</sup> by Russia's actions. The Court ordered the Georgian government to establish an effective mechanism for distributing funds to the victims, according to which the victims should receive compensation within 18 months. In the same judgment, the Court found a number of violations of the Convention by Russia, including excessive use of force, ill-treatment, unlawful restrictions on access to homes, land and families, deprivation of the right to education in the Georgian language and unlawful restrictions on daily movement across the Administrative Boundary Line. In addition, the document states that the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://pog.gov.ge/news/sasamarTlom-giga-oTxozorias-ganzrax-mkvlelobashi-braldebuli-rashid-kanji-oRli-damnashaved-scno>

<sup>5</sup> <https://coe.mfa.gov.ge/news/134408-strasburgis-sasamartlom-sakhelmtsiphotashoris-davaze-saqartvelo-rusetis-tsinaaghmdeg-iv-rusets-daaki>

<sup>6</sup> <https://1tv.ge/news/2008-wlis-omtan-dakavshirebit-strasburgis-sasamartlom-saqartvelos-sasargeblod-kidev-erti-gadawyvetileba-miigho/>

Committee of Ministers continues to supervise the execution of the Court's judgments against Russia, despite the fact that Russia is no longer a signatory<sup>7</sup> to it as of 2022.

On October 7, 2025, the European Court of Human Rights published its judgment in the case of *STORIMANS-VERHULST AND OTHERS v. RUSSIA* (Application no. 26302/10)<sup>8</sup>. The European Court of Human Rights ruled that the procedural part of Article 2 (right to life) of the European Convention on Human Rights was violated in the case of Dutch journalist Stan Storimans, who died while covering the August war.

It is particularly noteworthy that, according to reports by international and non-governmental organizations, no progress was made in protecting human rights in the occupied A/R of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region during the reporting years 2023-2025. Visits by international observers, independent experts and journalists to the occupied territories of Georgia are restricted.

### 1.1. Religious Situation in the Occupied A/R of Abkhazia

The religious situation in the occupied A/R of Abkhazia has been extremely difficult since the day of the occupation. The local ethnic Georgian population has been expelled from most of the territory and no services are held in Georgian in any of the Georgian Orthodox churches.

It is noteworthy that after the Abkhazian war, the displaced Georgian Orthodox clergy served only in the Kodori Gorge, after Russia's repeated aggression in 2008, they were finally expelled from the occupied territory of the A/R of Abkhazia. There are 22-25 thousand Georgians living in the Gali district<sup>9</sup>, however, not a single Orthodox church in occupied Abkhazia conducts religious services in the Georgian language. The Georgian population of the Gali district needs a Georgian clergyman to exercise their religious rights, especially during great religious holidays, when they are forced to move to the territory controlled by the central government of Georgia in order to attend religious services there, which is associated with great dangers.

The schools in the Gali district have completely switched to Russian education, therefore, in order to receive education in the Georgian language and preserve their native language, the Georgian population is forced to leave their homes and move to the territory controlled by the central government of Georgia, which is a gross violation of the right of children and adolescents to receive education in their native language. There is ongoing discrimination in all directions against the local ethnic Georgian population living in the occupied territories of Georgia.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://justice.gov.ge/?m=events&date=2025-10-14>

<sup>8</sup> [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#{%22itemid%22:\[%22001-245079%22\]}](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#{%22itemid%22:[%22001-245079%22]}); <https://gyla.ge/post/GYLA-ECHR-jurnalistsaqme>

<sup>9</sup> [https://euneighbourseast.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/devniltha\\_politikuri\\_monacileoba\\_geo.pdf](https://euneighbourseast.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/devniltha_politikuri_monacileoba_geo.pdf)

## 1.2. Religious Situation in the Occupied Tskhinvali Region

Similar to the occupied A/R of Abkhazia, the situation in the Tskhinvali region is extremely difficult. Georgian religious buildings are in a very poor condition and in all Georgian Orthodox churches there services are not held in Georgian, except for two churches,. All Georgian Orthodox clergy have been expelled from the Tskhinvali region. There are only three clergymen left there - Archimandrite Anton (Chakvetadze), nuns: Ioana (Pekhshvelashvili) and Salome (Chargazia), who are experiencing extreme harassment and who are not allowed to cross the occupation line and then return. One of the nuns, Ioana (Pekhshvelashvili), due to health problems, required urgent medical care, which was deliberately delayed by the separatist side. Only as an exception, she underwent medical examinations in a mobile clinic sent by the Georgian side near the occupation line. It is noteworthy, that until 2008, there were 23 Georgian clergymen and 9 Georgian Orthodox churches in the Tskhinvali region. Currently, only 2 churches are operational and services are held in Georgian in the Church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God in the settlement of Akhlagori and in the Nunnery of the village of Ikoti.

It should be noted that the Georgian parishioners living in the occupied territory of Georgia are restricted in their right to visit the graves of their relatives and family members and to attend services in the Georgian language in churches located in the occupied territory.

## 2. Dire Situation of the Georgian Orthodox Churches in the Occupied Territories

According to the State Agency for Religious Issues, in the occupied A/R of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, a total of 706 religious buildings have been survived: of which 151 are located in the occupied A/R of Abkhazia, 145 out of which are Orthodox churches; while in the occupied Tskhinvali region there are 555 Orthodox churches. Georgian and Orthodox clergy are not allowed to enter the Orthodox churches (except for two churches in the Akhlagori region) in the occupied territories and there are also many cases of changing, arbitrary alteration and damaging the original architecture of the churches.

It is noteworthy that Russia has not yet activated the relevant articles and protocols of the 1954 Hague Convention (for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict)<sup>10</sup> in the A/R of Abkhazian and the Tskhinvali Region, which would be one of the possible guarantees for the protection of cultural heritage monuments.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://shorturl.at/AVkBP>

The majority of unique cultural heritage sites located in the regions occupied by Russia are in a very poor condition. The Georgian traces are being deliberately erased and the historical context is being distorted.

The "restoration" of churches and monasteries continues in the occupied regions, which has completely destroyed their original architecture. Despite numerous offers from Georgia to engage with the Abkhaz side in the process of registering, conserving, evaluating and restoring religious buildings, the puppet regime refused to accept aid for various reasons, and the lion's share of this goes to the central government of Russia.

The "restoration" of churches by the occupying forces directly indicates how much the existence of Georgian cultural heritage monuments in the occupied A/R of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region hinders them. Against this background, the real and growing threats to Georgian monuments have become clearly evident.

After the creation of the "Department for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage" under the so-called Ministry of Culture of the self-proclaimed government of Abkhazia, the process of inventorying historical monuments in the occupied territory began, which should have reflected the assessment of the insurance value of the objects, the features of the architectural style, historical data, etc. A so-called targeted inventory program was prepared, which was financed by the de facto Cabinet of Ministers. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, the puppet regime still failed to register and properly maintain the monuments. As a result of the inventory conducted by the Department for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage of the so-called Ministry of Culture, about 2,000 sites have been registered in the so-called "State List of Historical and Cultural Heritage Sites", among which there are also important cultural monuments - mostly early Christian and medieval churches and monasteries.

Also, in the occupied regions, cultural and architectural monuments are often damaged, disfigured and destroyed as a result of vandalism. Cases of illegal archaeological excavations are on the rise, involving ancient and most valuable jewelry, coins and weapons. According to rough estimates, hundreds of artifacts are illegally obtained every year, some of which are sold at foreign auctions and in Middle Eastern markets.

The most alarming situation in terms of illegal archaeological excavations is in the regions of Sukhumi, New Athos, Gagra, Gudauta and the Kodori Gorge. The lack of technical means makes it difficult to timely detect and prevent illegal excavations in vast and hard-to-reach areas.

It should be emphasized that any "archaeological" work carried out by non-professionals in the occupied territories is arbitrary and illegal. A clear example of this "black archaeology" is the 11<sup>th</sup> century Georgian inscription in Asomtavruli Script<sup>11</sup> discovered in Gudauta in 2025 as a result of the recent "archaeological excavations" carried out arbitrarily and unprofessionally by the separatist Abkhazian Archimandrite Dorotheos Dbar. On the beautiful ornamental stone, the opening words of

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<sup>11</sup> <https://shorturl.at/7Evv2>

the Gospel of John are inscribed in Georgian: “in the beginning was the word”. This fact once again confirms that the occupied territories are an integral part of the unified Georgian civilization, which is facing great danger under the conditions of occupation.

The situation of Georgian Orthodox churches is extremely difficult in the occupied Tskhinvali region as well, namely:

In 2023, in the village of Zonkari, Eredvi Municipality, local residents, Valievs, carried out arbitrary and illegal "renovation work" on the 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century Church of the Most Holy Mother of God.

In June 2025, arbitrary and illegal work was carried out on the 19<sup>th</sup> century St. George's Church (Red Church) located in the city of Tskhinvali, Gori Municipality by the clergymen of schismatic group.

In June 2025, at the initiative of the schismatic so-called Alania Diocese, the arbitrary and illegal “restoration” of the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God (14<sup>th</sup> century) located in the village of Khetagurovo, Kurta Municipality, was completed.

During the same period, the local population in the village of Sokhta, Java Municipality, began an arbitrary and illegal “restoration” of the church, however, the works were stopped by the so-called Ministry of Culture of South Ossetia, because, according to them, the works were carried out without the consent of the Ministry and the intervention of archaeologists and restorers.

In October 2025, a late medieval church in the village of Shindara, Tighvi Municipality, was arbitrarily and illegally “restored” by local forces, by Dato Kelekhsaev, a resident of the same village, thus losing the authenticity of the monument.

It is worth emphasizing that in 2021, the Agency published the book “Occupied Heritage”, including all the religious buildings in the occupied territory, describing their current deplorable condition<sup>12</sup>.

### 3. Restriction on Movement and Harassment of Georgian Orthodox Christian Clergymen in the Occupied Territories of Georgia

The movement of Georgian Orthodox clergy is completely prohibited in the occupied territories of Georgia, the occupied A/R of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region. The de facto Administration of the occupied Tskhinvali region, without any prior warning, closed the so-called checkpoints, thus prohibiting Georgian Orthodox clergy from entering and returning to the occupied territory. Accordingly, they are not given the opportunity to conduct religious services in their native language for the Georgian parishioners. Despite Russia's occupation of two indigenous regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, the Georgian government, taking into account democratic policy based on human rights, facilitates the unhindered movement of representatives of religious organizations existing in Georgia (clergy of the Catholic, Lutheran, and Armenian Apostolic Churches),

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<sup>12</sup> <https://religion.gov.ge/publikaciebi/okupirebuli-memkvidreoba>

to the occupied A/R of Abkhazia, meet with their parishioners and perform religious services in compliance with the law on occupied territories. Georgian and Orthodox clergy are prohibited from entering the occupied territories of Georgia for religious services, which is clearly ethnic and religious discrimination only against Georgian Orthodox Christians, clergy of the Georgian Orthodox Church, carried out by the occupying country - Russia, and its puppet, separatist regimes.

Metropolitan Isaiah (Chanturia) of Nikozi and Tskhinvali Diocese is not given the right and opportunity to enter the territory of the Diocese and perform his religious duties. Since January 1, 2020, Metropolitan Isaiah has been waiting in vain to receive an entry permit to the occupied territory of the Tskhinvali region from the relevant structure of the occupied territories.

#### 4. Religious Conflicts in the Occupied Territories in 2023-2025

The situation in terms of freedom of religion remains dire in both occupied territories of Georgia, the A/R of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region. During the reporting years, Georgian Orthodox clergy were and are still prohibited from moving to the occupied regions. Georgian parishioners living on the other side of the occupation line are not allowed to attend religious services in their native language in churches located in the occupied territories and are prohibited from visiting the graves of their relatives and family members. In the occupied A/R of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region, representatives of the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church of the occupying country are still serving illegally, and three illegally built Russian churches are still operating (Holy Trinity Church in the center of Tskhinvali; Church of St. John the Baptist in the Russian military district, north of Tskhinvali and St. Nicholas' Church on the outskirts of Tskhinvali). Opposing schismatic church groups, incited by the support of the occupier have invaded Georgian Orthodox churches and are creating unprecedented religious chaos in the occupied territories of Georgia. And this is against the backdrop of repeated acts of arbitrary transformation and damage to Georgian Orthodox churches in the occupied territories.

##### 4.1. Religious Conflicts in the Occupied A/R of Abkhazia

Since 2013, two church schismatic groups have been operating simultaneously in the occupied A/R of Abkhazia: the so-called "Sukhumi-Bichvinta Eparchy" under the leadership of the representative of the older generation of clergy, Besarion Aplia (previous surname Pilia) and under the patronage of the Moscow Patriarchate, and the so-called "Holy Metropolitanate of Abkhazia", the cathedral throne of which is the Church of Simon the Canaanite of New Athos and which is led by representatives of the new generation, Dorotheos Dbar and Andria Ampar. It is their names that are associated with the

raising of the so-called “autocephaly issue”, separation from the Moscow Patriarchate and establishment of the so-called “Holy Metropolitanate of Abkhazia”<sup>13</sup>.

The “presidents” of occupied Abkhazia - Ardzinba and Ankvab - addressed the Moscow Patriarchate with official letters requesting the granting of autocephaly status, but their attempt did not receive a response from Russia. Meanwhile, a schism was brewing in the Abkhazian Church. The secret appeal sent to the Moscow Patriarch in April 2009 by the new generation of clergy: Dorotheos, Pallad, Dolmat (Gopra), Mate (Tuzhba) and Nikita (Adleybais) was qualified as the first attempt that led to a schism. The request envisaged the gradual integration of the Abkhazian Church into the Russian Church; the appeal did not include a request for autocephaly. Under the pretext of negligence on the part of Russia, the new generation of clergy arbitrarily occupied the New Athos Monastery and prohibited the clergy of the older generation from serving there. This fact is related to the first raising of the issue of autocephaly in May 2011, when the so-called “Church and People’s Assembly” in New Athos unanimously adopted the decision to request “autocephaly” and established the so-called “Holy Metropolitanate of Abkhazia.”

The common goal of the so-called “clergy” of the occupied A/R of Abkhazia is to achieve autocephaly: some see this path in the Moscow Patriarchate, others in the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This issue posed a serious problem for the authorities of the self-proclaimed Republic of Abkhazia. In February 2021, the Georgian Patriarchate officially responded to an interview given to the Abkhazian media by Archpriest Besarion Aplia. The statement reviews the issues related to the church history of the Tskhum-Abkhazia Diocese and responds to the accusations of Besarion Aplia, stating that Archpriest Besarion Aplia, who was ordained as a priest by Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II and is still considered under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Orthodox Church, grossly distorted issues of church history in Abkhazia. The Patriarchate’s address also states: "in 1921-1993, the leaders of the Tskhum-Abkhazian Diocese have always been under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Apostolic Church." Initially, the diocese, along with 300,000 people, found themselves displaced from their historical lands during the well known events of 1993 and until 2008, the displaced clergy served only in the Kodori Gorge, until they were finally expelled from the territory of Abkhazia. As for the bishop who was illegally sent to Abkhazia by Patriarch Tikhon, Patriarch Tikhon did not recognize the autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Church and tried to weaken its positions in Abkhazia, but Patriarch Tikhon never considered the Tskhum-Abkhazian Diocese to be within the jurisdiction of the Russian Church. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Tskhum-Abkhazian Diocese always had Georgian bishops and the diocese was under the jurisdiction of the Church of Georgia. The Tskhum-Abkhazian Diocese, as an integral part of the Georgian Church, was confirmed by the Holy Synod of the Russian Church in October 1943, when it recognized the autocephaly of the Georgian Church within its historical borders<sup>14</sup>.

In 2024, the Abkhazian priest Besarion Aplia once again appealed to the Russian Patriarch to “receive the Abkhazian parish<sup>15</sup> under his omophorion”. Besarion Aplia implicated the de facto President of the

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<sup>13</sup> <https://patriarchate.ge/news/1726>

<sup>14</sup> <https://shorturl.at/jGkHx>

<sup>15</sup> <https://shorturl.at/yvmX3>

“Republic of Abkhazia” Aslan Bzhanias and the so-called Chairman of the Parliament Lasha Ashuba, who were supposed to meet with Patriarch Kirill in Moscow together with Aplaia. The time for the meeting had already been agreed upon, but after learning about the issues to be discussed (establishment of the canonical status of the Church of Abkhazia, ordination of the Abkhazian bishop and allocation of a church in Moscow for the Abkhazian diaspora), the meeting scheduled for the next day was canceled.

The head of the so-called Holy Metropolitanate of Abkhazia, Archimandrite Dorotheos (Dbar), whom the Russian Orthodox Church has considered as excommunicated since 2023, is skeptical about the prospects for a canonical resolution of the issue of the “Church of Abkhazia”. According to the “Dean” of the New Athos Monastery, Hierodeacon David (Sarsania), it is necessary to stop living with the illusion of the existence of the “Abkhazian Church”: “It is time to sit down at the negotiating table with the Church that bears canonical responsibility for our diocese, that is, with the Church of Georgia. And, of course, the mediator should be the Russian Church. Because this is directly related to our situation. Because the clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church, although without the appropriate canonical blessing, still perform religious services on the territory of Abkhazia<sup>16</sup>”.

In June 2025, the so-called Abkhazian Orthodox Church demanded that Archimandrite Dorotheos leave the New Athos Monastery - the largest Orthodox church in Abkhazia and one of the main tourist attractions. The main reason is that the church leadership, led by Archpriest Besarion, is trying to take control<sup>17</sup> of the monastery. A group of clergy (18 people) signed a petition for Dorotheos to leave the monastery, including Hierodeacon David Sarsania, who had previously sided with Dorotheos, but changed his position in February.

The State Agency for Religious Issues highlights the church chaos that is taking place in both occupied territories of Georgia in its annual reports. The two self-proclaimed church groups in Abkhazia, despite declared disagreements, are directly governed by the occupying state, Russia.

## 4.2. Religious Conflicts in the Occupied Tskhinvali Region

There is a church group operating in the occupied Tskhinvali region - the so-called Alania Diocese, which was founded in 2003. Initially, the "bishop" of the self-proclaimed diocese<sup>18</sup> became Giorgi Pukhate.

In 2005, Ossetian schismatics decided not to have any connection with either the Georgian or Russian churches and turned to one of the schismatic councils in Greece. The self-proclaimed “Alania Diocese” does not canonically belong to any of the official patriarchates, as a result, the Ossetian church separatists were forced to establish a connection with the “True Orthodox” “Old Calendarists” of

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<sup>16</sup> <https://shorturl.at/BXKxZ>

<sup>17</sup> <https://jam-news.net/ge/brdzola-akhali-atonis-monastristvis-afkhazetshi-eklesiashi-gankhetqilebaa/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://shorturl.at/0Q81>

Greece, which was founded in Athens in 1984 (the so-called “Synod of Chrysostomos”). The “Synod of Chrysostomos” is also in schism, does not obey any official Orthodox church and is in Eucharistic communion with a schismatic church group of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (Russian Orthodox Church in Exile). The aforementioned self-proclaimed “Alania Diocese” took an anti-Georgian ecclesiastical and political position immediately after its establishment; there was an active process of appropriating monuments of Georgian historical ecclesiastical culture, attempting to link them to their Ossetian origins and altering architectural monuments<sup>19</sup>.

The main church of the so-called Alania Diocese is the Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God in the city of Tskhinvali. In 2011, the ruling „bishop“ of the Alania diocese was Ambrose of Methone (Adrian Baird)<sup>20</sup>, and the priest serving on the spot is Yakov Khetagurov. Baird had been visiting the region regularly since 1998, and in 2003, then-"President" Eduard Kokoity granted him citizenship of the "Republic."

