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U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

29/9-04

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Georgia

International Religious Freedom Report 2004

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, local authorities sometimes restricted the rights of members of nontraditional religious minority groups.

In November 2003, a transfer of power took place as the result of peaceful protests referred to as the "Rose Revolution." President Eduard Shevardnadze stepped down, and in January 2004, Mikheil Saakashvili from the National Movement was elected President.

After November 2003, the status of religious freedom improved. Attacks on religious minorities, including violence, seizure of religious literature, and disruption of services and meetings decreased. At times, local police and security officials failed to protect nontraditional religious minority groups. Although police at times failed to respond to continued attacks by Orthodox extremists against members of Jehovah's Witnesses and other nontraditional religious minorities, authorities arrested excommunicated Orthodox priest Father Basil Mkalavishvili in March.

Citizens generally do not interfere with traditional religious groups, such as Orthodox, Muslim, or Jewish; however, there is widespread suspicion of nontraditional religious groups. Although there were incidents in which Orthodox extremists harassed and attacked such groups, especially members of Jehovah's Witnesses, there were fewer incidents during the period covered by this report. Reputable and repeated public opinion polls indicated that a majority of citizens believe minority religious groups (nontraditional groups) are detrimental for the state and that prohibition and outright violence against such groups is acceptable to limit their growth.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The Ambassador and other officers of the Embassy repeatedly raised U.S. concerns about the status of nontraditional religious groups, and the harassment of and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities with former President Shevardnadze and President Mikheil Saakashvili, senior government officials, and Members of Parliament (M.P.s).

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of approximately 25,900 square miles and its population is approximately 4.4 million. Most ethnic Georgians (more than 70 percent of the population, according to the results of the 2002 census) nominally associate themselves with the Georgian Orthodox Church. Orthodox churches serving other non-Georgian ethnic groups, such as Russians, Armenians, and Greeks, are subordinate to the Georgian Orthodox Church. Non-Georgian Orthodox Churches generally use the language of their communicants. In addition, there are a small number of mostly ethnic Russian adherents from three dissident Orthodox schools: The Molokani, Staroveriy (Old Believers) and Dukhoboriy, the majority of whom have all left the country. Under Soviet rule, the number of active churches and priests declined sharply and religious education was nearly nonexistent. Membership in the Georgian Orthodox Church has continued to increase since independence in 1991. The Church maintains 4 theological seminaries, 2 academies, several schools, and 27 church dioceses; it has approximately 700 priests, 250 monks, and 150 nuns. The Church is headed by Catholicos Patriarch, Ilya II; the Patriarchate is located in Tbilisi.

Several religions, including the Armenian Apostolic Church, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam, traditionally have coexisted with Georgian Orthodoxy. A large number of Armenians live in the southern Javakheti region, where they constitute a majority of the population.

Islam is prevalent among Azerbaijani and northern Caucasus ethnic communities in the eastern part of the country and also is found in the regions of Ajara and Abkhazia. Approximately 9.9 percent of the population is nominally Muslim. There are three main Muslim populations: Ethnic Azeris (who constitute the second largest ethnic minority), ethnic Georgian Muslims of Ajara, and ethnic Chechen Kists. There are four madrassas (Muslim religious schools) attached to mosques in eastern Georgia, three of which are Shi'a and connected to Iran, and one of which is Sunni and connected to Turkey.

Judaism, which has been present since ancient times, is practiced in a number of communities throughout the country, particularly in the largest cities of Tbilisi and Kutaisi.