On September 22, 2017, Ambrose Baird announced to the public about the establishment of an independent, local “Alania State Orthodox Church,” and on April 18, 2018, Ossetian border guards confiscated Ambrose Baird’s passport without explanation at the Zemo Roki checkpoint. This incident was caused by a confrontation between “Bishop” Ambrose and the then de facto president of the Tskhinvali region, Anatoly Bibilov. Bibilov met with “Bishop” Ambrose several times and tried to convince him to join the Russian Orthodox Church. The conflict between them began in 2017, when Anatoly Bibilov met with Russian Patriarch Kirill in Moscow and upon returning he declared that the Ossetian Church should be subordinated to the Russian Church.

After that, the de facto “President” met with local clergy and parishioners to discuss the issue of joining the Russian Church, but they categorically rejected this proposal. Bibilov also met with “Bishop” Ambrose several times and tried to convince him to join the Russian Orthodox Church. “Bishop” Ambrose, who was opposed to the de facto president of the Tskhinvali region and supported by a large part of the local Ossetian population, was banned from entering Tskhinvali. Bibilov was the first among the leaders of Tskhinvali to attend festive services in the Russian Church and not in the Tskhinvali Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God, which belonged to the so-called Alania Diocese.

In 2016-2017, the construction of a church in the city of Tskhinvali, on A. Jioev Street, began with the financial support of the “Andrew the First-Called Foundation”. Religious services have been held there since the end of 2017. According to Sonya Khubaeva, Advisor to the “President” on Religious Issues, the project for the new church was personally selected by Patriarch Kirill. According to the statement of the de facto President Tibilov, the decision to build a church in the city of Tskhinvali was made on September 10, 2014, during a meeting with Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://cominf.org/node/1166563497>

<sup>20</sup> <https://cominf.org/node/1166485761>

<sup>21</sup> <https://shorturl.at/QYCN3>

Currently, the „Head“ of the church is the ethnic Ossetian priest Sergi Kokoev<sup>22</sup>, who is subordinate to the Vladikavkaz and Alania Diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate. Kokoev’s biography posted on the same website of the diocese<sup>23</sup> explicitly stated that as a layman he participated in the 2008 war against Georgia and has also received combat awards (he is a reserve major); since 2010 he has been the head of the "Foundation for the Revival of Orthodoxy in South Ossetia"; on July 12, 2013, in the city of Vladikavkaz, Archbishop Zosima of Vladikavkaz and Alania ordained him as a deacon, and on November 23, as a priest. The aforementioned war criminal "clergyman" led the illegal construction of two Russian churches in occupied Tskhinvali.

In May 2023, a statement on the social network “Telegram” by the former Archbishop of Vladikavkaz and Alania, Exarch of the Russian Orthodox Church in Africa, Metropolitan Leonid (Gorbachev) caused a great resonance among the population of the Tskhinvali region. The Russian hierarch called the so-called "Bishop of the Alania Diocese" Ambrose (Adrian Baird) a freelance employee of British intelligence service, MI-6, and also sharply criticized the "president" of the de facto republic, Alan Gagloev, on his Telegram channel. According to Leonid, Gagloev supported the so-called Alania Diocese (schismatics) by visiting the Holy Trinity Church in Tskhinvali on Easter. The Russian cleric recalled Moscow's allocation of 1 billion rubles in aid to Tskhinvali and called on the Russian curators of Tskhinvali "not to support those people who pursue hostile policy at Russia's expense"<sup>24</sup>.

In February 2023, the “preist-monk” Simeon (Gagloev) was elected as the “Vicar” of the so-called Alania Diocese and the “Bishop of Ikorta”. In April 2025, the “priest-monk” Simeon was ordained as the Vicar of the so-called Alania Diocese in the schismatic church of St. Sabbas in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia<sup>25</sup>.

In the occupied Tskhinvali region, religious services in the following churches are held in Ossetian and Russian: in the Tskhinvali Church of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God; in the Kavta Church of Tskhinvali; in the Gujabauri Chapel of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker; in St. George’s Church of Tsunari; in the Eredvi Ascension Church.

It is noteworthy, that Georgian Orthodox churches in the Tskhinvali region are considered to be examples of Ossetian culture in the publications of the Vladikavkaz and Alania Diocese in the Russian Federation. After the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, Russian media outlets declared 650 cultural monuments in Shida Kartli as monuments of Ossetian culture<sup>26</sup>.

In the Tskhinvali region, from which almost the entire clergy of the Nikozi Diocese of the Georgian Patriarchate has been expelled, representatives of the Alania Diocese of the Moscow Patriarchate, on

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<sup>22</sup> <https://cominf.org/node/1166560307>

<sup>23</sup> <https://blagos.ru/content/ierey-sergiy-kokoev>

<sup>24</sup> <https://shorturl.at/6T1uz>

<sup>25</sup> <https://shorturl.at/DIEKL>

<sup>26</sup> <https://shorturl.at/iNcU2>

the one hand, and a Greek-schismatic group on the other hand, are serving illegally, which clearly demonstrates the church chaos that reigns in the occupied Tskhinvali region.

In addition to the above-mentioned church separatist and schismatic groups, there are religious confessions such as Baptists, Adventists, Pentecostals and Jehovah's Witnesses in the occupied Tskhinvali region. The Supreme Court of the occupied region has banned the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses since 2017 for spreading extremist literature and ideas. At that time, Sonya Khubaeva, the representative of the self-proclaimed "government" of the occupied Tskhinvali region for religious issues, stated that "the number of Jehovah's Witnesses in South Ossetia had exceeded 1,000, which is approximately 2% of the entire population." According to her, this religion is being "spread in South Ossetia by Ossetians sent from Georgia".

## 5. Situation at the Occupation Line

In 2018, the occupying forces set up a checkpoint in the vicinity of Lomisa Church of St. George and prohibited the residents of Kirbali, Mejvriskhevi, Zerti and Bershueti from approaching the church where they used to pray. The occupation line near Lomisa Church of St. George, made it extremely difficult for the local population to reach both the church and the cemetery nearby.

Due to the threat of illegal detention of Georgian citizens<sup>27</sup> by the representatives of the occupation forces, on May 6, 2023, Metropolitan Andria (Gvazava) of Gori-Ateni Diocese was unable to enter St. George's Church in Adzvi. In August 2023, representatives of the occupation regime sealed the door of St. George's Church of Lomisa with a tin plate and filled it with construction foam.

The Georgian Patriarchate also confirmed<sup>28</sup> the fact that the soldiers of the occupying forces were patrolling the Lomisa Church in 2023,

On November 7, 2023, Georgian citizen Tamaz Ginturi, who had gone to pray at St. George's Church in the village of Kirbali (Gori Municipality), was killed by Russian occupation forces during an attempt to illegally detain him, and another citizen was kidnapped<sup>29</sup>. The incident was immediately condemned by the Government of Georgia<sup>30</sup>, the US Embassy<sup>31</sup> and the European Parliament, which also adopted a special resolution<sup>32</sup>.

## 6. Detention of the Georgian Orthodox Clergyman

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<sup>27</sup> <https://shorturl.at/ogu5F>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/32655296.html>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/sssgo/posts/pfbid02JDYDqn4sMTfb2A7br7T12TswRuqhzflakBH2qgxCs4j9eKp51VLSkb48wFzF54tFl>

<sup>30</sup> <https://1tv.ge/news/ilia-darchiashvili-okupirebul-teritoriebze-mckhovrebi-mosakhleoba-adamianis-uflebata-mdzime-darghvevis-mskhverplia-tamaz-ginturis-mkvleloba-etnikuri-qartvelebis-mimart-dzaladobis-kidev-erti-aqtia/>

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.facebook.com/usingeo/posts/747895000713769?ref=embed\\_post](https://www.facebook.com/usingeo/posts/747895000713769?ref=embed_post)

<sup>32</sup> <https://mfa.gov.ge/news/241404-evroparlamentma-rusetis-saokupatsio-dzalebis-mier-saqartvelos-moqalaqis-tamaz-ginturis-mkvlelobis-sa>

It is worth emphasizing that the fact of the arrest of a Georgian Orthodox clergyman which has not yet been negatively assessed or condemned by any international organization, is completely unacceptable and outrageous. In 2025, Pimen (Roman) Kardava, a priest-monk of St. George's Church in Chuburkhinji, occupied Gali district, was arrested for "illegal religious services and spreading nationalist ideas"<sup>33</sup>. It is noteworthy that similar discriminatory judgments were made in the past against Pimen Kardava, a priest-monk of St. George's Church in Chuburkhinji, namely: in 2008, members of a bandit group in the Gali district kidnapped him, brutally beat him and took him from Chuburkhinji to Sukhumi. The incident occurred when Father Pimen was planning to deliver religious literature to the parishioners of St. George's Church of Ilori<sup>34</sup>. Later, Father Pimen was deprived of his right to serve and was expelled from Abkhazia. The incident was strictly condemned by the Georgian Patriarchate, noting that "a clergyman should be inviolable. This is a restriction of a person's religious rights, which is a grave crime"<sup>35</sup>.

## 7. Cult Buildings of Religious Minorities in the Occupied Territories of Georgia

There are cult buildings of several religious communities in the occupied territories of Georgia, namely the Muslim, Armenian Apostolic, Catholic, Lutheran, and Jewish communities.

**Muslim community:** Mosques in the city of Sukhumi (XX c.) and in the town of Gudauta (XIX – XX cc.).

**Jewish Community:** a synagogue in the city of Sukhumi (XX c.) - a cultural heritage monument of Georgia. A synagogue in the city of Tskhinvali (XX c.) – it was almost completely destroyed during Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008.

**Armenian Community:** Cathedral of the Holy Savior (Surb Amenafkrich - 2013) in the town of Gagra.

**Catholic community:** Catholic Church of St. Simon the Canaanite (1908) in the city of Sukhumi.

**Lutheran community:** Lutheran Church of St. John the Apostle (20th c.) – in the city of Sukhumi.

We would like to emphasize once again that, despite the fact that the A/R of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region are occupied by the Russian Federation, the Georgian government, implementing a democratic and human rights-based policy, encourages the clergymen of different religions operating in Georgia, including: Catholic, Lutheran and Armenian Apostolic Churches, to move to Abkhazia, meet with their parishioners and perform religious services there in compliance with the Law on Occupied Territories.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/134906>

<sup>34</sup> <https://patriarchate.ge/news/682>

<sup>35</sup> <https://patriarchate.ge/news/682>

## Conclusion

The Russian Federation, as an occupying country, is exercising effective control over the occupied territories of Georgia. Russia's puppet separatist regimes, however engage in religious and ethnic discrimination and segregation only against the Georgian Orthodox Christian population and clergy. They are destroying and transforming Georgian Orthodox churches and monasteries, and are causing church chaos through deliberately created schismatic groups. The above is yet another proof of a deliberate discriminatory policy aimed at erasing the Georgian religious and cultural traces on the occupied, indigenous Georgian lands of Georgia and changing the centuries-old historical reality of Georgia.

# State Agency for Religious Issues

## 2023 Annual Report

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## 1. National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights in Georgia for 2022-2030

In the reporting year, the State of Georgia was guided by the “National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights in Georgia for 2022-2030” within the framework of the Strategic Plan, Priority I (Strengthening the principles of justice, the rule of law, institutional democracy and the effective exercise of civil and political rights - freedom of religion and belief). The Agency systematically carried out activities to support tolerance and non-discriminatory environment, as well as to ensure freedom of religion and belief, in accordance with the standards provided for by international and national legislation.

### 1.1. Trainings for Clergy

The State Agency for Religious Issues systematically conducts trainings in order to raise awareness of representatives of religious associations (clergy) on freedom of religion, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to strengthen the culture of secularism and tolerance.

On November 28, 2023, in Marneuli, within the framework of the project of the “Center for Harmonious Development of Cultural Diversity” - “Religious Leaders of Kvemo Kartli for the Protection of Human Rights and Harmonious Development”, a meeting was held on the topic of “International and Georgian Experience in Managing Religious Diversity”. The project was implemented with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Georgia, in which the clergy and parishioners of the Marneuli and Hujabi Diocese of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia participated, before whom the Head of the Legal Maintenance Office of the State Agency for Religious Issues, Davit Davitashvili, delivered a report.

### 1.2. Covid-19 Pandemic and Freedom of Religion

According to the „National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights in Georgia for 2022-2030“, Priority I (Guarantees for the Protection of Human Rights during the Pandemic), the State Agency for Religious Issues actively cooperated with the government of Georgia, as a result, the decisions and regulations adopted to protect the health of citizens affected all denominations in Georgia and were in force until the summer of 2023, the end of the pandemic. The World Health Organization declared on May 5 2023<sup>36</sup>, that COVID-19 no longer constituted a global public health emergency. Accordingly, the country gradually returned to its normal rhythm of life and the restrictions that were in place during the pandemic were lifted.

During the three-year wave of the pandemic, the State Agency for Religious Issues acted in accordance with the Ordinance N 322 of the Government of Georgia of May 23, 2020 “On Approval of Isolation and the Quarantine Rules ” (repealed by the Resolution of the Government of Georgia of July 4, 2023

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<sup>36</sup> [https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2023-statement-on-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-pandemic](https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2023-statement-on-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-pandemic)

N244) and had direct and active contact with religious organizations. On December 30, 2020, in accordance with the Resolution No. 2632 of the Government of Georgia, an amendment was made to the Resolution No. 975 of June 15, 2020: “On Approval of the List of Priority Persons Subject to Mandatory Testing for Infection (Covid-19) Caused by Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and the Procedure for Conducting Testing”, where an article on testing of clergy was added as paragraph “Q”.

It is noteworthy that the State, adhering to the principles of secularism, promptly ensured the transparency of the process and with the direct involvement of the State Agency for Religious Issues quickly informed religious organizations. During the three-year pandemic, the Agency provided various types of assistance during the crisis not only to religious organizations included in the Interreligious Council, but also to those organizations that are not included in the Council, but had applied to the Agency with a relevant request (“Salvation Army in Georgia”; “Church of the Word of Life”; “Savior Bible Church”; “Seventh day Christian-Adventist Church”; “Holy Trinity Protestant Church”; Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses; Batumi “Bible Faith Church”; National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha’is of Georgia). It is particularly noteworthy that the Georgian government, with the assistance of the Agency, facilitated the smooth celebration of the major holidays of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church (Christmas, Easter, etc.), as well as the great holidays of the historical religions operating in Georgia, while maintaining distance and observing all rules.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the State Agency for Religious Issues, within its competence, assumed the function of crisis management in relations with religious organizations and introduced various religious organizations in Georgia to the regulations in force in the country (on wearing face masks, observing social distancing and hygiene rules, the necessity of treating icons, church and other cult inventory with a special disinfectant solution, free vaccinations and PCR testing, rules for obtaining permits for the movement of clergy and the implementation of humanitarian and social activities).

The State Agency for Religious Issues, together with the government, actively interacted with central and regional agencies involved in managing public health crises during the COVID-19 pandemic to address the needs of religious organizations. With the direct involvement of regional representatives of the Agency in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and the A/R of Adjara, support for charitable and social activities of religious organizations continued in 2023.

During the pandemic, the government, through active communication and direct participation with the Interreligious Council under the Agency as well as regional representatives, had been successful in providing timely information during crisis situations, raising awareness among clergy about the need for vaccination and facilitating the exercise of religious rights by religious leaders, clergy, and parishioners of all denominations. All the above-mentioned issues related to the Covid pandemic are described in detail in the Report of the State Agency for Religious Issues for 2020-2022<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://religion.gov.ge/wliuri-angarisebi/religiis-sakitxta-saxelmwifo-saagentos-2020-2022-wlebis-angarisi>

## 2. Raising Public Awareness in terms of Religious Tolerance

### 2.1. Projects

In order to create a healthy dialogue and a tolerant environment among religions and between religions and society in Georgia, the project “Religious Repressions in Soviet Georgia” (according to the data of the MIA archive) won the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia’s competition for Fundamental Research State Grant.

The State Agency for Religious Issues, in cooperation with the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, presented an important statement to thoroughly study and analyze information about religious repressions in Georgia during the Soviet period and publish a work based on archival materials.

The project envisaged the study and identification of the facts of repressions carried out on religious grounds in Georgia during the Soviet period (1921-1991). After the occupation and annexation of Georgia (1921), the “Red Terror” and the implementation of atheistic religious policies began actively: hundreds of religious buildings and religious schools were closed, and the persecution of clergy of the Orthodox, Catholic, Armenian-Apostolic, Jewish, Islamic communities and Christian-Protestant denominations on religious grounds began with particular cruelty. The basis for the persecution of individuals on religious grounds was the accusation of anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary agitation-propaganda and other types of accusations.

It is noteworthy that the project idea was supported by the Interreligious Council under the Agency, which represents almost all religious associations, including the Georgian Orthodox Church, historical religions and other small denominations.

### 2.2. Annual Publication „Interreligious Calendar“

In 2023, an annual interreligious calendar was traditionally published, uniting the major holidays of various religious communities, contributing to strengthening relations between different confessions and raising religious awareness.

The interreligious calendar includes the great religious holidays of all major religious communities operating in Georgia (12 in total) - the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Armenian Apostolic, Spiritual Christians-Molokan, Yazidi, Evangelical-Lutheran, Evangelical-Protestant, Baptist communities and the Evangelical Faith Church.

## 3. Promoting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In accordance with Article 37 of the Law of Georgia on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in order to promote the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and the creation of an inclusive and tolerant environment, the Agency has developed an Action Plan for Promoting the Protection of

the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) for 2023. The document aims to identify priority areas and measures to be implemented during 2023, based on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Law of Georgia on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. According to the Action Plan, the following activities were implemented in the reporting year:

### 3.1. Placing Braille-printed Prayers in Churches

At the initiative of the Agency and in agreement with the Patriarchate of Georgia, in 2023, prayers, troparia and kontakia printed in Braille were placed next to the icons in three churches in Tbilisi: Ponichala Church of St. Queen Tamar, the Patriarchal Cathedral of the Holy Trinity and Kvashveti Church of St. George.

### 3.2. Braille-printed Annual Interreligious Calendar

It is noteworthy that since 2018, the Agency has been printing interreligious calendars "to support blind and visually impaired citizens" and presenting them to the Georgian Blind Union and LEPL Tbilisi Public School No. 202 (for blind and visually impaired students).

### 3.3. Braille-printed Canonical Books

The Agency, taking into consideration the wishes of the members of the Georgian Blind Union has been publishing Bible books in Braille since 2020. The canonical books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus have already been presented to them.

On January 25, 2023, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the State Agency for Religious Issues hosted the representatives of the Georgian Blind Union and LEPL Tbilisi Public School No. 202 (for blind and visually impaired students) and presented the Bible book "Book of Numbers" along with an interreligious calendar.

## 4. Relationship of the State with Religious Organizations

The central government of Georgia, headed by the Prime Minister and representatives of the Agency traditionally attend the main holidays of the historical religions operating in Georgia, including the greatest holidays of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church – Easter, Christmas and Svetitskhovloba (a holiday dedicated to the Svetitskhoveli, "Life-Giving Pillar", Cathedral); on the occasion of the main holidays of the Muslim community and the beginning of the Ramadan the Prime Minister hosts an iftar dinner for Muslim clergy; on the Hanukkah holiday of the Jewish community the Prime Minister of Georgia symbolically lights the first candle in the synagogue. Also, the State Agency for Religious Issues regularly meets with the leaders of various religious organizations and participates in their important religious holidays both in Tbilisi and Rustavi, as well as in the regions, attends annual reports, conferences, organizes joint charity events, reviews the applications received from them and provides assistance according to needs.

#### 4.1. Iftar for the Muslim Community on behalf of the Prime Minister

On April 20, 2023, the Prime Minister congratulated Muslims on Ramadan Bayram and in his speech paid special attention to the outstanding role of representatives of Muslim citizens in the development of the country. He noted that in 2014, with the establishment of the State Agency for Religious Issues, concern for the strengthening of religions rose to the highest state level. At the event, the Chairman of the Agency drew attention to the attitude of the Georgian government towards religious minorities, including representatives of the Muslim community.

#### 4.2. Head of the Government of Georgia Congratulated the Jews on Hanukkah

On December 7, 2023, Georgian Jews celebrated Hanukkah. Representatives of the Jewish community, the government of Georgia and the Agency gathered at the Great Synagogue of Tbilisi to celebrate the joyous Jewish holiday. The first candle of Hanukkah was symbolically lit by the Prime Minister of Georgia, who congratulated the community gathered in the synagogue on the holiday of Hanukkah.

Those gathered at the celebration were greeted by Merab Chanchalashvili, Chairman of the Jewish Union of Georgia, Hadassah Meitzad, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Israel to Georgia, Yaakov Gagulashvili, Chief Rabbi of Georgian Jews around the world and Rakhamin Murdukhashvili, Chief Rabbi of the Great Synagogue of Tbilisi.

### 5. Activities of the Interreligious Council

There is an Interreligious Council under the State Agency for Religious Issues, uniting almost all religious associations in Georgia, including the Georgian Orthodox Church, historical religions and other small denominations. It is noteworthy that in 2023, two religious organizations joined the Interreligious Council: the “Salvation Army in Georgia” and the Seventh Day Christian-Adventist Church of Georgia. The Interreligious Council today is as follows:

1. Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church;
2. Administration of Muslims of All Georgia;
3. Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia;
4. Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus;
5. Jewish Union of Georgia;
6. Tbilisi International Baptist Church;
7. Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia;
8. Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Georgia;
9. Evangelical-Protestant Church of Georgia;
10. Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia;
11. Yezidi Spiritual Council of Georgia;
12. International Society for Krishna Consciousness;
13. „Salvation Army in Georgia“;
14. The Seventh Day Christian-Adventist Church of Georgia.

On January 12, 2023, the Chairman of the Agency and members of the Interreligious Council under the Agency met with the Deputy Minister of Defense Grigol Giorgadze at the Ministry of Defense and were introduced to the draft of the new Defense Code, according to which “priestly service” is no longer a basis for deferring compulsory military service. Representatives of all religions are subject to military service and no denomination will be able to benefit from discretionary conditions. Clergy will have the opportunity to undergo non-military alternative labor service, the conditions of which are determined by relevant legislation.

On March 14, 2023, a meeting of representatives of the Interreligious Council with the Head of the NATO Liaison Office in Georgia, Alexander Vinnikov, was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, organized by the State Agency for Religious Issues. At the meeting, religious leaders recalled their visit to NATO Headquarters and meetings with NATO representatives. The idea of visiting Brussels again, only with a larger delegation was voiced at the meeting.

On March 20, 2023, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues and the leaders of religious organizations, that are members of the Interreligious Council, met with the Director General of the Special Penitentiary Service, Nika Tskhvarashvili. The topic of the meeting was the protection of religious rights of convicts in penitentiary institutions. The meeting was held in a Q&A format, during which the idea of signing a memorandum of understanding between the Agency and the Special Penitentiary Service arose.

On April 5, 2023, a session of the Interreligious Council was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia. The Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues introduced the members of the Council to a document received from the Special Penitentiary Service regarding the issues raised at the above-mentioned meeting of the Interreligious Council with the Director General of the Penitentiary Service, which concerned the protection of religious rights of convicts in penitentiary institutions. According to the Chairman of the Agency, representatives of different religions should be guided by the aforementioned document when interacting with the penitentiary institution.

On May 5, 2023, a session of the Interreligious Council was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, where the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues introduced the idea of the Holy See’s Envoy José-Avelino Bettencourt to the members of the Council about holding a joint event of religious confessions under the motto: “We Want Peace”. The representatives of religious organizations made suggestions regarding the creation of a working group, the format and location of the event.

On June 15, 2023, a session of the Interreligious Council was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia. The members of the Council were briefed by Merab Chanchalashvili, Chairman of the Jewish Union of Georgia, on the attitude of the Georgian Jewish community towards the opening of a Reformist prayer room in the building of the Evangelical-Baptist Church (Archbishop Malkhaz Songhulashvili) in the Didube district of Tbilisi.

On December 8, 2023, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, members of the Interreligious Council and the Agency’s staff met with Ia Imerlishvili, representative of the Department of Resocialization and Rehabilitation of Convicts of the Special Penitentiary Service. She introduced the members of the Interreligious Council to the activities that can be implemented for the purpose of resocialization of convicts. In particular, organizing joint cultural and educational events and activities on civil, religious holidays or other days, which are especially important for vulnerable groups. Religious organizations expressed their readiness to jointly hold events aimed at promoting the resocialization of convicts.

## 6. Funding of Religious Organizations within the Framework of Compensation for the Damage Caused during the Soviet Totalitarian Regime

Based on the Resolution of the Government of Georgia No. 117 (27.01.2014), the State Agency for Religious Issues was indeed tasked with managing and distributing funds intended as partial compensation for damages caused to religious communities in Georgia during the Soviet totalitarian regime. Based on consultations with religious communities and a study of the factual circumstances (number of parishioners, clergy, religious buildings), the Agency prepared Recommendation No. 1/7. 13.01.2023 addressed to the Prime Minister of Georgia, the 5,500,000 (five million five hundred thousand) GEL allocated to religious associations by the Law of Georgia “On the State Budget of Georgia for 2023” to provide partial compensation for the damage caused to them during the Soviet totalitarian regime was distributed to religious associations in the following amounts this year:

- 1) Muslim community of Georgia - 3 350 000 (three million three hundred fifty thousand) GEL;
- 2) Armenian Apostolic Church of Georgia - 1 000 000 (one million) GEL;
- 3) Georgian Roman-Catholic community - 650 000 (six hundred fifty thousand) GEL;
- 4) Jewish community of Georgia - 500 000 (five hundred thousand) GEL.

Including 2023, the total amounted to: 43 250 000 (Forty-three million two hundred fifty thousand) GEL (see table).

year	Muslim community	Roman-Catholic community	Armenian Apostolic community	Jewish community	total
2014	1 100 000	200 000	300 000	150 000	1 750 000
2015	2 200 000	400 000	600 000	300 000	3 500 000
2016	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2017	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2018	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2019	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2020	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000

2021	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2022	3 350 000	650 000	1 000 000	500 000	5 500 000
2023	3 350 000	650 000	1 000 000	500 000	5 500 000
total	26 500 000	5 200 000	7 700 000	3 850 000	43 250 000

*\*amounts are given in GEL*

In addition, religious associations receive financial and property assistance from local budgets to meet the religious needs of their communities.

It is noteworthy that in the reporting year, in accordance with the process of returning religious buildings confiscated during the Soviet totalitarian regime to their historical owners, 16 mosques and a plot of land confiscated during the Soviet totalitarian regime were returned to the Muslim community.

## 7. Recommendatory Commission for the Study of Property and Financial Needs of Religious Associations

### 7.1. Recommendatory Commission Sessions

In 2023, 4 (four) sessions of the Recommendatory Commission for the Study of Property and Financial Needs of Religious Associations were held. In total, the Commission considered 181 issues, in particular:

- Orthodox Church: satisfied – 119, flawed – 6, refused – 13;
- Muslim community: satisfied – 28, flawed – 0, refused – 1;
- Armenian community: satisfied – 4, flawed – 0, refused – 0;
- Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia: satisfied – 10, flawed – 0, refused – 0.

#### March 15, 2023 - I Session

Religious community	motion	satisfied	flawed	refused
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	66	62	2	2
Muslim community	26	25		1
Armenian community	3	3		

**June 22, 2023 - II Session**

<b>Religious community</b>	<b>motion</b>	<b>satisfied</b>	<b>flawed</b>	<b>refused</b>
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	36	29	3	4
Muslim community	2	2		
Armenian community	1	1		

**September 19, 2023 - III Session**

<b>Religious community</b>	<b>motion</b>	<b>satisfied</b>	<b>flawed</b>	<b>refused</b>
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	9	7		2
Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia and Armenian community	9	9		

**November 28, 2023 - IV Session**

<b>Religious community</b>	<b>motion</b>	<b>satisfied</b>	<b>flawed</b>	<b>refused</b>
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	27	21	1	5
Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia	1	1		
Muslim community	1	1		

In total, in 2023, based on the decisions of 4 (four) sessions of the Recommendatory Commission for the Study of Property and Financial Needs of Religious Associations, the Agency issued a positive recommendation on the transfer of GEL 1,470,313.94 out of the requested GEL 3,666,274.23.

## 8. International Day for Tolerance

On the occasion of the International Day for Tolerance (November 16), the State Agency for Religious Issues has established a tradition according to which one of the religious communities in Georgia takes turns hosting leaders and parishioners of other religious organizations. Below is a list of the host religious organizations over the years:

- In 2016 - the Georgian Orthodox Church hosted religious communities at the Georgian Patriarchate;
- In 2017 - the host was the Jewish community - the reception was held at the David Baazov Museum of History of the Jews of Georgia and Georgian-Jewish Relations;
- In 2018 - religious organizations were hosted by the Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus;
- In 2019 - the representatives of religious organizations were hosted by the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia;
- In 2020 – the Union of Christian Baptist Churches of Georgia was the host;
- In 2021 - the host was the Evangelical-Protestant Church of Georgia;
- In 2022 – Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia held a reception.

In 2023, a traditional event related to the International Day for Tolerance, hosted by the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia, was held at the Diocese's Cultural, Educational and Youth Center "Hayartun", which was attended by leaders and representatives of religious organizations that are members of the Interreligious Council.

The ceremonial meeting was opened by a representative of the host religious organization, Bishop Kirakos Davtyan of the Armenian Apostolic Church and the chairman of the Agency Zaza Vashakmadze. Leaders of various religious organizations congratulated everyone on this day and emphasized the positive role of the Agency in creating a tolerant environment and distinctive relations among religious organizations.

International Day for Tolerance has been celebrated since 1995, at the initiative of UNESCO, with the aim of raising public awareness of the dangers of intolerance, extremism and discrimination and establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. Traditional meetings related to the International Day for Tolerance have become a manifestation of the Georgian culture of religious tolerance.

It should also be noted that an event dedicated to the International Day for Tolerance was held at the Batumi Art Center, which was organized by the Evangelical Alliance of Georgia. The event was attended by Evangelical churches operating in Adjara and confessions within the Evangelical Alliance of Georgia, as well as clergy and parishioners from Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and

Uzbekistan. The Chairman of the Agency addressed the participants of the event, who highly appreciated the role of religious organizations in Georgia in creating a tolerant environment.

## 9. Project „State Language for Clergy“

In 2019, a project of state importance “State Language for Clergy”, was launched within the framework of which together with the LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, clergy serving in Georgia study the state language. At the first stage, clergy from the Muslim community of Georgia, the Armenian Apostolic and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches participated in the project. It is also worth noting that employees of the State Agency for Religious Issues held trainings on human rights, religious diversity and religious organizations in Georgia for teachers of Z. Zhvania School of Public Administration.

In October 2023, the Agency launched the third stage of the project “State Language for Clergy”, in which a total of 58 representatives of the Muslim community of Georgia, the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Georgia, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Georgia and the Catholic community participated. Religious leaders were also involved in the process of studying the Georgian language, including Bishop Rolf Barais of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church, Mufti of Eastern Georgia Etibar Eminov and Sheikh of All Georgia Ramin Igidov.

## 10. Interreligious Chess Championship

The State Agency for Religious Issues ensures support for freedom of religion and belief, as well as the creation of a tolerant and non-discriminatory environment. At the initiative of the Agency and with the participation of religious organizations that are members of the Interreligious Council under the Agency, a number of joint projects and activities are being implemented, including the annual team chess championship.

### 10.1. Signing of a Memorandum between the Agency and the Georgian Chess Federation

On March 22, 2023, at the Tbilisi Chess Palace, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues, Zaza Vashakmadze and the President of the Georgian Chess Federation, Akaki Iashvili, signed a Memorandum of Cooperation between the Agency and the Georgian Chess Federation, which envisages the popularization of chess among individuals involved in various religious organizations and for this purpose, holding annual chess championships between teams of religious organizations, implementing joint programs and projects in the field of chess, which helps to bring people involved in various religious organizations closer together.

### 10.2. The Second Georgian Team Chess Championship among Religious Organizations

On July 4-5, 2023, the Second Georgian Team Chess Championship among religious organizations was held at Nona Gaprindashvili Chess Palace in Tbilisi, in which teams from the Georgian Apostolic

Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Administration of Muslims of all Georgia, the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia, the Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus, the Jewish Union of Georgia, the Tbilisi International Baptist Church, the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia, the Georgian Evangelical-Lutheran Church, the Georgian Evangelical-Protestant Church, the Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia, the Yazidi Spiritual Council of Georgia and the Agency participated. The winner of the second chess tournament was the team of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia, the second place was taken by the team of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the third prize went to the team of the Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia.

## 11. International Conferences

### 11.1. International Conference „Religion and the Rule of Law“

On June 26, 2023, at Sheraton Grand Tbilisi Metechi Palace, a joint international conference was held by the State Agency for Religious Issues and the US NGO "Institute for Global Engagement" on the topic: "Religion and the Rule of Law." Representatives from China, Great Britain, the Czech Republic, Germany, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Poland, Hungary and Singapore also participated in the three-day conference.

The first session of the conference was opened by Zaza Vashakmadze, Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues and James Cheney, Vice President of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), who emphasized the relevance and importance of the conference topic for the modern world.

The first report, Global Overview of Religious Freedom, was addressed to the conference participants by American expert Nadine Maenza, Professor Elizabeth Clark (USA) spoke about international human rights related to freedom of religion and belief, Professor of Law Dr. Eric Jensen (USA) spoke about Freedom of Religion and National Security and Greg Mitchell (USA) spoke about the Global Network of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable.

The Chairman of the Agency spoke on the topic of "Threats to Religious Freedom in the Territories Occupied by Russia". He highlighted the dire situation of the Georgian population remaining in the territories of Georgia occupied by Russia, the deplorable condition of religious buildings of various religious denominations, especially Orthodox churches and the attempts to erase the Georgian traces in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

Leaders of religious organizations in Georgia gave speeches at the conference and spoke about the current situation in Georgia regarding freedom of religion.

The second day of the conference opened with a report by Davit Davitashvili, the Head of the Legal Maintenance Office of the Agency who spoke about the legislative framework for ensuring freedom of religion in Georgia.

The following participants spoke about the issues of protecting human religious rights in Georgia: Giorgi Osadze, Director of the Human Rights Protection and Investigation Quality Monitoring Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia; Salome Shengelia, Head of the Human Rights

Protection Department of the Prosecution Service of Georgia and Tamar Rostiashvili, Head of the Analytical Department of the Ministry of Justice of Georgia.

Mark Hill (UK) delivered a report about restrictions on freedom of religion and belief. The conference format included a European and Asian panel on the topic of the intersection of religion and law. The European panel was attended by Dr. Evelia Ochaby (Poland), Valeriu Ghileci (Moldova), Mark Aurelier Zegy (Hungary) and Dr. Mark Hill (UK). The Asian panel was attended by Professor Paul Liu (China), Professor Eugenie Tan (Singapore) and Bulat Sarsanbayev (Kazakhstan).

Within the framework of the conference, the organizers and participants visited the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, Mikheil Sarjveladze. The Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee emphasized the importance of holding such a forum in Georgia, the activities of the Agency in the field of freedom of religion and protection of human religious rights. At the meeting, the guests expressed the initiative to make Tbilisi a regional hub for international religious freedom, which was supported by the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee and the Agency, and future cooperation was planned.

The third day of the International Conference “Religion and the Rule of Law” began with a presentation of the Action Plan of the Love Your Neighbor Community (LYNC) and Kazakhstan Partnership. It should be noted that Kazakhstan has been cooperating with this organization for a long time and it was within the framework of Tbilisi International Conference that the LYNC-Kazakhstan Memorandum of Understanding was signed.

## 11.2. International Conference “the Role of the State in Interreligious Dialogue“

On September 27, 2023, a Georgian-Azerbaijani international conference was held at the Biltmore Hotel Tbilisi on the topic: "The Role of the State in Interreligious Dialogue."

Among the speakers at the international conference were: Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues, Zaza Vashakmadze; Chairman of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mubariz Gurbanli; Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Georgia, Faig Guliyev; Advisor to the Prime Minister of Georgia on Human Rights Protection Issues, Niko Tatulashvili; Rector of Tbilisi Theological Academy and Seminary, Prototropresbyter Giorgi Zviadadze; First Deputy Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Department, Mufti Salman Musaev; Head of the Legal Maintenance Office of the Agency, Davit Davitashvili; Sheikh of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia, Ramin Igidov. The speakers spoke about good-neighborly relations between Georgia and Azerbaijan, the role of religion in the face of challenges in the modern world, the necessity of interreligious dialogue and the role of the state in interreligious dialogue.

The second panel of the conference was dedicated to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Heydar Aliyev's birth. The panelists discussed the role of the Azerbaijani President in the formation of an independent Azerbaijan. The panel was summarized by Zaza Vashakmadze and Mubariz Gurbanli.

## 12. Charity Events

The Agency, with the support of the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia, systematically conducts charity events to address the needs of various religious communities. In 2023, the following charity events were held:

On January 27, 2023, representatives of the Agency and Tbilisi International Baptist Church visited LEPL Tbilisi Public School No. 202 (for blind and visually impaired) and presented 52 blind students with the fourth canonical book of the Bible "Book of Numbers" and annual interreligious calendars printed in Brail by the Agency;

On February 7, 2023, the Regional Representative of the Agency in A/R of Adjara and representatives of the Christian Association Gideon in Georgia presented 300 copies of the New Testament and Psalms to the prisoners of Batumi Penitentiary No. 3 of the Special Penitentiary Service;

On April 21, 2023, the Agency and the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Georgia held a joint charity event - they congratulated the Muslim community on Ramadan Bayram and provided humanitarian aid at Tbilisi Juma Mosque. 500 boxes of various types of food were distributed to socially vulnerable people;

On November 8, 2023, humanitarian aid, 19 boxes of clothing for women, men and children, provided by the international organization "FriedensBote" was donated to the socially vulnerable population in the IDP settlement area in Avchala, Tbilisi, The charity event was organized by the Agency, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia;

On November 17, 2023, humanitarian aid, women's, men's, and children's clothing, provided by the international organization "FriedensBote" was distributed to socially vulnerable citizens living in the village of Potskho, Tsalenjikha Municipality. The charity event was organized by the Agency, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia;

On December 27, 2023, the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia donated humanitarian aid from the international charity organization "FriedensBote" - 25 bundles of women's, men's and children's clothing and 20 boxes of sweets to the residents of the Tsalka Diocese;

On December 28, 2023 - the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia donated humanitarian aid from the German international charity organization "FriedensBote" - 20 bundles of clothes and 20 gift boxes of sweets to the students and teachers of St. Nino's Gymnasium in the village of Sairkhe, Chiatura and Sachkhere Diocese of the Orthodox Church.