Approximately 8,000 Jewish persons remain in the country, following 2 large waves of emigration: the first in the early 1970s and the second in the period of perestroika during the late 1980s. Before then, Jewish officials estimate there were as many as 100,000 Jewish persons in the country. There also are small numbers of Lutheran worshipers, mostly among descendants of German communities that first settled in the country several hundred years ago. A small number of Kurdish Yezidis have lived in the country for centuries.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Protestant denominations have become more active and prominent. They include Baptists (composed of Russian, Georgian, Armenian, Ossetian, and Kurdish groups); Seventh-day Adventists (local representatives state that there are approximately 350 members); Pentecostals (both Georgian and Russian, estimated at approximately 9,000 adherents); members of Jehovah's Witnesses (local representatives state that the group has been in the country since 1953 and has approximately 16,000 adherents); and the New Apostolic Church. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) has not yet sent missionaries to the country, and the number of Mormons in the country is very small. There also are a few Baha'is and Hare Krishnas. Except for Jehovah's Witnesses, membership numbers on these groups are generally not available; however, the membership of all these groups combined is most likely fewer than 100,000 persons.

Section II. Status of Freedom of Religion

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the central Government generally respects this right in practice; however, local officials, police, and security officials at times harassed nontraditional religious minority groups and their foreign missionaries. The Constitution recognizes the special role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the country's history but also stipulates the independence of the Church from the State. A Constitutional Agreement between the Government and the Georgian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (referred to as the Concordat) was signed and ratified by Parliament in October 2002. The Concordat recognizes the special role of the Georgian Orthodox Church and devolves authority over all religious matters to it, including matters outside the Church.

The law is silent on registration of religious communities. There is no mechanism by which religious organizations can register. While the law does not proscribe unregistered organizations from performing sacramental rituals, there is also no protection for organizations that do. Because unregistered organizations are not recognized as legal entities, they may not rent office space or import literature, among other activities. Individual members of unregistered organizations may engage in these activities as individuals, but in such cases are exposed to personal legal liability. Religious groups that perform humanitarian services may be registered as charitable organizations, although religious and other organizations may perform humanitarian services without registration. On November 28, 2003, the Ministry of Justice registered the organization Watchtower as an affiliate branch of the foreign organization Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. Watchtower is a legal organization in use by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In March, a working group comprised of members of various traditional and nontraditional religious groups, representatives from the Ministry of Justice, and officials from the Council of Europe (COE) met in Strasbourg to discuss a draft bill on religion submitted to Parliament in

2001. The working group decided that such a law on religion was not necessary, and discussed drafting amendments to laws already in place, such as the provision in the civil code that allows groups to officially register. On June 11, a working group attended a conference in Tbilisi sponsored by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and COE to discuss the establishment of a legal status for religious groups. The conference included representatives from all religions and foreign legal experts. All parties agreed that drafting separate laws was unnecessary and that making two to three amendments to current laws would suffice. Participants from all sides also decided that a representative from all religions should be involved in a transparent drafting process, which had up until that time been closed. At the end of the reporting period, parliamentary reaction to such amendments was uncertain. It was possible that another conference might be held, with mediation by OSCE at the Public Defenders later in 2004.

The President, the National Security Council Secretary, and the Government Ombudsman have been effective advocates for religious freedom and have made numerous public speeches and appearances in support of minority religious groups. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (including the police) and Procuracy in isolated instances have become more active in the protection of religious freedom but until the transfer of power which occurred in November 2003, failed to pursue criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for their continued attacks against religious minorities. The Human Rights unit in the Legal Department of the Procuracy is charged with protecting human rights, including religious freedom.

During the Soviet era, the Georgian Orthodox Church largely was suppressed and subordinated to political entities and the Committee for State Security (KGB), as were many other religious institutions; many churches were destroyed or turned into museums, concert halls, and other secular establishments. As a result of policies regarding religion initiated by the Soviet government in the late 1980s, the present Patriarch began at that time reconsecrating churches formerly closed throughout the country. The Church remains very active in the restoration of these religious facilities and lobbies the Government for the return of properties that were held by the Church before the country's incorporation into the Soviet Union. (Church authorities have claimed that 20 to 30 percent of the country's land area at one time belonged to the Church.)