## 13. Various Meetings of the Agency

### 13.1. Meeting with the Delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran

On January 18, 2023, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the Agency met with a delegation from the Islamic Republic of Iran, namely: Ayatollah Reza Ramezan, Secretary General of the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly, Abdolreza Rashedi, Deputy Head of International Affairs of the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly and Hassan Sadeghian, Head of the CIS and Turkey Department of the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly. Along with the Iranian guests, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Georgia, Mahmoud Adib, the Embassy's Cultural Attache, Ahmad Ali Mehri Ardestani, Representative of Al-Mustafa University, Hassan Yousefzadeh and an employee of the Cultural Department, Mahdi Zare attended the meeting.

The Chairman of the Agency introduced the guests to the activities of the State Agency for Religious Issues. He emphasized the Georgian phenomenon of Islam, the harmonious and peaceful coexistence of Shiite and Sunni Muslims in Georgia and as a clear example of this, he cited their prayer in one mosque.

The guests were interested in the projects implemented by the Agency and the activities of the Interreligious Council. They thanked the Chairman of the Agency for the reception and expressed hope that the cooperation between different religions in Georgia would become an example for other countries.

### 13.2. Meeting with an American Religious Organization

On January 23, 2023, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues met with the representative of the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE), Wade Cusack, who briefly introduced the Chairman of the Agency to IGE's activity, which strengthens freedom of belief around the world and gives everyone the opportunity to live as they believe. Wade Cusack is also the founder and president of the non-profit organization "Love Your Neighbor Community" (LYNC), which promotes religious freedom in Eastern Europe in partnership with government, civil society and religious communities.

### 13.3. Meeting with Representatives of "Limmud"

On January 30, 2023, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues hosted representatives of the Jewish organization "Limmud". The guests spoke about the Jewish cultural and educational conference, "Limmud", which includes a variety of sessions, seminars, and meetings for people of different ages. "Limmud" is held in Jewish communities in various cities around the world, such as New York, Toronto, Kiev, Baku, Jerusalem, London, Sydney.

In turn, the Chairman of the Agency provided the guests with information about the establishment of the Agency and its activities and focused on the unique Georgian-Jewish relations.

#### 13.4. Visit of the Agency to the “Salvation Army's” Anniversary

On October 14, 2023, the Salvation Army celebrated 30 years of service in Georgia. Representatives of the Interreligious Council of the State Agency for Religious Issues and leaders from Eastern Europe attended the reception held in connection with the anniversary.

The Agency congratulated the organization on its anniversary, expressed satisfaction with deepening of relations between the Agency and the Salvation Army and proposed cooperation in the format of the Interreligious Council.

On November 2 of the same year, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues met with representatives of the Salvation Army in Georgia.

The Director of the “Salvation Army” Representative Office, Captain Revaz Bakhtadze and the Public Relations Officer, Major Sofio Bakhtadze, informed the Agency about the main goals and objectives of their organization. In turn, the Chairman of the Agency introduced the guests to the activities of the State Agency for Religious Issues, the religious policy of the State of Georgia and stated that he would be glad to see the “Salvation Army” among the members of the Interreligious Council. The guests thanked the Chairman of the Agency for the reception and expressed their desire for intensive cooperation with the Agency.

#### 13.5. Meeting with the Newly Elected Chairman of the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia

On October 31, 2023, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues met with the newly elected Chairman of the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia, Bishop Aneri Giunashvili and congratulated him on his election as a bishop. The Bishop thanked the Chairman of the Agency for his reception and pledged his readiness to cooperate with the Agency in the format of an Interreligious Council.

The new bishop of the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia was elected at an international conference, which was attended by representatives of Baptist churches from Armenia, Estonia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Lithuania, Israel, Germany and the leadership of the international organization "FriedensBote".

### 13.6. Meeting with the Bishop of the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia

On November 1, 2023, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues met with the newly elected Bishop Kirakos Davtyan of the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia and congratulated him on his election as a bishop. The bishop, in turn, thanked the Chairman of the Agency for his reception.

### 13.7. Meeting with the Head of the Seventh Day Christian-Adventist Church of Georgia

On November 6, 2023, Boris Charaia the head of the Seventh Day Christian-Adventist Church of Georgia visited the State Agency for Religious Issues. At the introductory meeting, the guest got familiar with the establishment of the Agency, its goals, objectives, implemented projects and the Interreligious Council under the Agency. The guest, in turn, spoke about the activities of the Seventh Day Christian-Adventist Church in Georgia. At the end of the meeting, a desire was expressed for the aforementioned organization to join the Interreligious Council and to participate in its activities.

### 13.8. Agency at the Synod Session of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church

On November 25, 2023, the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the VII Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Georgia and the South Caucasus was held at Tbilisi Reconciliation Church, which was attended by high-ranking clergy of the Evangelical-Lutheran Churches of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Germany.

At the Synod session, reports were made by the leadership and representatives of Tbilisi Reconciliation Church and news from individual parishes was also presented. In the end, the budget plan for 2024 was discussed in a closed format.

At the invitation of the Bishop Rolf Barais of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church the first part of the Synod session, which was attended by representatives of the State Agency for Religious Issues, highlighted the successful cooperation between the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Georgia and the Agency in the format of an Interreligious Council.

### 13.9. Opening of the Cathedral in Chiatura

On December 13, 2023, the Cathedral of St. Andrew the First-Called was opened in Chiatura. The solemn service was led and the Cathedral was consecrated by Metropolitan Daniel (Datuashvili) of Chiatura and Sachkhere Eparchy. The service was also attended by members of the Holy Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Metropolitan Daniel especially noted the financial assistance of the State in the construction of the Cathedral and thanked the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues for his support.

### 13.10. Meeting with the Newly Elected Sheikh

On December 15, 2023, an introductory meeting was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia between the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues, Zaza Vashakmadze, and the newly elected Sheikh of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia, Faig Nabiev.

The Chairman of the Agency introduced the Sheikh to the projects implemented by the Agency and the active involvement of representatives of the Muslim community, both Shiite and Sunni, in them. He also drew attention to the assistance provided by the State to the Muslim community and noted that this would continue. In turn, the Sheikh Faig Nabiev of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia thanked Zaza Vashakmadze for his reception.

### 14. Meetings with Counterpart Organizations

On September 25, 2023, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the State Agency for Religious Issues and the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The Memorandum was signed by Zaza Vashakmadze, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues and Mubariz Gurbanli the Chairman of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan,.

At the meeting, the representatives of counterpart organizations and clergy discussed the aspects of cooperation between the two agencies, the situation in terms of religious rights of the Muslim community in Georgia and the Orthodox community living in Azerbaijan as well as future prospects.

### 15. Visits Abroad

#### 15.1. Visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan

The State Agency for Religious Issues is establishing a tradition of celebrating holidays of St. George's Day (May 6 and November 23) in the Qakh district of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

On the occasion of the holiday of May 6, 2023, a delegation visited the Qakh district of the Republic of Azerbaijan, consisting of representatives of the Patriarchate of Georgia, the Parliament, the State Agency for Religious Issues, the Administration of the State Representative in the Kakheti Region and of local municipal Councils and City Halls.

The delegation members visited St. George's Church in the village of Kakhigilo, Qakh district, where a religious service was held by Metropolitan Theodore (Chuadze) and the Dean of St. George's Church in Qakh, priest Petre Khumarashvili. After the service, the Agency presented 50 Bibles to the Orthodox parishioners.

The delegation members also visited St. George's Church in Kurmukhi, where a service was held by Metropolitan Theodore (Chuadze) of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti Eparchy, the temporary ruler of the Khornabuji, Hereti and Nekresi Diocese.

## 15.2. Georgian Delegation Visited Qakh

On November 23, 2023, the State Agency for Religious Issues celebrated St. George's Day with the compatriots living in the Qakh district of the Republic of Azerbaijan. A 120-member delegation consisting of the representatives of the Patriarchate of Georgia, the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia, the Parliament of Georgia, the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Administration of the State Representative in the Kakheti Region, Lagodekhi and Dedoplistskaro City Councils and City Halls and the Agency's staff arrived in the Qakh district.

The delegation members visited St. George's Church in the village of Kakhingilo, Qakh district, where a religious service was held by Metropolitan of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti, temporary ruler of the Khornabuji, Hereti and Nekresi Diocese, Theodore (Chuadze). After the service, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues and the Agency's staff presented 150 Bibles to the Orthodox Christians living in Qakh district.

Following the service at St. George's Church in Qakh, the members of the delegation visited St. George's Church in Kurmukhi, where a religious service was celebrated by Metropolitan Theodore (Chuadze) of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti Eparchy and priest Petre Khumarashvili. The Agency's staff distributed Bibles to local Georgian Orthodox Christians.

On November 24, 2023, Zaza Vashakmadze, the Chairman of the Agency met with the Georgian population living in the village of Ititala, Belakani district and visited the secondary school of the village, where 380 children study out of which 158 are in the Georgian sector. The Chairman of the Agency, together with the Governor of Belakani district and the village trustee, met with the school principal, teachers and pupils of the Georgian sector, who were introduced to the school's activities and current challenges.

On November 24, 2023, a delegation of the Agency visited the Juma Mosque in the village of Ititala, Belakani district, Republic of Azerbaijan, where they met with Georgian Muslims and Christians and distributed the Quran published in Georgian to the Muslim congregation and the Bible to the Christian congregation.

At the meeting, the Chairman of the Agency spoke about tolerant environment in Georgia and the support and financial assistance that the State of Georgia provides to Muslim citizens of Georgia. The meeting was attended by the governor of the Belakani district, the village trustee and the school principal.

### 15.3. Visit to the USA

From May 30 to June 12, 2023, a delegation of the State Agency for Religious Issues, consisting of the Chairman of the Agency, Zaza Vashakmadze and the Head of the Legal Maintenance Office, Davit Davitashvili, visited the United States of America and held the following meetings:

May 31, 2023 - with the Head of the Public Affairs Department of the US state of Georgia, Mike Griffin, Lobbyist of the Christian Conference in the Government of Georgia, who introduced the Georgian side to the American practice of the relationship between religion and the state using the example of the US state of Georgia. In turn, the Chairman of the Agency spoke about the specific directions of the religious policy of the Georgian State;

June 1, 2023 - with the Texas Police Chaplain, Baptist Church Pastor Dr. Clifton Cumming, who provided the guests with detailed information about the training of police chaplains and the criteria for candidates. In turn, the Chairman of the Agency introduced Pastor Cumming to the activities of the Agency for the introduction of chaplaincy services in Georgia;

June 2, 2023 - with Alex Gerasimov, Chief Chaplain of the Atlanta Sheriff's Office, Georgia and Yaroslav Malko, the Atlanta Police Chaplain, the Head of the Ukrainian Law Enforcement Chaplaincy Service and the President of the "Global Christian Support". The Chief Chaplain of the Atlanta Sheriff's Office, Alex Gerasimov, discussed specific cases from his own practice with the delegation of the Agency;

June 3, 2023 - with Olga Westphal, Military Hospital Chaplain at the US Department of Veterans Affairs, who provided the Agency's delegation with detailed information about the selection of military chaplains, their training, practice and the importance of service;

June 5, 2023 - with Josh Holland, Billy Graham Organization's International Director, Head of the Rapid Response Chaplains Team; Eric Hubbard, Deputy Director, Law Enforcement Chaplain, and the Manager of Law Enforcement Chaplains, Lieutenant David Rutledge. The Board of Directors introduced the Agency delegation to the organization's activities, various areas of service of their chaplains, including the specifics of chaplaincy services with police officers, sheriff's departments and other law enforcement agencies;

June 6, 2023 - with the Chief of Police of Charlotte (North Carolina), Colonel Johnny Jennings, Deputy Chief of Police and Head of the Police Academy, Major Dave Johnson and the Chief Chaplain, Head of the Chaplain Training Center, Theo Schaffer, who spoke about the role and importance of chaplains in law enforcement;

June 7, 2023 - with Greg Mitchell, Co-Chair of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable, James Chen, Vice President of the Institute for Global Engagement and Wade Cusack, Senior Scholar, Head of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Program at the Institute for Global Engagement, who provided the Agency's delegation with a detailed overview of the organizations' activities and implemented projects. At the meeting, which was also attended by Levan Khurtsidze, Counselor of the Embassy of

Georgia in the United States, the Chairman of the Agency spoke about the religious communities in Georgia and the State's religious policy;

June 7, 2023 - with Mark Levin, Executive Vice Chairman of the National Coalition for Eurasian Jewry (NSCEJ) and Daniel Mariashin, Executive Director of B'nai B'rith International. The meeting once again emphasized the uniqueness of Georgian-Jewish relations;

June 8, 2023 - with Rashad Hussein, US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom at the United States Department of State. At the meeting, the parties discussed the Georgian-American strategic cooperation in the field of human rights. The meeting emphasized the history of cooperation between the Agency and the US Office of International Religious Freedom, which dates back to the establishment of the Agency in 2014, as well as the importance of its continuation and future plans. The meeting was attended by: Carson Relitz Rocker, Deputy to the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Robin Schulman, Foreign Affairs Officer, Representative of the Office of International Religious Freedom; Susan Wood, Georgia Desk Officer; Jonathan Smith, Deputy Assistant Attorney General of the US Department of Justice, Robert Weiner, Senior Counsel, Representative of the Office of the Assistant Attorney General, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to the United States, David Zalkaliani, Counsellor Sofia Balanchivadze;

June 9, 2023 - with Peter Mina, Deputy Director of Programs for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, US Department of Homeland Security, Jennifer Attal, Senior Policy Advisor for Public Engagement Division and Rebecca Tosad, Head of the Program Division. They briefed the Agency's delegation on the specifics and details of the activities of the Department of Homeland Security. They also discussed programs to prevent violent extremism and radicalism in the United States. The meeting was attended by Khatuna Kveselava, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Georgia to the United States and Shalva Burduli, Senior Counselor of the Embassy of Georgia to the United States;

June 12, 2023 - with the United States Commissioner for International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Advisor to the US Presidential on Religious Issues, Frederick Davie, USCIRF Executive Director, Erin Singhsinsuk, USCIRF Supervisory Policy Analyst, Keely Bakken and USCIRF Victims List Database Specialist, Dylan Schexnaydre. The hosts paid special attention to the violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms, including freedom of religion and belief, in the occupied territories of Georgia, and to ethnic and religious discrimination by the occupying country, Russia. The discussion also touched on the annual reports on international religious freedom published by the US Department of State. The meeting was attended by Khatuna Kveselava, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Georgia to the United States and Shalva Burduli, Senior Counselor of the Embassy of Georgia to the United States.

#### 15.4. Visit to the Republic of Armenia

On July 17-19, 2023, a delegation of the State Agency for Religious Issues, consisting of the Chairman, Zaza Vashakmadze, Analyst of the Strategic Research, Analysis and Regional Service of the same Agency, Giorgi Patashuri and Lawyer of the Legal Maintenance Office of the Agency, Aleksandre

Shekiladze visited the Republic of Armenia. Within the framework of the working visit, the delegation met with the following representatives, namely:

July 18, 2023 – the Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Artashes Tumanyan. At the meeting, which was attended by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to the Republic of Armenia, Giorgi Sharvashidze and the First Secretary of the Embassy of Georgia, Shalva Sabauri, the Chairman of the Agency introduced the Advisor to the Prime Minister to the main directions of the religious policy of the State of Georgia and the measures taken by the State to support religious organizations, including the Armenian community. During the meeting with the Advisor to the Prime Minister, the transfer of religious buildings and other important issues for the State of Georgia and the Georgian Orthodox Church were raised.

July 19, 2023 - His Holiness Karekin II, Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church, Catholicos of All Armenians. At the meeting, which was attended by the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to the Republic of Armenia, Giorgi Sharvashidze and the First Secretary of the Embassy of Georgia, Shalva Sabauri, the Chairman of the Agency spoke about the main directions of the religious policy of the Georgian State. In addition, the Chairman of the Agency introduced to His Holiness Karekin II the position of the Georgian side on the registration of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the Republic of Armenia, on cultural monuments and focused on other issues important for the Georgian State and the Georgian Orthodox Church.

On July 19, 2023, as part of a visit to the Republic of Armenia, a delegation from the State Agency for Religious Issues visited the Akhtala Georgian Monastery.

## 16. Meetings with the Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps

The State Agency for Religious Issues traditionally actively cooperates with representatives of the diplomatic corps, holds introductory and working meetings and informs them about the Agency's activities, implemented projects and future plans. In 2023, the following meetings were held:

- With the First Resident Ambassador of the Kingdom of Denmark to Georgia, Anne Toft Sørensen - 18.01.2023;
- With the Religious Attaché of the Embassy of the Republic of Turkey to Georgia, Ahmet Erdem - 02.02.2023;
- With the representatives of the US Embassy in Georgia, Christina Pflanz, Medea Kochoradze and Jonathan Pinoli - 07.02.2023;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Georgia, Faig Guliyev - 17.02.2023;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of France to Georgia, Ms. Sheraz Gasri - 20.02.2023;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Saudi Arabia to Georgia, Salman bin Abdulrahman Al Al-Sheikh - 17.03.2023;

- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Holy See (Vatican) to Georgia, Archbishop José Avellino Betancourt - 28.04.2023;
- With the Head of the European Union Monitoring Mission to Georgia, Dimitrios Carabalis - 17.05.2023;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Turkey to Georgia, Ali Kaan Orbay and the Religious Attaché of the Republic of Turkey, Mahmut Gol - 19.06.2023;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Qatar to Georgia, Hassan bin Ahmad Al-Mutawa - 18.08.2023;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Arab Emirates to Georgia, Ahmad Al-Nuaimi - 12.09.2023.

## 17. Relationship with the Media

The State Agency for Religious Issues considers open and transparent relations with the media a priority.

Any publications of the Agency, interreligious calendars and religious maps are uploaded to the Agency's website.

Information about any activities of the Agency's representatives: meetings, visits, conferences, participation in various events, is uploaded to the Agency's website, "Facebook", "Twitter", and is covered and disseminated through media outlets, as well as through the news agency "Interpressnews".

In 2023, 200 pieces of information with the photo materials were posted on the Agency's website and "Facebook"; 40 pieces of information in English were shared via "Twitter"; 194 pieces of information were disseminated via the news agency "Interpressnews"; 51 events of the Agency were covered by the news programs on various TV channels.

## 18. Appendix – Administrative Report

### **Appendix – Expense Report of the LEPL State Agency for Religious Issues**

In 2023, 44 (forty four) contracts were signed for administrative expenses, including 13 (thirteen) contracts under consolidated tender, 5 (five) contracts under electronic tender and 26 (twenty-six) contracts under simplified purchase.

The electronic declarations are submitted on a monthly basis in accordance with the deadlines set by the legislation in force.

The budget execution report is submitted electronically (<https://www.ebudget.ge/>) to the Ministry of Finance of Georgia on a quarterly basis.

The plan (EPLAN), all the contracts and all the documents confirming the contract costs have been uploaded electronically to the State Procurement Agency, both to CMR and SPA.

6 (six) electronic tenders were implemented. Technical documentation, relevant protocols, contracts, executions and payments have been uploaded within the time limits established by the law.

44 (forty four) administrative contracts (organizational code 5001) and 4 (four) contracts signed with different religious organizations (organizational code 5002) (LEPL Administration of Muslims of all Georgia (1), LEPL Jewish Union of Georgia (1), LEPL Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Holy Church in Georgia (1) and LEPL Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus (1)) have been registered with the Treasury Service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia.