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Georgian Orthodox Church enjoys a tax-exempt status not available to other religious groups and lobbied Parliament and the Government for laws that would grant it special status and restrict the activities of missionaries from nontraditional religions. A 2002 Constitutional Agreement between the Church and the State defines relations between the two. The Concordat contained several controversial articles, including Article 6.6 which gives the Georgian Orthodox Church approval authority over all religious literature and construction; transfer to Georgian Orthodox Church ownership of church treasures expropriated during the Soviet period and held in state museums and repositories; government compensation to the Georgian Orthodox Church for moral and material damage inflicted by the Soviet authorities; and government assistance in establishing Orthodox chaplaincies in the military and in prisons. The Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, and Armenian Apostolic churches, as well as representatives of the Jewish and Muslim faiths, signed formal documents with the Orthodox Patriarchate agreeing to the Concordat, but stated after the document was published that Article 6.6 was not in the original. Representatives of nontraditional religious minority groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals, were not included in the Concordat process. The Catholic Church has raised concerns about the authority the Orthodox Church enjoys over decisions regarding the return of its historical church property.

While most citizens practice their religion without restriction, the worship of some, particularly members of nontraditional faiths, has been restricted by threats, intimidation, and the use of force by ultra-conservative Orthodox extremists whom the Government has at times failed to control. On several occasions during the reporting period, local police and security officials harassed non-Orthodox religious groups, particularly local and foreign missionaries, including members of Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Hare Krishnas. Some nationalist politicians used the issue of the supremacy of the Georgian Orthodox Church in their platforms and criticized some Protestant groups, particularly evangelical groups, as subversive. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses in particular were the targets of attacks from such politicians, most prominently Former M.P. Guram Sharadze. The situation has improved substantially since November 2003, and the arrest of Father Basil Mkalavishvili has sent a

helpful signal.

A 2001 Supreme Court ruling revoking the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses, on the grounds that the law does not allow for registration of religious organizations, continues to restrict the group's ability to rent premises for services and import literature. The revocation of the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses resulted from a 1999 court case brought by former M.P. Sharadze seeking to ban the group on the grounds that it presented a threat to the State and the Georgian Orthodox Church. Although the Supreme Court emphasized that its ruling was based on technical legal grounds and was not to have the effect of banning the group, many local law enforcement officials interpreted the Supreme Court's ruling as a ban and have used it as a justification not to protect members of Jehovah's Witnesses from attacks by religious extremists. A case brought by the Jehovah's Witnesses before the European Court of Human Rights challenging this annulment was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

On April 5, members of Jehovah's Witnesses filed an application to build a place of worship on land they own in Telavi. On April 15, the case went to court and the local authorities never appeared. Jehovah's Witnesses refiled the application on May 21 and were denied the right to build because, according to the local authorities, the neighbors do not like them. At the end of the reporting period, the group planned to file a complaint with the central government to bring the issue to the attention of the national authorities. The group has also experienced similar obstacles in Samtredia, where they have a Kingdom Hall, and local authorities have refused to give them permission to use the building.

Customs and police officials sometimes seized literature of nontraditional religions, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses. On October 10, Tbilisi Airport Customs seized a shipment of religious literature they imported. However, since January, they claimed they have not had any problems receiving literature from abroad.

Forum 18 reported that some nontraditional religious organizations claim that importing religious literature can be difficult or expensive. There were reports that the Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church wrote a letter to the Customs Service saying that the distribution of foreign literature should be banned. However, a representative for the Patriarch maintains that the Patriarch only objects to large quantities of non-Orthodox literature being imported.

The Ministry of Education requires that all students in the fourth grade take a "Religion and Culture" class in addition to history courses. Although the course is supposed to cover the history of other major religions aside from Georgian Orthodoxy, the Ministry of Education has received many complaints from parents of students whose teachers concentrate only on the Georgian Orthodox Church during the course.

The Georgian Orthodox Church routinely reviews religious and other textbooks used in schools for consistency with Orthodox beliefs. Suggestions by the Church are almost always incorporated into textbooks prior to issue. By law, the Church has a consultative role in curriculum development but has no veto power.

The Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches have been unable to secure the return of their churches and other facilities closed during the Soviet period, many of which later were given to the Georgian Orthodox Church by the State. A prominent Armenian Church in Tbilisi remained closed, and the Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches, as with Protestant denominations, have had difficulty obtaining permission to construct new churches due to pressure from the Georgian Orthodox Church.

The Jewish community also experienced delays in the return of property confiscated during Soviet rule. By the end of the period covered by this report, a theater group still had not vacated the central hall of a former synagogue that the Government rented to it, despite a 2001 Supreme Court ruling instructing it to do so.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

On occasion, local police and security officials continued to deny protection to or harass nontraditional religious minority groups, particularly members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The police sporadically intervened to protect such minorities from attacks by Orthodox extremists.

Police participation or facilitation of attacks diminished during the reporting period. The Catholic Church continued to face difficulties in attempting to build churches in the towns of Kutaisi and Akhaltsikhe. During the reporting period, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (including the police) and Procuracy have not pursued aggressively criminal cases against Orthodox extremists for their attacks against religious minorities.

Since 1999, followers of excommunicated Orthodox priest Basil Mkalavishvili (Basilists) have engaged in numerous violent attacks on nontraditional religious minorities, including Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, and especially members of Jehovah's Witnesses. From July to November 2003, the Basilists, as well as members of another Orthodox extremist group called "Jvari" (Cross), continued their series of attacks, at times together. The attacks involved seizing religious literature, preventing and breaking up religious gatherings, and beating parishioners, in some cases with nail-studded sticks and clubs. The attacks have been publicized widely, in part by the Basilists themselves who videotaped some incidents. Many acts of religious violence have gone unpunished, despite the filing of more than 750 criminal complaints. On November 4, 2003, several members of the "Jvari" movement received sentences for their participation in violence against Jehovah's Witnesses. "Jvari's" leader, Paata Bluashvili, and two of his colleagues were given 4-year suspended jail sentences, while two other colleagues received suspended 2-year jail sentences. In April, they appealed the decision to the district court, which reduced their sentences by half.

During the reporting period, there were numerous attacks on members of nontraditional religions, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses. At times, supporters of Mkalavishvili and former M.P. Sharadze threatened and physically abused members at meetings for worship, prevented such meetings, and destroyed religious literature and property, such as the private homes where the meetings often took place. During the period covered by this report, Basilists continued to harass several families of Jehovah's Witnesses, demanding that they stop holding meetings in their homes. Because of the continuing violence, Jehovah's Witnesses have refrained from public meetings in favor of gatherings in private homes. Members of Jehovah's Witnesses regularly filed complaints with the General Prosecutor and Ombudsman, but authorities rarely investigated the perpetrators.

On July 8, 2003 in Abasha, the Mayor and approximately ten other persons reportedly entered the house of a member of Jehovah's Witnesses, Valeri Tsomaia, to disband a religious meeting; they physically and verbally abused several worshippers.

For 6 weeks ending on July 13, 2003, protestors blockaded a home in Tbilisi to prevent Russian-speaking Pentecostals from attending worship services in a private home. Police restrained the protestors from using violence, but did not allow the worshippers to enter their building. Officially the protestors stated that the worship building is in a residential area and the services are too noisy; however, during the protests, they stated that they wanted to prevent non-Orthodox services from taking place.

After an arrest warrant was issued for defrocked radical Orthodox priest Basili Mkalavishvili in June 2003, he went into hiding for 4 months, and subsequently reportedly suffered a heart attack in October 2003. After his release from the hospital, although his whereabouts were commonly known, police made no effort to arrest him. On March 11, Mkalavishvili gave a press conference at the Ombudsman's office accusing the Government of protecting sects and undermining Orthodoxy. Later that night, police surrounded his "church," where several hundred "parishioners" were present, and launched an early morning assault on March 12. Authorities were criticized for using excessive force, including ramming a truck into the building, using tear gas, and beating Basili "parishioners" with batons when they attempted to prevent Mkalavishvili's arrest. Police arrested Mkalavishvili and several of his most aggressive supporters. Ten persons were treated for injuries sustained during the arrest. Mkalavishvili remains in pretrial detention. He is being charged with illegal interference in religious rite, damaging property, causing mass disorder, and resistance, threat, or violence against protector of public order. The case has been submitted to the Vake-Saburtalo district court, and Mkalavishvili will be tried as soon as a judge and prosecutor have been selected.