## 19. Information on Financial Situation

Organizational code	Name	Approved plan for 2023	Cash flow	percentage of completion against the approved cash flow plan
<b>50 00</b>	<b>LEPL – State Agency for Religious Issues</b>			
	total	6,450,000.00	6,421,406.12	99.56%
2	expenses	6,440,000.00	6,411,617.12	99.56%
2.1	salary	715,000.00	693,004.76	96.92%
2.2	Goods and services	223,500.00	217,170.36	97.17%
2.5	subsidies	5,500,000.00	5,500,000.00	100.00%
2.8	Other expenses	1,500.00	1,442.00	96.13%
31	Growth in non-financial assets	10,000.00	9,789.00	97.89%
<b>50 01</b>	<b>LEPL – State Agency for Religious Issues - administration</b>			
	total	950,000.00	921,406.12	96.99%
2	expenses	940,000.00	911,617.12	96.98%
2.1	salary	712,000.00	693,004.76	97.33%
2.2	Goods and services	226,500.00	217,170.36	95.88%
2.8	Goods and services	1,500.00	1,442.00	96.13%
31	Growth in non-financial assets	10,000.00	9,789.00	97.89%
<b>50 02</b>	<b>Funding of religious organizations</b>			
2	expenses	5,500,000.00	5,500,000.00	100.00%
2.5	subsidies	5,500,000.00	5,500,000.00	100.00%

## 20. Information on Business Trips

<b>Business trip</b>	<b>Expense (GEL)</b>
Business trip within the country	2820
Business trip abroad	30350
<b>Total business trip expenses</b>	<b>33170</b>

## 21. Funding of Religious Associations (confessions)

<b>Denomination</b>	<b><i>Budget for 2023</i></b>
<b>LEPL Administration of Muslims of All Georgia</b>	3,350,000
<b>LEPL Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus</b>	650,000
<b>LEPL Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia</b>	1,000,000
<b>LEPL Jewish Union of Georgia</b>	500,000
<b>total</b>	<b>5,500,000</b>

## 22. Shota Rustaveli Georgian National Science Foundation Grant

<b>შოთა რუსთაველის საქართველოს ეროვნული სამეცნიერო ფონდის გრანტი</b>		
Grant Agreement Number	FR-22-21090	Cash flow in GEL for 2023
Grant Agreement Signing Date	10.03.2023	
<b>Spending categories</b>	Grant budget approved appropriation	
	First tranche	

- total	45640	33785
01 - Grant funding for key personnel	39960	29970
02 - Salary for supporting personnel	4980	3320
04 - Goods and services	700	495

### 23. Information on Correspondence

Correspondence	Quantity
Incoming correspondence	362
Outgoing correspondence	831
Legal acts	262
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# State Agency for Religious Issues

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## 1. Action Plan of the Government of Georgia on the Protection of Human Rights for 2024-2026

The State, and accordingly the State Agency for Religious Issues, is guided by the “National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights” and the “ Action Plan of the Government of Georgia on the Protection of Human Rights” corresponding to this strategy, approved by years.

Within the framework of the 2024-2026 Action Plan (Goal 9. Ensuring freedom of religion and belief and further strengthening the principles of secularism), the Agency systematically carried out measures to support tolerance and non-discriminatory environment. In addition, to ensure freedom of religion and belief and to strengthen the principles of secularism in accordance with the standards provided for by international and national legislation.

### 1.1. Trainings for Clergy

In accordance with paragraph 9.1.2. of the Action Plan on the Protection of Human Rights of Georgia for 2024-2026 (Awareness-raising trainings on freedom of religion and belief and its guarantees for representatives of religious organizations registered in Georgia), on March 5, 2024, the Agency together with the non-governmental organization “Center for Harmonious Development of Cultural Diversity”, a meeting in Kvareli was held on the topic “Psychological Addiction of People - Alcoholism and Gambling. Seeing the problem, prevention and ways to overcome it”. The training, organized with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Georgia, was attended by clergy of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia and Marneuli and Hujabi, Bolnisi dioceses of the Georgian Apostolic Orthodox Church.

At the meeting, the aim of which was to promote a healthy lifestyle by Georgian Christian and Muslim clergy and peaceful, harmonious relations and cooperation among religions, Aleksandre Shekiladze, a lawyer of the Legal Maintenance Office of the State Agency for Religious Issues, made a report. He spoke about the role of religions in promoting a healthy lifestyle. The Muslim and Christian clergy participating in the meeting discussed issues of future cooperation.

### 1.2. The Process of Returning Religious Buildings to their Historical Owners

In accordance with paragraph 9.1.6. of the 2024-2026 Action Plan on the Protection of Human Rights in Georgia (Continuation of the process of returning religious buildings confiscated during the Soviet totalitarian regime to their historical owners), during the reporting year, 18 religious buildings and land plots confiscated during the Soviet totalitarian regime were returned to the Muslim community.

## 2. Raising Public Awareness in terms of Religious Tolerance

### 2.1. Annual Publication “Interreligious Calendar”

In 2024, an annual interreligious calendar was traditionally published, reflecting the religious holidays of all the main religious communities operating in Georgia (13 in total) - the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Armenian Apostolic, Spiritual Christians-Molokan, Yazidi, Evangelical-Lutheran, Evangelical-Protestant, Baptist communities, the Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia and the "Salvation Army" in Georgia.

Since 2014, the calendar has been published and distributed not only in religious communities, but also in all public institutions and is presented as a gift to diplomats from various countries accredited in Georgia, as well as representatives of different spheres of Georgian society.

## 3. Promoting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In accordance with Article 37 of the Law of Georgia on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and in order to promote the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and the creation of an inclusive and tolerant environment, the Agency has developed an Action Plan for Promoting the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) for 2024. The document aims to identify priority areas and measures to be implemented during 2024, based on the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Law of Georgia on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. According to the Action Plan, the following activities were implemented in the reporting year:

### 3.1. Braille-printed Annual Interreligious Calendar

To support blind and visually impaired citizens, an interreligious calendar was printed in Braille in 2024, which was presented to the LEPL Tbilisi Public School No. 202 (for blind and visually impaired students) and the Georgian Blind Union.

### 3.2. Braille-printed Canonical Books

The Agency, taking into account the wishes of the members of the Georgian Blind Union, has been publishing Bible books in Braille since 2020.

In 2024, the fifth canonical book of the Old Testament, "Deuteronomy", was published, which was presented to the LEPL Tbilisi Public School No. 202 (for blind and visually impaired students) and the Georgian Blind Union.

## 4. Relationship of the State with Religious Organizations

The central government of Georgia, headed by the Prime Minister, and representatives of the Agency traditionally attend the main holidays of the historical religions operating in Georgia, including the greatest holidays of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church – Easter, Christmas and Svetitskhovloba (a holiday dedicated to the Svetitskhoveli “Life-Giving Pillar”, Cathedral); on the occasion of the main holidays of the Muslim community and the beginning of the Ramadan the Prime Minister hosts an iftar dinner for Muslim clergy; on the Hanukkah holiday of the Jewish community the Prime Minister of Georgia symbolically lights the first candle in the synagogue. Also, the State Agency for Religious Issues regularly meets with the leaders of various religious organizations and participates in their important religious holidays both in Tbilisi and Rustavi, as well as in the regions, attends annual reports, conferences, organizes joint charity events, reviews the applications received from them and provides assistance according to needs.

### 4.1. Iftar for the Muslim Community on behalf of the Prime Minister

On March 29, 2024, the Prime Minister of Georgia, on behalf of the Government of Georgia, held a traditional Iftar for representatives of the Muslim community on the occasion of Ramadan Bayram and congratulated them on the month of Ramadan. The Prime Minister especially noted the centuries-old tradition of peaceful coexistence and friendship between Christians and Muslims in Georgia, as well as the contribution of Muslim citizens to the development of the country. He emphasized that the State has transferred 237 mosques to the Muslim community to date and 20 mosques would be transferred in the near future, the financial support provided to the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia had also increased to 4,150,000 GEL.

### 4.2. Head of the Government of Georgia on Hanukkah

According to tradition, the first candle of Hanukkah was lit by the Prime Minister of Georgia at the Great Synagogue of Tbilisi. Jews celebrate Hanukkah, a time of renewal and blessing, the victory of light over darkness.

The Prime Minister addressed the Jews and invited guests gathered in the Great Synagogue. In his speech, he emphasized the 26-century, unique experience of Georgian-Jewish friendship, recalled the October 7 terrorist attack and noted that Israel, like the entire world, needs peace most of all today.

The public gathered at the Great Synagogue was greeted by Merab Chanchalashvili, Chairman of the Jewish Union of Georgia, Hadas Meitzad, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of Israel to Georgia, and Rakhamin Murdukhshvili, Chief Rabbi of the Great Synagogue of Tbilisi.

## 5. Interreligious Council

There is an Interreligious Council under the State Agency for Religious Issues, uniting almost all religious associations in Georgia, including the Georgian Orthodox Church, historical religions and other small denominations, namely:

- Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church;
- Administration of Muslims of All Georgia;
- Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia;
- Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus;
- Jewish Union of Georgia;
- Tbilisi International Baptist Church;
- Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia;
- Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Georgia;
- Evangelical-Protestant Church of Georgia;
- Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia;
- Yezidi Spiritual Council of Georgia;
- International Society for Krishna Consciousness;
- „Salvation Army in Georgia“;
- The Seventh Day Christian-Adventist Church of Georgia.

On January 17, 2024, a meeting of the Interreligious Council was held. According to the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues, the reason for the meeting was the proposal of the Georgian Orthodox Church, which requested information and an assessment of the fact regarding the vandalism that occurred at the Holy Trinity Church.

The members of the Interreligious Council expressed solidarity and full support for the Orthodox Church and noted that vandalism and desecration of sacred spaces are unacceptable. Despite the differences in worldview among religions, there had always been a tolerant and mutually respectful environment in Georgia, which must be maintained. The members of the Interreligious Council assessed the incident as a clear act of blasphemy and vandalism, including in terms of damage to other people's property.

At the end of the meeting, the members of the Interreligious Council adopted a joint statement.

On February 9, 2024, the next meeting of the Interreligious Council was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, which was attended by Konstantine Kapanadze Advisor to the US and Canada Division of the Department of the Americas of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia along with the leaders of religious organizations that are the members of the Interreligious Council. The purpose of the meeting was to intercede with the US Embassy and Consulate in Georgia, in particular, assistance in the visa application process for the leaders of religious organizations.

On April 2, 2024, the next meeting of the Interreligious Council was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, where the initiative of representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church, based on the draft “Law of Georgia on the Protection of Family Values and Minors, on legislative amendments to protect children's rights, was discussed.

The members of the Council proposed to the Agency to ensure the delivery of the draft law for its thorough consideration.

On May 16, 2024, the Chairman of the Parliament of Georgia, Shalva Papuashvili, met with the Chairman of the Agency and representatives of the Interreligious Council within the framework of the session of the Commission for the General Public Review of the Draft Constitutional “Law of Georgia On the Protection of Family Values and Minors”. The importance of the constitutional amendments was discussed by members of the parliamentary majority: Irakli Kadagishvili, Davit Matikashvili and Tengiz Sharmanashvili. Representatives of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia, the Jewish Union of Georgia, Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia, the Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus, the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia and the Yazidi Spiritual Council expressed full support for the draft law.

On November 15, 2024, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues and members of the Interreligious Council met with the Executive Director of the National Statistics Service of Georgia, who spoke about the general population census. The Chairman of the Agency emphasized the importance of the population census and called on religious leaders, together with their parishioners, to actively participate in the general population census process. According to the Chairman, the results of the census will significantly contribute to the State's involvement in meeting the needs of religious organizations.

## 6. Funding of Religious Organizations within the Framework of Compensation for the Damage Caused during the Soviet Totalitarian Regime

Although the State of Georgia is not a legal successor of the Soviet regime and accordingly, is not obligated to compensate for the damage caused during the Soviet totalitarian period, within the framework of the Resolution of the Government of Georgia No. 117 of January 27, 2014, 4 (four) religious denominations - Islamic, Jewish, Roman-Catholic and Armenian Apostolic religious associations are symbolically and partially compensated for the damage caused during the Soviet totalitarian regime, which is used to promote the development, unification and peaceful coexistence of religious communities in the country. (See table).

year	Muslim community	Roman-Catholic community	Armenian Apostolic community	Jewish community	total
2014	1 100 000	200 000	300 000	150 000	1 750 000

2015	2 200 000	400 000	600 000	300 000	3 500 000
2016	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2017	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2018	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2019	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2020	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2021	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2022	3 350 000	650 000	1 000 000	500 000	5 500 000
2023	3 350 000	650 000	1 000 000	500 000	5 500 000
2024	4 150 000	700 000	1 100 000	550 000	6 500 000
total	30 650 000	5 900 000	8 800 000	4 400 000	49 750 000

*\*amounts are given in GEL*

In addition, religious associations receive financial and property assistance from local budgets to meet the religious needs of their communities.

Based on consultations with religious communities and a study of the actual circumstances (number of parishioners, number of clergy and religious buildings), by Decree No. 146 of the Government of Georgia of January 26, 2024, in order to partially compensate for the material and moral damage caused to religious communities (Islamic, Jewish, Roman-Catholic and Armenian Apostolic) existing in Georgia during the Soviet totalitarian regime, the additional 1,000,000 (one million) GEL allocated to the LEPL - State Agency for Religious Issues from the Reserve Fund of the Government of Georgia provided for by the Law of Georgia "On the State Budget of Georgia" of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia was distributed among religious communities in the following amount:

- 1) Muslim community of Georgia - 800 000 (eight hundred thousand) GEL;
- 2) Armenian Apostolic Church of Georgia - 100 000 (a hundred thousand) GEL;
- 3) Georgian Roman-Catholic Church - 50 000 (fifty thousand) GEL;
- 4) Jewish community of Georgia - 50 000 (fifty thousand) GEL.

## 7. Recommendatory Commission for the Study of Property and Financial Needs of Religious Associations

### 7.1.Recommendatory Commission Sessions

In 2024, 5 sessions of the Recommendatory Commission for the Study of Property and Financial Needs of Religious Associations were held. In total, the Commission considered 169 issues, in particular:

- Orthodox Church : satisfied – 136, flawed– 0, refused – 14;
- Muslim community: satisfied – 3, flawed – 1, refused – 0;
- Armenian community: satisfied – 3, flawed – 8, refused – 2;
- Armenian Apostolic Church: satisfied – 2, flawed – 0, refused – 0.

#### March 1, 2024 - I Session

Religious community	motion	Satisfied	flawed	refused
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	54	51		3
Muslim community	1	1		
Armenian community	1			1

#### May 24, 2024 - II Session

Religious community	motion	Satisfied	flawed	refused
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	41	34		7
Muslim community	1		1	
Armenian community	2		1	1

**August 12, 2024 - III Session**

<b>Religious community</b>	<b>motion</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>flawed</b>	<b>refused</b>
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	23	20		3
Armenian community	4		4	
Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic church in Georgia	2	2		
Muslim community	2	2		

**October 23, 2024 - IV Session**

<b>Religious community</b>	<b>motion</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>flawed</b>	<b>refused</b>
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	22	22		
Armenian community	3		3	

**December 13, 2024 - V Session**

<b>Religious community</b>	<b>motion</b>	<b>Satisfied</b>	<b>flawed</b>	<b>refused</b>
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	10	9		1

Armenian community	3	3		

In total, in 2024, based on the decisions of 5 (five) sessions of the Recommendatory Commission for the Study of Property and Financial Needs of Religious Associations, the Agency issued a positive recommendation on the transfer of 3,332,384.54 GEL out of the requested 5,909,242.42 GEL.

## 8. Publications of the Agency

On June 4, 2024, at the Courtyard by Marriott Tbilisi Hotel, the State Agency for Religious Issues held a presentation of the photo album “Functioning Cult Buildings in Georgia as of 2023”, which was attended by the representatives of the Government of Georgia, the Parliament of Georgia, religious organizations and the diplomatic corps.

At the presentation, the Chairman of the Agency spoke about the photo album and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Agency, which symbolically coincided with the issuing of the aforementioned publication. After the presentation, the guests were presented with a photo album “Functioning Cult Buildings in Georgia as of 2023”.

## 9. International Day for Tolerance

On November 16, 2024, on the occasion of the International Day for Tolerance, the State Agency for Religious Issues established a tradition according to which one of the religious communities in Georgia takes turns hosting the leaders and parishioners of other religious organizations.

The event related to this day was hosted by the Georgian Orthodox Church in 2016; in 2017 - the Jewish Union of Georgia; in 2018 - the Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus; in 2019 - the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia; in 2020 - the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia; in 2021 - the Evangelical-Protestant Church of Georgia; in 2022 - the Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia; in 2023 - the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia.

On the occasion of the International Day for Tolerance in 2024, the Yazidi Spiritual Council of Georgia held an event for religious organizations of Georgia, which was attended by leaders and representatives of religious organizations that are members of the Interreligious Council at the Agency.

## 10. Project „State Language for Clergy“

In 2019, a project of state importance “State Language for Clergy”, was launched within the framework of which together with the LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, clergy serving in Georgia study the state language. At the first stage, clergy from the Muslim Community of Georgia, the Armenian Apostolic and the Evangelical-Lutheran Churches participated in the project.

It is also worth noting that employees of the State Agency for Religious Issues held trainings on human rights, religious diversity and religious organizations in Georgia for teachers of Z. Zhvania School of Public Administration.

During the reporting period, in order to raise public awareness, the Agency continued the project “State Language for Clergy” in which a total of 35 representatives of the Muslim community of Georgia, the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia and the Catholic Church participated.

## 11. International Conferences

### 11.1. International Conference: "The Role of Religious Education in Overcoming Modern Global Challenges"

On July 9, 2024, the Second Georgian-American International Conference opened at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Batumi on the topic: “The Role of Religious Education in Overcoming Modern Global Challenges,” organized by the State Agency for Religious Issues and the US non-governmental organization “Institute for Global Engagement.”

The first report at the conference was presented by Zaza Vashakmadze, Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues on the topic: “Education against Radicalism”; Bob Roberts, President of the Institute for Global Engagement, spoke on the topic: “Fighting Extremism by Building Multireligious Relations”; Levan Ioseliani, Public Defender of Georgia, spoke on the “Contemporary Challenges of Religious Tolerance”; Davit Davitashvili, Head of the Legal Maintenance Office of the Agency touched upon the issues concerning the violations of religious freedom in the occupied territories of Georgia; Dennis Hoover, Senior Fellow at the Institute for Global Engagement, discussed the Necessity of Intercultural Religious Education in his report; Koba Chopliani, Director of the Center for the Harmonious Development of Cultural Diversity, spoke about the role of religion in establishing peace and harmonious relations between nations/ethnic groups.

### 11.2. International Conference in Germany

On October 9-10, 2024, a delegation of the Agency participated in the international conference "How Inclusive Freedom of Religion and Belief Can Prevent and/or Deter Radicalization, Extremism and

Violence" in Berlin (Germany). At the conference, the chairman of the Agency spoke about the religious landscape of Georgia, touched upon the State's religious policy, in particular, the financial compensation provided to religious associations in connection with partial compensation for the damage caused during the Soviet totalitarian regime and the practice of returning religious buildings to religious organizations, the activities of the Interreligious Council, which unites 14 major religious organizations, also the phenomenon of Georgian Islam, which implies good-neighborly relations between Sunnis and Shiites, the 26-century unique tradition of Jews in Georgia, the complete disregard for the rights of the Georgian population to movement, religion, education and healthcare in the occupied territories of Georgia, as well as the dire condition of Georgian Orthodox Churches.

### 11.3. IX International Scientific Conference of the National Archives of Georgia

On October 10, 2024, the IX International Scientific Conference of the National Archives of Georgia was held on the topic - "Archival Studies, Source Studies - Trends and Challenges", which was dedicated to the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Queen Ketevan.

Zviad Tkabladze, the project leader, analyst of the Agency delivered a report on "Repressions on Religious Grounds in Soviet Georgia (According to Data from the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs) at the conference. The report was an overview of the 2022 State Scientific Grant Competition for Fundamental Research project – Religious Repressions in Soviet Georgia (According to Data from MIA Archive), funded by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia, which is being implemented at the initiative of the Agency in cooperation with the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia.

The topic covered the research conducted by a group of researchers on religious repressions and repressed clergy in Georgia during the Soviet period (1921-1991). Information was processed about those clergymen who were sentenced to three categories of punishment – executed, imprisoned and exiled.

## 12. Charity Events

The Agency, with the support of the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia, systematically conducts charity events to address the needs of various religious communities. In 2024, the following charity events were held:

On January 10, 2024, representatives of religious organizations that are members of the Interreligious Council and the Agency staff visited N5 (Women's) Penitentiary Institution in Rustavi and presented 380 female prisoners with New Year's gifts - sweets, personal hygiene items and 20 bundles of clothes;

On January 22, 2024, the Agency donated humanitarian aid, 15 bundles of clothes and 25 boxes of sweets, to the Zarzma Monastery of the Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti Diocese from the international charity organization "FriedensBote";

On January 24, 2024, representatives of the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia delivered humanitarian aid - 15 bundles of clothes and 25 gift boxes - to displaced children from the Tskhinvali region living in the village of Metekhi, Kaspi district, from the international charity organization "FriedensBote";

On February 5, 2024, representatives of the Agency visited the LEPL Tbilisi Public School N202 (for blind and visually impaired) and presented the school students with 2024 Interreligious Calendar printed in Braille, the fifth canonical book of the Old Testament "Deuteronomy" and 45 gift boxes from the Tbilisi International Baptist Church (pastor Charles Hoblitz).

On February 15, 2024, the Agency donated 4 bundles of clothes and 17 gift boxes to Lomisa St. George's Shelter for Mothers and Children "They Will Grow Up Again" at the Patriarchate of Georgia, which houses 17 children;

On March 16, 2024, employees of the Agency visited the Mercy House at the Patriarchate of Georgia and presented the beneficiaries with gifts - 5 bundles of clothes and 10 gift boxes;

On April 24, 2024, the Agency donated 7 bundles of clothes, 10 boxes of food and 9 boxes of sweets to the St. King Tamar Boarding School. The boarding school, which was founded in 2009, is home to Christian and Muslim children from all regions of Georgia, as well as our compatriots from Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey;

On April 25, 2024, the Agency donated 8 boxes of food to the Mercy House located near the Church of the Iberian Icon of the Most Holy Mother of God in Varketili;

On April 26, 2024, employees of the Agency visited the organization "Teen Challenge Georgia" at the Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia and delivered humanitarian aid;

On April 29, 2024, at Tbilisi Juma Mosque, the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Georgia and the Agency congratulated the representatives of the Muslim community on Ramadan Bayram and distributed humanitarian aid - 500 boxes of various types of food - to socially vulnerable people;

On May 1, 2024, employees of the Agency, together with the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches visited the Juvenile Penitentiary Establishment N11 as part of a pre-Easter charity campaign and donated humanitarian aid of the international charity organization "FriedensBote" - 208 bundles of clothes, gift boxes of sweets and Bibles;

On June 10, 2024, the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia held a joint charity event, within the framework of which humanitarian aid - 30 bundles of clothes and 50 gift boxes - from the German international organization "FriedensBote" was delivered to St. Nino's Gymnasium in the village of Sairkhe, Chiatura and Sachkhere Diocese of the Orthodox Church;

On August 10, 2024, the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia held a joint charity event in the Kutaisi-Gaenati Diocese and handed over a humanitarian aid - 25 bundles of clothes and 200 kg. of rice - of the Christian Mission "FriedensBote" and the "International Aid Network" to the Kutaisi Church of the Annunciation of the Most Holy Mother of God, intended for the students and teachers of the St. Gabriel Bishop Tskaltubo Orthodox School-Gymnasium;

On August 13, 2024, the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia donated 200 kg. of rice to the representatives of the organization "World Vision Georgia", where there are 60 homeless children;

On August 16, 2024, the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia and the German international organization "FriedensBote" provided humanitarian aid - 25 bundles of clothes and 500 kg. of rice – to internally displaced persons from Abkhazia living in Tbilisi;

On August 22, 2024, the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia held two charity events: the administration of the temporary administrative-territorial unit of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Region was provided humanitarian aid - 10 bundles of clothes and 300 kg. of rice - for the displaced population from the Tskhinvali region living in the village of Teliani, Kaspi district from the international organization "FriedensBotes". Also, 300 kg. of rice was provided to the charitable organization "Catharsis", where Ukrainian elderly people in need have lunch every day together with Georgians;

On August 23, 2024, humanitarian aid from an international organization - 300 kg. of rice – was provided to the Bishop of Manglisi and Tsalka Eparchy of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Grigol (Katsia), for the needy families living in Tsalka by the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia;

On September 6, 2024, the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia donated humanitarian aid - 500 kg. of rice and 23 boxes of clothes - from the international organization "International Assistance Center" to St. Nino's Gymnasium in the village of Saikhe, Chiatura and Sachkhere Diocese of the Orthodox Church;

On October 3, 2024, a joint charity event was held in the Shaumiani village of the Marneuli district, where the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia provided 207 families displaced from the Tskhinvali region with 18 bundles of clothes from the international organization "FriedensBote" and 54 boxes (730 kg) of rice from the international organization "International Assistance Center";

On November 27, 2024, the Agency presented 40 juveniles from the Juvenile Penitentiary Establishment No11 with 40 gift boxes of sweets from the charity organization "FriedensBote";

On December 30, 2024, the humanitarian aid - 20 boxes of clothes and 20 boxes of sweets – was donated to the socially vulnerable parish of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti Diocese by the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia.

### 13. The Third Georgian Team Interreligious Chess Championship

On May 28, 2024, the Georgian Team Chess Championship among religious organizations, members of the Interreligious Council, was held for the third time at Nona Gaprindashvili Chess Palace in Tbilisi. The winner of the third championship was the Georgian Orthodox Church team, the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia team took the second place and the Evangelical Faith Church team took the third place. The Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues awarded the winning teams with cups and the participants with honorary diplomas.

### 14. Visits Abroad

#### 14.1. Visit to the Republic of Turkey

On February 21-25, 2024, a delegation of the State Agency for Religious Issues paid a visit to the Republic of Turkey. The following meetings were held within the framework of the visit:

On February 21, 2024, with the Chief Ombudsman of the Republic of Turkey, Şeref Malkoç;

On February 22, 2024, with the Chairman of the Directorate of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Professor Ali Erbaş, during the meeting, he emphasized the progress of Diyanet in the field of education and noted the Religious Academy established last year and expressed his readiness to start cooperation with Georgia on Islamic religious education issues, if the Georgian side is interested.

On February 23, 2024, with Israfil Kishlam, Chief Advisor to the President of Turkey. At the meeting held at the Turkish Presidential Administration, the parties emphasized the quality and importance of Georgian-Turkish relations in all areas of neighborhood policy and expressed their desire to deepen cooperation.

On February 25, 2024, with Safi Arpagus, the Mufti of Istanbul. The meeting took place at the Grand Mufti Hall of Istanbul, where the Chairman of the Agency spoke about the phenomenon of Georgian Islam and the State's support for the Muslim community in Georgia.

#### 14.2. Visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan

On May 6, 2024, on the occasion of the execution of St. George of Cappadocia, the Great Martyr and patron saint of Georgia, a Georgian delegation visited Qakh district of the Republic of Azerbaijan at the initiative and organization of the State Agency for Religious Issues. The Orthodox parish, representatives of the Patriarchate, the Parliament and the Government of Georgia traditionally celebrated St. George's Day in the Qakh district together with their compatriots.

In the village of Qakh Ingiloy, Qakh district, a religious service was held at St. George's Church by the Metropolitan of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti, temporary ruler of the Khornabuji, Hereti and Nekresi diocese Theodore (Chuadze) and the Dean of St. George's Church in Qakh, priest Petre (Khumarashvili). After the service, the Chairman of the Agency and the Agency's staff presented the parish with Bibles, New Testaments and Georgian folk instruments. Metropolitan Theodore (Chuadze) also performed a service in the main religious place of worship for Georgians living in Qakh - St. George's Church in Kurmukhi.

It is noteworthy that in recent years, the Agency has been actively supporting and assisting the Georgian diaspora living in the Republic of Azerbaijan and providing our Muslim and Christian compatriots with religious books (Bible, New Testament, Quran), Georgian musical instruments, traditional clothing and dancewear.

Later, Zaza Vashakmadze, the Chairman of the Agency and Zurab Pataridze, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to the Republic of Azerbaijan met with the Georgian diaspora living there at the Cultural Center of the village of Ititala, Belakani district of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Specially for this meeting, Adam Shantadze, the Mufti of Western Georgia, Etibar Eminov, the Mufti of Eastern Georgia and Sheikh Faig Nabiev of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia arrived in the village of Ititala. The members of the delegation spoke with local residents, inquired about their problems and presented them with the Quran translated into Georgian and Georgian folk instruments.

### 14.3. Visit to Hungary

On December 3-8, 2024, a delegation of the State Agency for Religious Issues paid an official visit to Hungary and held the following meetings:

On December 5, 2024, with Miklós Soltész, the State Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office of Hungary for Church and Ethnic Minorities. The Chairman of the Agency introduced Soltész to Georgia's religious policy and emphasized the importance of the partnership between Georgia and Hungary. The Chairman of the Agency also raised the issue of handing over the buildings to the Georgian diaspora, the Georgian parish and the Georgian Orthodox Church in the Hungarian capital of Budapest; At the meeting, the Chairman of the Agency paid special attention to the deplorable situation in the occupied territories of Georgia and the facts of ethnic and religious discrimination by the occupying country - Russia.

On December 6, 2024, with Akosh Kozma, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (Ombudsman) who was briefed about the Georgian State's funding of religious denominations and the process of returning religious buildings;

On December 7, 2024, with the Chairman of the Justice Committee of the Hungarian Parliament, Vejkey Imre, who emphasized the similarities in the history of the two countries, Georgia and Hungary,

and in respecting traditional values. He once again confirmed Hungary's support for Georgia on its path to European integration.

On December 8, 2024, with Attila Miklóvich, the head of the Church of Scientology.

## 15. Signing of Memoranda

### 15.1. Signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation with Ltd. “American Hospital Networks”

On June 7, 2024, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the State Agency for Religious Issues and Ltd “American Hospital Networks” at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, which envisages promoting the full realization of the religious rights of patients of different religious faiths, including cooperation on the introduction of chaplaincy services in the hospital.

### 15.2. Signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation with Ltd. “Geo Hospitals”

On November 19, 2024, a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed between the State Agency for Religious Issues and Ltd. “Geo Hospitals”, which was signed within the framework of the Medical Chaplaincy Project and envisages promoting the full realization of the religious rights of patients of different religious faiths, including cooperation on the introduction of chaplaincy services in the hospital.

## 16. Various Meetings of the Agency

### 16.1. Meeting with the Representative of the United Nations Children's Fund

On January 11, 2024, the Chairman of the Agency hosted Jasper Moller, the Representative of the United Nations Children's Fund in Georgia. He briefly introduced the guest to the activities of the State Agency for Religious Issues and its main activities. A significant part of the meeting was devoted to the cooperation of the Agency with the Representative of the United Nations Children's Fund in Georgia, namely: within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding, in order to raise the awareness of religious leaders, the seminar "The Role of Clergy in the Protection of the Children's Rights" organized by the Agency and the United Nations Children's Fund, aimed at increasing the role and importance of religious leaders in the protection of children's rights; as well as, through the joint efforts of the Agency and the Fund, the training "Freedom of Religion and the Best Interests of the Child" was held, in which representatives of religious organizations registered in Georgia participated.

## 16.2. Meeting with Representatives of LEPL Tbilisi Public School N202 (for blind and visually impaired students)

On January 23, 2024, representatives of the State Agency for Religious Issues, the Georgian Blind Union and LEPL Tbilisi Public School No. 202 (for blind and visually impaired students) visited the school. The Chairman of the Agency spoke about the activities of the social project "Supporting Blind and Visually Impaired Citizens", which the Agency has been implementing since 2018. The meeting was attended by Mikheil Sarjveladze, Chairman of the Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, who positively assessed the social activity of the Agency and noted that the Parliament of Georgia was taking important steps to take into account the needs of persons with disabilities and solve their problems.

## 16.3. Meeting with the Delegation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Georgia

On March 28, 2024, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the Agency hosted a delegation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Georgia, which included: Meline Arakelian, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Georgia, Bea Ten Tusscher, Special Envoy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for Freedom of Religion and Belief, Alexander Akerbosch, an employee of the European Affairs Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Lela Lomia, Political Advisor of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The guests were interested in the religious policy of the Georgian State, including the priorities of the Agency, the mechanism for compensating the material and moral damage caused by the State to various religions during the Soviet period and the State's relationship with the Orthodox Church.

## 16.4. Meeting with Representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran

On May 8, 2024, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues met with representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran - Ayatollah Dibaj, Ayatollah Gharavi and Abdolrahim Foroutan. Zaza Vashakmadze spoke to the guests about the projects implemented by the Agency and drew attention to the activities of the Interreligious Council.

## 16.5. Meeting with the Delegation of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan

On June 13, 2024, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues received a delegation of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, headed by Chairman Ramin Mammadov. The meeting discussed aspects of cooperation between the two structures, issues of protecting the religious rights of the Muslim community in Georgia and the Georgian Orthodox parish in Azerbaijan and future prospects.

#### 16.6. Meeting with Representatives of the Yazidi Community

On June 15, 2024, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues met with the Chairman of the Yazidi Spiritual Council of Georgia, Dimitri Pirbari and representatives of the Yazidi community from various countries. The delegation's visit was related to the celebration of "Tawafa Ezid" (Tbilisi House of Prayer Day) holiday of the Yazidi community of Georgia, which is traditionally visited by many guests from different countries.

#### 16.7. Meeting with Female Representatives of Religious Organizations in Georgia

On July 8, 2024, a meeting with female representatives of religious organizations in Georgia was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, organized by the State Agency for Religious Issues and initiated by the US non-profit organization "Love Your Neighbor Community" (LYNC). The meeting took place within the framework of the second joint international conference: "The Role of Religious Education in Overcoming Modern Global Challenges" of the Agency and the Institute for Global Engagement (IGE). Wade Cusack, the founder of the organization and Halina Cusack, Women's Engagement Fellow at the Institute for Global Engagement and the organizer of the women's side event of the conference made a presentation on the topic: "Strengthening Societies by Promoting Women's Leadership in the Field of Religious Freedom and Social Cohesion."

#### 16.8. Meeting with the Public Defender

On July 24, 2024, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues met with Levan Ioseliani, the Public Defender of Georgia where they discussed issues of deepening relations between the Agency and the Public Defender's Office. The Chairman of the Agency introduced the guest to the activities of the Agency and its main priorities, in particular: he focused on the State's religious policy and its support for religions, the projects implemented by the Agency and the dire situation in the occupied territories of Georgia. At the meeting, a desire of signing a memorandum between the two agencies and holding joint events was expressed.

## 16.9. Opening of the Imam Hassan Mosque

On July 27, 2024, in the village of Akholalo, Marneuli Municipality, the Imam Hassan Mosque was opened, which was attended by Sheikh Faig Nabiev, Etibar Eminov, Mufti of Eastern Georgia of the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia, Zaur Dargali, MP of Georgia, Kenan Omarov, Mayor of Marneuli Municipality, Zaza Vashakmadze, Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues, as well as representatives of the embassies of Turkey, Azerbaijan and Iran.

## 16.10. Meeting with Representatives of the Church of Scientology in Georgia

On October 3, 2024, at the initiative of representatives of the Church of Scientology in Georgia, Korney Gonchalov, Alyona Verukhina and Nugzar Bardavelidze, a meeting was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia with the Chairman of the Agency who expressed their desire to cooperate with the State and the State Agency for Religious Issues.

## 16.11. Meeting with the Gender and Inclusion Analyst at the US National Democratic Institute

On October 4, 2024, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues met with Eleanor Benoit, the NDI Gender and Inclusion Analyst and introduced the activities of the Agency and its main priorities. The guest was interested in the functions and role of the Agency in the format of interreligious relations and dialogue and the reforms carried out by the State in this regard, including financing, transferring religious buildings. At the meeting, the guest expressed a desire for future cooperation with the Agency.

## 16.12. Meeting with Members of the 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the VII Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church

On December 7, 2024, the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the VII Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Georgia and the South Caucasus was held at Tbilisi Reconciliation Church, which was attended by high-ranking clergy of the Evangelical-Lutheran Churches of Georgia and Azerbaijan, representatives of the diplomatic corps and various religious organizations. At the invitation of the Bishop Rolf Barais of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church representatives of the State Agency for Religious Issues attended the first part of the Synod session. They thanked the Bishop for the constructive cooperation and wished success to the Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Georgia and the South Caucasus.

## 17. Meeting with the Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps

The State Agency for Religious Issues traditionally actively cooperates with the representatives of the diplomatic corps, holds introductory and working meetings and informs them about the Agency's activities, implemented projects and future plans. The following meetings were held in 2024:

- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Georgia, Melina Arakelian - 25.01.2024;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia to Georgia, Ashot Smbatyan - 12.03.24;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Norway to Georgia, Bergliot Hovland - 13.03.24;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Turkey to Georgia, Ali Kaan Orbay - 13.03.24;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Italy to Georgia, Massimiliano D'Antuono - 02.04.24;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Georgia, Mahmoud Adibi - 29.04.24;
- With the Ambassador of the Holy See (Vatican) to Georgia and Armenia, Archbishop Ante Yozic - 16.10.24.

## 18. Relationship with Media

The State Agency for Religious Issues considers open and transparent relations with the media a priority.

Any publications of the Agency, interreligious calendars and religious maps are uploaded to the Agency's website.

Information about any activities of the Agency's representatives: meetings, visits, conferences, participation in various events, is uploaded to the Agency's website, "Facebook", "Twitter", and is covered and disseminated through media outlets, as well as through the news agency "Interpressnews".

In 2024, 286 pieces of information with their photo materials were posted on the Agency's website and "Facebook"; 27 pieces of information in English were shared via "Twitter"; 279 pieces of information were disseminated via the news agency "Interpressnews"; 54 events of the Agency were covered in the news programs on various TV channels.

## 19. Appendix – Administrative Report

### Appendix - Expenses Report of the LEPL State Agency for Religious Issues

In 2024, 41 (forty one) contracts were signed for administrative expenses, including 6 (six) contracts under consolidated tender, 4 (four) contracts under electronic tender and 31 (thirty-one) contracts under simplified purchase.

The electronic declarations are submitted on a monthly basis in accordance with the deadlines set by the legislation in force.

The budget execution report is submitted electronically (<https://www.ebudget.ge/>) to the Ministry of Finance of Georgia on a quarterly basis.

The plan (EPLAN), all the contracts and all the documents confirming the contract costs have been uploaded electronically to the State Procurement Agency, both to CMR and SPA.

6 (six) electronic tenders were implemented. Technical documentation, relevant protocols, contracts, executions and payments have been uploaded within the time limits established by the law.