An investigation into the June 2003 arson of a Baptist Church in Akhalsopheli remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

Regular and reliable information regarding the separatist controlled "Republic of Abkhazia,"

which no country recognizes and over which the Government does not exercise authority, is difficult to obtain. A 1995 decree by the Abkhaz "President" Vladislav Ardzinba that banned Jehovah's Witnesses in Abkhazia remains in effect. Although Baptists, Lutherans and Catholics report they are allowed to operate in Abkhazia, the Georgian Orthodox Church reports they are unable to operate there.

The Patriarch has expressed concern over the Russian Orthodox Church's support of separatism in the region by subsidizing Web sites that encourage successionist sentiments. The Georgian Orthodox Church has also complained that in addition to encouraging separatism, the Moscow Theological Seminary is training Abkhaz priests. The Patriarchy claims that the Russian Orthodox Church is sending in priests under the pretext of setting up Abkhaz churches, despite the fact that it recognizes the country's territorial integrity.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses By Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

In September 2003, approximately 3,000 members of Jehovah's Witnesses attended a congress in Zugdidi without any incidents. Also, in March, approximately 2,500 members of Jehovah's Witnesses attended a congress in Kutaisi. In previous years, radical Orthodox Christians threatened such congresses.

In November 2003, Paata Bluashvili and four others received suspended jail sentences for their roles in violent attacks on minorities, including an incident in May 2003 when they allegedly raided an apartment where a Pentecostal congregation was meeting. Bluashvili and one other Jvari follower received 4-year suspended sentences, and the other three received 2-year suspended sentences. In April, the guilty appealed the decision to the district court, which reduced their sentences by half. The case is now over.

On November 28, 2003, the Ministry of Justice registered the organization Watchtower as an affiliate branch of the foreign organization Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. Since November 2003, members of Jehovah's Witnesses have been able to rent property and operate as an affiliate of Watchtower Inc.

On March 12, authorities arrested defrocked radical Orthodox priest Basili Mkalavishvili at his "church" in Tbilisi, on a arrest warrant for his pretrial detention issues in June 2003. On March 15, Mkalavishvili and six of his supporters were sentenced to 3 months of pretrial detention on charges of resisting arrest and interfering with law enforcement officers. Mkalavishvili and another follower are additionally being charged with illegal interference in religious worship, destruction of property, and creating mass disorder. The remaining five are only being charged with resisting arrest. The cases have been submitted to the Vake-Saburtalo district court and are set to go to trial in the near future.

On March 12, Poti customs cleared a shipment of religious literature imported by Jehovah's Witnesses that had been received in the country the previous day.

On April 18, 2003, the Isani-Samgori Circuit Tax Inspection issued a letter annulling the tax identification code of the Union of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Representation of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. The group petitioned the court to invalidate the administrative act of the tax bureau. On May 18, Isani-Samgori Circuit Tax Inspection signed an act of reconciliation canceling the administrative change, in exchange for which the Watchtower

Society would not seek repayment of damages caused by the annulment. This agreement means that Jehovah's Witnesses will maintain their tax registration and will be able to freely import religious literature.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The public's attitude towards religion is ambivalent, according to numerous public opinion polls. Although many residents are not particularly observant, the link between Georgian Orthodoxy and Georgian ethnic and national identity is strong.

Relations between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims are very good. Since the fall of 1996, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims have worshipped together in Tbilisi's mosque. Relations between Muslims and Christians are also quite good. Despite occasional media reports of minor incidents of violence between ethnic-Azeris and ethnic-Georgians or ethnic Armenians, these do not appear to be motivated by religious differences.