41 (forty-one) administrative contracts (organizational code 5001) and 8 (eight) contracts signed with different religious organizations (organizational code 5002) (LEPL Administration of Muslims of All Georgia (1), LEPL Jewish Union of Georgia (1), LEPL Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Holy Church in Georgia (1) and LEPL Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus (1)) have been registered with the Treasury Service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia.

## 20. Information on Financial Situation

### *LEPL State Agency for Religious Issues*

Organizational code	Name	Approved plan for 2024	Cash flow	Percentage of completion against the approved cash flow plan
50 00	LEPL – State Agency for Religious Issues			
00	total	7,500,000.00	7,459,580.31	99.46%
2	expenses	7,494,000.00	7,458,580.31	99.53%
2.1	Salary	761,000.00	750,729.00	98.65%

2.2	Goods and services	231,500.00	206,373.26	89.15%
2.5	subsidies	6,500,000.00	6,500,000.00	100.00%
2.8	Other expenses	1,500.00	1,478.05	98.54%
31	Growth of non-financial assets	6,000.00	1,000.00	16.67%
<b>50 01</b>	<b>LEPL – State Agency for Religious Issues - administration</b>			
00	Total	1,000,000.00	959,580.31	95.96%
2	expenses	994,000.00	958,580.31	96.44%
2.1	salary	761,000.00	750,729.00	98.65%
2.2	Goods and services	229,500.00	206,373.26	89.92%
2.8	Other expenses	1,500.00	1,478.05	98.54%
31	Growth of non-financial assets	6,000.00	1,000.00	16.67%
<b>50 02</b>	<b>Funding of religious organizations</b>			
00	total	6,500,000.00	6,500,000.00	100.00%
2	Expenses	6,500,000.00	6,500,000.00	100.00%
2.5	subsidies	6,500,000.00	6,500,000.00	100.00%

## 21. Information on Business Trips

<b>Business trip</b>	<b>Expense (GEL)</b>
Business trip within the country	7092
Business trip abroad	17233
<b>Total business trip expenses</b>	<b>24325</b>

## 22. Funding of Religious Associations (Confessions)

Denomination	<i>Budget for 2024</i>	<i>Government Reserve Fund for 2024</i>	<i>total, including government reserve fund for 2024</i>
LEPL Administration of Muslims of All Georgia	3 350,000	800,000	4,150,000
LEPL Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus	650,000	50,000	700,000
LEPL Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia	1 000,000	100,000	1,100,000
LEPL Jewish Union of Georgia	500,000	50,000	550,000
<b>total</b>	<b>5,500,000</b>	<b>1,000,000</b>	<b>6,500,000</b>

## 23. Shota Rustaveli Georgian National Science Foundation Grant

Grant Agreement Number	FR-23-13674	Cash flow in GEL for 2024
Grant Agreement Signing Date	18.12.2023	
Spending categories	Grant budget approved appropriation	
	First tranche	
- total	59990	59,039
01 - Grant funding for key personnel	39840	39,840
02 - Salary for Supporting personnel	5000	4,992
03 - Business trip	14650	13,907
04 - Goods and services	500	300

Grant Agreement Number	FR-22-21090	Cash flow in GEL for 2024
Grant Agreement Signing Date	10.03.2023	
<b>Spending categories</b>	Grant budget approved appropriation	
	Second tranche	
<b>- total</b>	<b>59,240</b>	<b>44,940</b>
<b>01 - Grant funding for key personnel</b>	<b>39,960</b>	<b>39,960</b>
<b>02 - Salary for supporting personnel</b>	<b>19,280</b>	<b>4,980</b>

## 24. Information on Correspondence

<b>Correspondence</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Incoming correspondence	396
Outgoing correspondence	1077
Legal acts	246
Internal documents	201

# State Agency for Religious Issues

## 2025 Annual Report

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## 1. Action Plan of the Government of Georgia on the Protection of Human Rights for 2024-2026

The State, and accordingly the State Agency for Religious Issues, is guided by the “National Strategy for the Protection of Human Rights” and the “Action Plan of the Government of Georgia on the Protection of Human Rights” corresponding to this strategy, approved by years.

Within the framework of the 2024-2026 Action Plan (Goal 9. Ensuring freedom of religion and belief and further strengthening the principles of secularism), the Agency systematically carried out measures to support tolerance and non-discriminatory environment. In addition, to ensure freedom of religion and belief and to strengthen the principles of secularism in accordance with the standards provided for by international and national legislation.

### 1.1 Trainings for Public Servants

In accordance with paragraph 9.1.1. of the Action Plan of the Government of Georgia on the Protection of Human Rights for 2024-2026 (Awareness-raising trainings for public servants on freedom of religion and belief and its guarantees), on September 17, 2025, in order to raise awareness of public servants on freedom of religion and belief and its guarantees, a training was held for employees of the South Ossetian Administration on the topic - "Secularism and Religious Neutrality". After the training, the participants were awarded certificates.

On November 7, 2025, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Agency’s staff held a training for public servants of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons of the A/R of Abkhazia on the topic: "Secularism and Religious Neutrality" in order to raise awareness about freedom of religion and belief and its guarantees. After the training, the participants were awarded certificates.

### 1.2. Research „Religious Repression in Soviet Georgia“

In accordance with paragraph 9.1.5. of the Action Plan of the Government of Georgia on the Protection of Human Rights for 2024-2026 (Research on “Repressions on Religious Grounds in Soviet Georgia” to raise public awareness) in 2025, the State Agency for Religious Issues, in cooperation with the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, published a work prepared within the framework of the winning project (NFR-22-21090) of the 2022 State Scientific Grant Competition for Fundamental Research funded by the “Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia” – “Repressions on Religious Grounds in Soviet Georgia (According to Data from the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs)”, which is unique in its essence. The issue of repression is generally a poorly studied area in scientific

literature, although it is presented fragmentarily in the form of certain studies. Because of this, information about the hundreds of repressed clergy of various religions in Georgia has been less accessible to both interested parties and a wide circle of readers until now.

The project envisaged studying the facts of repressions carried out on religious grounds as a result of the “Red Terror” and atheistic religious policy in Soviet Georgia (1921-1991) and reporting on the research conducted on repressed clergy. The idea of the project was supported by the Interreligious Council of the State Agency for Religious Issues, which represents almost all religious associations in Georgia, including the Georgian Orthodox Church, historical religions and other small denominations.

### 1.3. The Process of Returning Religious Buildings to their Historical Owners

In accordance with paragraph 9.1.6. of the Action Plan of the Government of Georgia on the Protection of Human Rights for 2024-2026 (Continuation of the process of returning religious buildings confiscated during the Soviet totalitarian regime to their historical owners), during the reporting year, 4 religious buildings and a plot of land confiscated during the Soviet totalitarian regime were returned to the Muslim community.

## 2. Raising Public Awareness in terms of Religious Tolerance

### 2.1. Annual publication „Interreligious Calendar”

In 2025, an annual interreligious calendar was traditionally published, reflecting the religious holidays of all the main religious communities operating in Georgia (13 in total) - the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church, Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Armenian Apostolic, Spiritual Christians-Molokan, Yazidi, Evangelical-Lutheran, Evangelical-Protestant, Baptist communities, the Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia and the "Salvation Army" in Georgia.

Since 2014, the calendar has been published and distributed not only in religious communities, but also in all public institutions and is presented as a gift to diplomats from various countries accredited in Georgia, as well as representatives of different spheres of Georgian society.

## 3. Promoting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

In accordance with Article 37 of the Law of Georgia “On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” and in order to promote the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities and the creation of an inclusive and tolerant environment, the Agency has developed an Action Plan for Promoting the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) for 2025. The document aims to identify priority areas and measures to be implemented during 2025, based on the principles of the UN

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Law of Georgia “On the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”. According to the Action Plan, the following activities were implemented in the reporting year:

### 3.1. Brail-printed Annual Interreligious Calendar

To support blind and visually impaired citizens, an interreligious calendar was printed in Braille in 2025 and presented to the LEPL Tbilisi Public School No. 202 (for blind and visually impaired students) and the Georgian Blind Union.

### 3.2. Brail-printed Canonical Books

The Agency, taking into account the wishes of the members of the Georgian Blind Union, has been publishing Bible books in Braille since 2020.

In 2025, the sixth canonical book of the Bible, “Book of Joshua” was published in Braille (in two books), which was presented to the LEPL Tbilisi Public School No. 202 (for blind and visually impaired students) and the Georgian Blind Union.

## 4. State Relationship with Religious Organizations

The central government of Georgia, headed by the Prime Minister, and representatives of the Agency traditionally attend the main holidays of the historical religions operating in Georgia, including the greatest holidays of the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church – Easter, Christmas and Svetitskhovloba (a holiday dedicated to the Svetitskhoveli, “the Life-Giving Pillar” Cathedral); on the occasion of the main holidays of the Muslim community and the beginning of the Ramadan the Prime Minister hosts an iftar dinner for Muslim clergy; on the Hanukkah holiday of the Jewish community the Prime Minister of Georgia symbolically lights the first candle in the synagogue. Also, the State Agency for Religious Issues regularly meets with the leaders of various religious organizations and participates in their important religious holidays both in Tbilisi and Rustavi, as well as in the regions, attends annual reports, conferences, organizes joint charity events, reviews the applications received from them and provides assistance according to needs.

### 4.1. Iftar for the Muslim Community on Behalf of the Prime Minister

On March 28, 2025, the Prime Minister of Georgia hosted the Muslim community at an Iftar dinner organized on behalf of the government, which was attended by leaders of the Muslim community, as well as representatives of the Georgian government, parliament, local authorities, the diplomatic corps and the Agency.

On June 6, the Prime Minister of Georgia, together with the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues, visited Tbilisi Juma Mosque and congratulated Muslim clerics, parishioners and ambassadors of Islamic countries on Kurban Bayram (Eid al-Adha).

#### 4.2. Head of the Government of Georgia on Hanukkah

On December 14, 2025, Georgian Jews celebrated Hanukkah. To celebrate the holiday, guests gathered at the Great Synagogue of Tbilisi. The Prime Minister of Georgia congratulated the Jewish people on the holiday of Hanukkah, symbolically lit the first candle of Hanukkah and in his speech recalled the 26-century tradition of friendship between Georgians and Jews. The Chairman of the Agency congratulated the gathered community on the holiday.

### 5. Interreligious Council

There is an Interreligious Council under the State Agency for Religious Issues uniting almost all religious associations in Georgia, including the Georgian Orthodox Church, historical religions and other small denominations, namely

- Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church;
- Administration of Muslims of All Georgia;
- Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia;
- Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus;
- Jewish Union of Georgia;
- Tbilisi International Baptist Church;
- Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia;
- Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Georgia;
- Evangelical-Protestant Church of Georgia;
- Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia;
- Yezidi Spiritual Council of Georgia;
- International Society for Krishna Consciousness;
- "Salvation Army in Georgia";
- The Seventh Day Christian-Adventist Church of Georgia.

On December 16, 2025, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the Agency and members of the Interreligious Council, representing religious organizations discussed the new rules for issuing and receiving foreign grants. The information was provided to the members of the Council by the Acting Head of the Department of International Relations, Strategic Planning and Coordination of the Administration of the Government of Georgia, Tiko Khachvani.

After the presentation, the meeting was held in a question-and-answer format. The leaders of religious organizations received complete and comprehensive information on the latest developments related to foreign grants.

## 6. Funding of Religious Organizations within the Framework of Compensation for the Damage Caused during the Soviet Totalitarian Regime

Although the State of Georgia is not a legal successor of the Soviet regime and accordingly, has no obligation to compensate for the damage caused during the Soviet totalitarian period, within the framework of the Resolution of the Government of Georgia No. 117 of January 27, 2014, 4 (four) religious denominations - Islamic, Jewish, Roman-Catholic and Armenian Apostolic religious associations are symbolically and partially compensated for the damage caused during the Soviet totalitarian regime, which is used to promote the development, unification and peaceful coexistence of religious communities in the country (see table).

year	Muslim community	Roman-Catholic community	Armenian Apostolic community	Jewish community	In total
2014	1 100 000	200 000	300 000	150 000	1 750 000
2015	2 200 000	400 000	600 000	300 000	3 500 000
2016	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2017	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2018	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2019	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2020	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2021	2 750 000	550 000	800 000	400 000	4 500 000
2022	3 350 000	650 000	1 000 000	500 000	5 500 000
2023	3 350 000	650 000	1 000 000	500 000	5 500 000
2024	4 150 000	700 000	1 100 000	550 000	6 500 000
2025	4 150 000	700 000	1 100 000	550 000	6 500 000
In total	34 800 000	6 600 000	9 900 000	4 950 000	56 250 000

*\*Amounts are given in GEL*

In addition, religious associations receive financial and property assistance from local budgets to meet the religious needs of their communities.

## 7. Recommendatory Commission for the Study of Property and Financial Needs of Religious Associations

### 7.1. Recommendatory Commission Sessions

In 2025, 4 (four) sessions of the Recommendatory Commission for the Study of Property and Financial Needs of Religious Associations were held. In total, the Commission discussed 182 issues, in particular:

- Orthodox Church: Satisfied – 140, flawed – 0, refused – 15;
- Administration of Muslims of All Georgia: satisfied – 1, flawed – 6, refused – 0;
- Muslim community: satisfied – 6, flawed – 0, refused – 0;
- Armenian community: satisfied – 0, flawed – 11, refused – 0;
- Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia: satisfied – 2, flawed – 0, refused – 0.

#### March 14, 2025 - I Session

Religious community	motion	satisfied	flawed	refused
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	78	72		6
Muslim community	5	5		

#### June 13, 2025 - II Session

Religious community	motion	satisfied	Beyond the Agency's competence	refused
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	28	21	1	6
Religious community	motion	satisfied	flawed	refused
Muslim community	1	1		
Armenian community	5		5	

**September 18, 2025 - III Session**

<b>Religious community</b>	<b>motion</b>	<b>satisfied</b>	<b>flawed</b>	<b>refused</b>
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	26	24		2
Administration of Muslims of All Georgia	1		1	
Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia	1	1		
Armenian community	1		1	

**December 1, 2025 - IV Session**

<b>Religious community</b>	<b>motion</b>	<b>satisfied</b>	<b>flawed</b>	<b>refused</b>
Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church	24	23		1
Administration of Muslims of All Georgia	6	1	5	
Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia	1	1		
Armenian community	5		5	

In total, in 2025, based on the decisions of 4 (four) meetings of the Recommendatory Commission for the Study of Property and Financial Needs of Religious Associations, the Agency issued a positive recommendation on the transfer of 2,016,689.58 GEL out of the requested 4,902,890.12 GEL.

## **8. International Day for Tolerance**

The International Day for Tolerance has been celebrated since 1995, at the initiative of UNESCO, with the aim of raising public awareness of the dangers of intolerance, extremism and discrimination as well as establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding.

On the occasion of the International Day for Tolerance, the State Agency for Religious Issues established a tradition according to which one of the religious communities in Georgia takes turns hosting the leaders and parishioners of other religious organization.

- On November 16, 2016, the Georgian Apostolic Autocephalous Orthodox Church hosted religious communities. The reception was held at the residence of the Patriarchate of Georgia;
- On November 16, 2017, the host was the Jewish Union of Georgia – the reception was held at the David Baazov Museum of History of the Jews of Georgia and Georgian-Jewish Relations;
- On November 16, 2018, religious organizations were hosted by the Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus;
- On November 16, 2019, the International Day for Tolerance was celebrated at the Administration of Muslims All of Georgia;
- On November 16, 2020 - the host was the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia;
- On November 16, 2021 – the host was Evangelical-Protestant Church of Georgia;
- On November 16, 2022 – the host was Evangelical Faith Church of Georgia
- On November 16, 2023 – the host was the Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Georgia;
- On November 16, 2024 – the host was the Yazidi Spiritual Council of Georgia.

On November 16, 2025, an event dedicated to the International Day for Tolerance was held at Tbilisi Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Reconciliation, which was attended by representatives of various religious organizations, the Public Defender's Office and the State Agency for Religious Issues.

On November 13 of the same year, an exhibition "Dialogue of Faiths" dedicated to the International Day for Tolerance was held at the Museum of Religion in Batumi, where rare manuscripts of various religions, artifacts necessary for religious rituals and printed versions of archival photographs depicting religious buildings were presented.

The annual meetings associated with the International Day for Tolerance have become a manifestation of the Georgian culture of religious tolerance, a continuation of an ancient tradition and a symbol of interfaith friendship.

## 9. Project „State Language for Clergy“

In 2025, a project of state importance “State Language for Clergy”, which has been implemented since 2019 together with the LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, continued. Within the framework of the project, leaders and clergy of religious organizations in Georgia are learning the state language. This year, a total of 19 representatives of the Muslim community of Georgia, the Armenian Apostolic and Catholic Churches participated in the project.

On March 4, a joint event was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia by the State Agency for Religious Issues and Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration, within the framework of which the clergy participating in the fourth stage of the Project "State Language for Clergy" were awarded certificates confirming their study of the state language.

From 2019 to 2025, a total of 252 individuals from the above-mentioned religious communities mastered the Georgian language at various levels, including 175 from the Muslim community, 26 from the Lutheran community, 24 from the Armenian Apostolic Church and 27 from the Catholic Church.

## 10. International Conferences

### 10.1. International Conference in the Czech Republic

On November 12-15, under the auspices of the President of the Czech Republic, the International Alliance for Freedom of Religion or Belief held a conference in Prague on the topic: “Freedom of Religion or Belief as a Source of Sustainability and Religious Engagement.” The conference was attended by a delegation of the State Agency for Religious Issues, consisting of the Chairman of the Agency, Zaza Vashakmadze and the Head of the Legal Maintenance Office, Davit Davitashvili.

On November 13, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues, Zaza Vashakmadze, addressed the conference participants. The speech was dedicated to the facts of violation of fundamental human rights, freedom of religion and belief in the occupied territories of Georgia, the A/R of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region. In particular, the prohibition of the right of Georgian Orthodox Christians to receive education in their native language, to worship, to move and to attend religious holidays in churches located beyond the occupation line, which is ethnic and religious discrimination and segregation only against Georgian Orthodox Christians and clergy of the Georgian Orthodox Church. He also noted that in both regions Georgian Orthodox churches are being demolished and destroyed, illegal restoration works are systematically underway and the so-called Black archaeology is rampant, the Georgian traces are being destroyed, that is, evidence that these territories are an integral part of the Georgian state.

After the speech of the Chairman of the Agency, several foreign journalists became interested in the issue. The audience was also interested in the Agency's publication - "Occupied Heritage", which reflects the condition of places of worship in the A/R of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

On November 14, the Chairman of the Agency participated in the Eurasia Panel, which was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. At the panel, the Chairman of the Agency spoke about religious repression in Soviet Georgia, freedom of religion in modern Georgia, interreligious dialogue and the activities of the Agency. After the speech, an interactive dialogue was held. The publication “Occupied Heritage” displayed in the lobby of the Ministry, next to the banner of the Agency aroused great interest among the participants. Representatives of religious organizations, diplomats from various countries and journalists were introduced to the photo materials that reflected the situation in the occupied territories of Georgia.

On November 15, the Agency held a presentation of the publication “Occupied Heritage” within the framework of the Prague Conference “Freedom of Religion and Belief as a Source of Sustainability and Religious Engagement”. The publication concerns the deplorable condition of places of worship in the occupied territories of Georgia, the A/R of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region.

The conference participants - clergy, diplomats and journalists from various countries - got acquainted with the books exhibited under the banner of the Agency.

## 10.2. Participation in the X International Scientific Conference of the National Archives

On September 25, 2025, the X International Scientific Conference of the National Archives of Georgia was held on the topic - "Archival Studies, Source Studies - Trends and Challenges", which was dedicated to the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of King Vakhtang VI.

At the conference, the Adjara regional representative of the Agency made a report "Repressions of Clergy in Soviet Georgia (According to Data from Central and Local Archives)".

## 11. Interreligious Chess Championship

Since 2022, an interreligious chess championship, organized by the State Agency for Religious Issues and the Georgian Chess Federation, has been held annually in Tbilisi, in which clergy and parishioners of religious organizations that are members of the Interreligious Council participate.

On June 5, 2025, the Fourth Georgian Team Chess Championship among Religious Organizations was held, which ended with the victory of the Georgian Orthodox Church team. Representatives of the Administration of Muslim of All Georgia took second place and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church team came in third place.

## 12. Charity Events

The Agency, with the support of the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia, systematically conducts charity events to address the needs of various religious communities. In 2025, the following charity events were held:

On March 7, 2025, the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Georgia, the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia and the Agency, on the occasion of the beginning of the month of Ramadan (fasting), delivered humanitarian aid - 800 boxes of various types of food to the Muslim congregation, both Sunni and Shiite, at Tbilisi Juma Mosque;

On May 14, 2025, the Agency, the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches and the Government of A/R of Abkhazia held a joint charity event to help internally displaced persons from Abkhazia living in Tbilisi, to whom they donated humanitarian aid - 20 packs of clothes and 30 gift boxes - from the German international organization "FriedensBote";

On May 15, 2025, representatives of the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia met with representatives of the South Ossetian Administration and presented humanitarian

aid - 20 packs of clothes and 30 gift boxes - from the international organization "FriedensBote" to families displaced from the Tskhinvali region living in the Gardabani IDP settlement;

On the same day, representatives of the Agency donated 8 boxes of various food items and 17 gift boxes for children to Lomisa St. George's Shelter for Mothers and Children "They Will Grow Up Again" at the Patriarchate of Georgia.

On May 16, 2025, representatives of the Agency presented humanitarian aid - 50 gift boxes and 8 boxes of sweets - to the students of the St. King Tamar Secondary School-Gymnasium under the Patriarchate of Georgia;

On May 19, 2025, representatives of the Agency donated 7 packs of various types of food and 30 gift boxes to the organization "Youth House" under the Patriarchate of Georgia;

On June 13, 2025, employees of the Agency delivered humanitarian aid - 20 gift boxes and 30 bundles of clothes to representatives of St. Nino's Orthodox School in the village of Sairkhe, Chiatura and Sachkhere Diocese;

On the same day, the Agency's employees delivered humanitarian aid - 30 gift boxes and 27 bundles of clothing - to the Diocese of Akhaltsikhe, Tao-Klarjeti and Lazeti;

On October 23, 2025, representatives of the Agency delivered humanitarian aid, 25 packs of clothes, from the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches and the international organization "FreedensBote" to the displaced population from the Tskhinvali region in the village of Sakasheti, Gori district;

On November 24, 2025, the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches provided assistance to internally displaced persons from Abkhazia. The Chairman of the Agency handed over humanitarian aid - 40 bundles of clothes - to the Government of the A/R of Abkhazia for families living in Zugdidi;

On December 3, 2025, the Agency and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia held a joint charity event. They donated humanitarian aid - 36 bundles of clothes - to representatives of St. Nino's Orthodox School in the village of Sairkhe, Chiatura and Sachkhere Diocese of the Orthodox Church;

On December 18, 2025, representatives of the State Agency for Religious Issues and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia visited the Art School of St. Queen Tamar under the Patriarchate of Georgia. They presented the students of the gymnasium with humanitarian aid - 50 boxes of sweets;

On December 22, 2025, representatives of the State Agency for Religious Issues and the Union of Christian-Baptist Churches of Georgia visited the Lomisa St. George's Shelter for Mothers and Children "They Will Grow Up Again" under the Patriarchate of Georgia and presented 20 gift boxes of sweets.

### 13. Various Meetings of the Agency

#### 13.1. Meeting with Representatives of LEPL Tbilisi Public School N202 (for blind and visually impaired students)

On January 29, 2025, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues met with the representatives of the Georgian Blind Union and Tbilisi Public School No. 202 (for blind and visually impaired students) and according to tradition, presented the guests with 100 copies of the 2025 Interreligious Calendar as well as 30 copies of the sixth canonical book of the Bible - "Book of Joshua" printed in Braille.

#### 13.2. Meeting with Representatives of the Aziz Khudai Wagfi Foundation

On February 7, 2025, the Chairman of the Agency met with representatives of Aziz Khudai Vagfi Foundation. It was an introductory meeting. The Chairman of the Agency introduced the guests to the religious policy of the State of Georgia, the activities of the Agency and the implemented projects. The guests were interested in the activities of the Agency and expressed their desire for future cooperation.

#### 13.3. Meeting with a Senior Scientist at the “Institute for Global Engagement”

On February 13, 2025, the Chairman of the Agency met with Wade Cusack, Senior Scholar of the Institute for Global Engagement, Head of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Program, Founder of the organization “Love Your Neighbor Community”, and Greg Mitchell, Co-Chair of the “International Religious Freedom Roundtable”. The Agency and the US non-governmental organization “Institute for Global Engagement” have a two-year cooperation experience: in 2023 they held a Georgian-American international conference on “Religion and the Rule of Law” and in 2024 - “The Role of Religious Education in Overcoming Modern Global Challenges”.

#### 13.4. Meeting with the UN Permanent Representative

On February 25, 2025, an introductory meeting was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia between the Chairman of the Agency and the UN Permanent Representative to Georgia, Didier Trebucq. At the meeting, the Chairman of the Agency introduced the guest to Georgia's religious policy, the religious landscape in Georgia and the projects implemented by the Agency.

At the meeting, the Chairman of the Agency also drew attention to the facts of violation of religious rights of the Georgian population living in the occupied territories of Georgia and the erasure of historical traces on Georgian cultural heritage sites.

The UN Permanent Representative thanked the Chairman of the Agency for the reception and expressed his desire to continue cooperation with the Agency.

### 13.5. Meeting with the Chairman of the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan

On March 17, 2025, the Chairman of the Agency met with the Chairman of the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ramin Mammadov. At the meeting held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, aspects of cooperation between the two agencies, issues of protecting the religious rights of the Muslim community in Georgia and the Georgian Orthodox parish in Azerbaijan and future prospects were discussed. The Chairman of the Agency expressed interest in the protection of the religious rights of Georgian Orthodox Christians living in the Qakh district of the Republic of Azerbaijan, as well as the situation of Georgian Sunni Muslims living in the Zagatala and Balakan districts and emphasized the good-neighborly cooperation between the two agencies, the readiness of the Azerbaijani colleague to protect the religious rights of Georgian Orthodox Christians to the maximum extent possible and expressed hope that the tradition of mutually beneficial cooperation would continue.

### 13.6. Meeting with Representatives of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia

On April 23, 2025, the Chairman of the Agency met with Araks Pashanyan, Head of International Relations of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia and members of the Academy at the Administration of the Government of Georgia. The purpose of the meeting was to share the activities, experience, and projects of the Agency in the field of religious policy of Georgia, interreligious dialogue and Islam.

### 13.7. Meeting with the Head of the Anti-Corruption Bureau

On October 2, 2025, a meeting was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia between the Chairman of the Agency Zaza Vashakmadze and the Head of the Anti-Corruption Bureau of Georgia, Razhden Kuprashvili. The topic of the meeting was the activities of religious organizations and the transparency of grant-issuing processes.

### 13.8. Meeting with Azerbaijani Counterpart Organization

On December 11, 2025, a meeting was held at the Administration of the Government of Georgia between representatives of the State Agency for Religious Issues and the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, who discussed issues of relations and future cooperation between the two countries in the field of religion.

The Chairman of the Agency raised the issue of registration of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the Republic of Azerbaijan and the transfer of Georgian churches. He also expressed interest in the

protection of religious rights of both Christian and Muslim Georgians living in the Qakh, Zagatala and Belakan districts.

Deputy Chairman of the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Sahib Nagiev, thanked Zaza Vashakmadze for the warm welcome and invited him to pay a return visit to Baku.

### 13.9. Meeting with the Iranian Parliamentary Delegation

On December 12, 2025, at the Administration of the Government of Georgia, the Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Issues, Zaza Vashakmadze, met with members of the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hujatulislam Ismail Syavosh (Fereydan Georgian -Ioseliani) and Ahad Byute.

The Chairman of the Agency introduced the Iranian guests to the activities of the Agency, its main functions and implemented projects. He also drew attention to the tolerant environment in the country and the issues of financing religious organizations, the transfer of religious buildings, including to the Muslim community. The Chairman emphasized that, against the backdrop of the conflicts in the world, Sunni and Shiite Muslims in Georgia pray in the same mosque. Zaza Vashakmadze also spoke about the facts of gross violations of human rights, including religious rights, in the occupied territories.

The Iranian parliamentarians thanked the Chairman of the Agency for his reception, interesting conversation and invited him to the Islamic Republic of Iran for sharing experiences.

## 14. Visits Abroad

### 14.1. Visit to the Republic of Armenia

On April 29, 2025, a delegation of the State Agency for Religious Issues, consisting of the Chairman of the Agency, Zaza Vashakmadze, the Head of the Legal Maintenance Office Davit Davitashvili and the Senior Specialist of the same Office, Aleksandre Shekiladze visited the Republic of Armenia. The members of the Georgian delegation met with the Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia on Religious Affairs, Artashes Tumanyan, the Head of the Department for Ethnic Minorities and Religious Affairs of the Government of Armenia, Vardan Astsatryan and the Head of the Department of Bordering Countries of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Davit Janazyan at the Office for Ethnic Minorities and Religious Affairs of Armenia. The participants of the meeting discussed the issue of initiating negotiations on granting the Georgian Orthodox Church legal status and registration in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Armenia. During the meeting, the parties outlined specific steps for future cooperation. The meeting was also attended by: Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to the Republic of Armenia, Giorgi Sharvashidze, Counselor to the Ambassador, Giorgi Pipia and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia to Georgia, Ashot Smbatyan.

On April 30, 2025, a delegation of the Agency visited the Akhtala Monastery in the historical Georgian corner of Lore-Tashir in the Republic of Armenia.

## 14.2. Visit to the USA

On May 20-27, 2025, a delegation of the State Agency for Religious Issues, consisting of the Chairman of the Agency, Zaza Vashakmadze, the Head of the Legal Maintenance Office, Davit Davitashvili and the Senior Specialist of the same Office Aleksandre Shekiladze paid a working visit to the United States of America.

During the visit to the USA, important and fruitful meetings were held, namely: on May 21, with Pastor Mark Burns, who was introduced to the religious composition of Georgia, the State's religious policy and the importance of the strategic partnership between Georgia and the United States of America; with Wade Cusack, Senior Scholar of the Institute for Global Engagement, Head of the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Program, Founder and Executive Director of the “Love Your Neighbor Community” (LYNC) and Greg Mitchell, Founder and Executive Director of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable; on May 22, at a meeting with Mark Levin, Executive Vice Chairman and Director General of the National Coalition for Eurasian Jewry (NSCEJ) in Washington, the Chairman of the Agency spoke about the 26-century-old Georgian-Jewish friendly relations. Mark Levin stated at the meeting that a hearing on "global anti-Semitism" was being held in the US Congress, where Georgia, of course, wouldn't be mentioned in a negative context. On May 22, with Deputy Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, Mariah Mercer. One of the topics of the meeting was the objective reflection of information about Georgia in the annual reports on international religious freedom published by the US Office of International Religious Freedom and the strengthening of cooperation in this regard. Zaza Vashakmadze, in turn, emphasized the strategic partnership between Georgia and the United States of America and the need to elevate relations to a higher level. On May 22, with the Central Executive Director of the organization “B'nai B'rith International”, Daniel Mariashin. At the meeting, they discussed the unique Georgian-Jewish relations, the State's support for the Jewish community and the maintenance of Jewish cemeteries; On May 23, with the Chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), Stephen Schneck, Director of Research and Policy, Guillermo Cantor, and Policy Analyst, Dylan Schexnayder. At the meeting, the Chairman of the Agency focused on the objective reflection of information about Georgia in the annual U.S. International Religious Freedom Reports and emphasized the need to elevate the strategic partnership and relations between Georgia and the United States to a higher level.

On May 23, 2025, in Washington, at the opening of the forum “Cooperative Engagement & Builders” organized by the American non-governmental organizations - “International Religious Freedom Secretariat” (IRF Secretariat) and “Love Your Neighbor Community” (LYNC), the Chairman of the Agency, Zaza Vashakmadze, met with the Advisor to the White House Office of Faith, Paula White-Kane. The Chairman of the Agency briefly introduced the Advisor to the White House Office of Faith to the main aspects of Georgia's religious policy and the functions of the Agency. He emphasized Georgia's important role in the South Caucasus and expressed his desire to deepen cooperation with

the United States, especially against the backdrop that Georgia's Western policy remains unchanged and its course is towards the European Union.

On May 27, 2025, in Washington, organized by the American non-governmental organizations, the International Religious Freedom Secretariat (IRF Secretariat) and the "Love Your Neighbor Community" (LYNC), the international conference "Cooperative Engagement & Builders" was held, in which representatives from different countries of the world participated. One of the topics of discussion at the forum was the role of Georgia in the South Caucasus, where the Chairman of the Agency addressed the participants. He participated in the conference panel "Regional Initiatives for the Development of Religious Freedom, Equal Citizenship, Social Cohesion and Conventional Pluralism". The Chairman of the Agency spoke about the religious policy of the State of Georgia, cooperation between various religious organizations and the role of the State in strengthening tolerant coexistence among religions. He also focused on the situation in the occupied territories of Georgia.

On the same day, the Agency signed a Memorandum of Understanding with two American non-governmental organizations – the International Religious Freedom Secretariat (IRF Secretariat) and "Love Your Neighbor Community" (LYNC), which aims to deepen cooperation in the field of religious freedom, share operational experience and promote peace and coexistence.

## 15. Meetings with the Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps

The State Agency for Religious Issues actively cooperates with representatives of the diplomatic corps, holds introductory and working meetings and introduces them to the Agency's activities, implemented projects and future plans. In 2025, the Chairman of the Agency held important meetings, namely:

- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Austria to Georgia, Robert Gerschner - 31.01.2025;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic to Georgia, Matus Bushovsky - 18.03.2025;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to Georgia, Zhou Qian - 4.06.2025;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Hungary to Georgia, Petra Ponevach-Pana - 24.09.2025;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Israel to Georgia, Walid Abu-Haya - 21.10.2025;
- With the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of France to Georgia, Olivier Courtois - 6.11.2025.

## 16. Relationship with Media

The State Agency for Religious Issues considers open and transparent relations with the media a priority.

Any publications of the Agency, interreligious calendars and religious maps are uploaded to the Agency's website.

Information about any activities of the Agency's representatives: meetings, visits, conferences, participation in various events, is uploaded to the Agency's website, "Facebook", "Twitter", and is covered and disseminated through media outlets, as well as through the news agency "Interpressnews".

In 2025, 253 pieces of information with their photo materials were posted on the Agency's website and "Facebook"; 22 pieces of information in English were shared via "Twitter"; 245 pieces of information were disseminated via the news agency "Interpressnews"; 24 events of the Agency were covered in the news programs on various TV channels.

## 17. Appendix – Administrative Report

### **Appendix - Expense Report of the LEPL State Agency for Religious Issues**

In 2025, 40 (forty) contracts were signed for administrative expenses, including 5 (five) contracts under consolidated tender, 5 (five) contracts under electronic tender and 30 (thirty) contracts under simplified purchase.

The electronic declarations are submitted on a monthly basis in accordance with the deadlines set by the legislation in force.

The budget execution report is submitted electronically (<https://www.ebudget.ge/>) to the Ministry of Finance of Georgia on a quarterly basis.

The plan (EPLAN), all the contracts and all the documents confirming the contract costs have been uploaded electronically to the State Procurement Agency, both to CMR and SPA.

5 (five) electronic tenders were implemented. Technical documentation, relevant protocols, contracts, executions and payments have been uploaded within the time limits established by the law.

40 (forty) administrative contracts (organizational code 5001) and 4 (four) contracts signed with different religious organizations (organizational code 5002) (LEPL Administration of Muslims of All Georgia, LEPL Jewish Union of Georgia, LEPL Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Holy Church in Georgia and LEPL Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus) have been registered with the Treasury Service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia.

## 18. Information on Financial Situation

Organizational code	Name	Approved plan for 2025	Cash flow	Percentage of completion against the approved cash flow plan
<b>50 00</b>	<b>LEPL – State Agency for Religious Issues</b>			
00	total	7,600,000.00	7,559,016.00	99.46%
2	expenses	7,593,000.00	7,553,526.00	99.48%
2.1	salary	863,000.00	844,712.00	97.88%
2.2	Goods and services	226,700.00	205,895.00	90.82%
2.5	subsidies	6,500,000.00	6,500,000.00	100.00%
2.8	Other expenses	3 300	2,919.00	88.45%
31	Growth of non-financial assets	7,000.00	5,490.00	78.43%
<b>50 01</b>	<b>LEPL – State Agency for Religious Issues - administration</b>			
00	Total	1,100,000.00	1,059,016.00	96.27%
2	expenses	1,093,000.00	1,053,526.00	96.39%
2.1	salary	863,000.00	844,712.00	97.88%
2.2	Goods and services	226,700.00	205,895.00	90.82%
2.8	Other expenses	3 300	2,919.00	88.45%
31	Growth in non-financial assets	7,000.00	5,490.00	78.43%
<b>50 02</b>	<b>Funding of religious organizations</b>			
00	total	6,500,000.00	6,500,000.00	100.00%
2	Expenses	6,500,000.00	6,500,000.00	100.00%

2.5	subsidies	6,500,000.00	6,500,000.00	100.00%
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## 19. Information on Business Trips

Business trip	Expense (GEL)
Business trip within the country	2 880
Business trip abroad	46 840
<b>Total business trip expenses</b>	<b>49 720</b>

## 20. Funding of Religious Associations (confessions)

Denomination	<i>budget for 2025</i>
LEPL Administration of Muslims of All Georgia	4,150,000
LEPL Apostolic Administration of the Caucasus	700,000
LEPL Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church in Georgia	1,100,000
LEPL Jewish Union of Georgia	550,000
total	<b><i>6,500,000</i></b>

## 21. Shota Rustaveli Georgian National Science Foundation Grant

Grant Agreement Number	FR-23-13674
Grant Agreement Signing Date	18.12.2023
<b>Spending categories</b>	Cash flow for 2025
- total	<b>56 587</b>
<b>01 - Grant funding for key personnel</b>	<b>36 105</b>

<b>02 - Salary for supporting personnel</b>	<b>4,992</b>
<b>03 - Business trip</b>	<b>14 940</b>
<b>04 - Goods and services</b>	<b>550</b>

Grant Agreement Number	FR-22-21090
Grant Agreement Signing Date	10.03.2023
<b>Spending categories</b>	Cash flow for 2025
<b>- total</b>	<b>25 735</b>
<b>01 - Grant funding for key personnel</b>	<b>9 990</b>
<b>02 - Salary for supporting personnel</b>	<b>1 245</b>
<b>04 - Goods and services</b>	<b>14 500</b>

## 22. Information on Correspondence

<b>Correspondence</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Incoming correspondence	432
Outgoing correspondence	114
Legal acts	276
Internal documents	289