In April, Muslims and Lutherans united to build a sports stadium in the Dmanisi District, although by the end of the reporting period, the stadium had not yet opened.

The Jewish communities report that they have encountered few societal problems. There is no historical pattern of anti-Semitism in the country, nor were there any reported incidents during the period covered by this report.

The Patriarch and several ranking clergy of the Georgian Orthodox Church attended an interfaith reception in honor of His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America on April 19. In attendance were representatives of the Armenian Church; the Roman Catholic Church; the Baptist, Muslim, and Jewish communities; and other religious communities, including "nontraditional" sects.

Despite their genuine and historical tolerance toward minority religious groups traditional to the country—including Catholics, Armenian Apostolic Christians, Jews, and Muslims—many citizens remain apprehensive about Protestants and other nontraditional religions, which they often view as taking advantage of the populace's economic hardship by gaining membership through economic assistance to converts. Some members of the Georgian Orthodox Church and the public, including former M.P. Sharadze, view religious minorities, especially nontraditional groups of evangelical Protestants or so-called "sects," as a threat to the national Church and the country's cultural values. In response to a February survey conducted by a reputable polling organization, 81 percent responded that members of Jehovah's Witnesses create serious problems for Georgian society.

Nationalistic politicians manipulated reports of the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in order to create public hostility however, religious leaders of different faiths have spoken out against such criticism.

The Georgian Orthodox Church withdrew its membership from the World Council of Churches in 1997 in order to appease clerics strongly opposed to ecumenism. The Patriarchy of the Georgian Orthodox Church has strongly criticized the attacks perpetrated by Orthodox extremists against nontraditional religious minorities and has distanced itself from Mkalavishvili. However, some Georgian Orthodox Church officials have had ties to the Jvari organization, which has committed numerous acts of violence against religious minorities. Following the June 2003 destruction of the Baptist Church in Akhalsopheli, the Orthodox Bishop in Rustavi contacted the Baptist Bishop to say he had withdrawn his support of the Jvari organization. The Orthodox Bishop had been one of the founders of Jvari.

During the year, there were several incidents of violence and harassment directed towards nontraditional religious groups, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses. In August and September 2003, in the Merve Polki region, Besik Gazdeliani verbally and physically assaulted a group of Jehovah's Witnesses. Although complaints were filed with authorities, including the Prosecutor General's Office and the Ombudsman, no action was taken to hold him responsible. On October 13, 2003 in Senaki, approximately 40 persons reportedly verbally and physically assaulted several members of Jehovah's Witnesses. The attackers confiscated religious literature and

personal belongings of the victims. After a complaint was filed with the Prosecutor General and the Ombudsman, authorities began a preliminary investigation, which ended soon after when they decided not to initiate a case.

Many of the problems among traditional religious groups stem from disputes over property. The Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches have been unable to secure the return of their churches and other facilities that were closed during the Soviet period, many of which later were given to the Georgian Orthodox Church by the State. A prominent Armenian church in Tbilisi remains closed and the Roman Catholic and Armenian Apostolic Churches, as well as Protestant denominations, have had difficulty obtaining permission to construct new churches, reportedly in part as a result of pressure from the Georgian Orthodox Church. Georgian Orthodox Church authorities have accused Armenian believers of purposely altering some existing Georgian churches so that they would be mistaken for Armenian churches. The Catholic Church successfully completed the construction of a new church in Batumi in 2000.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Government repeatedly raised its concerns regarding harassment of and attacks against nontraditional religious minorities with the country's senior government officials, including the President, Parliament Speaker, Internal Affairs and Justice Ministers, and the Prosecutor General. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, frequently met with representatives of the Government, Parliament, various religious confessions, and NGOs concerned with religious freedom issues.

On October 8, 2003, the Ambassador attended the opening of a Pentecostal Assemblies of God Mission building in Tbilisi.

In April 2004, the Ambassador hosted an interfaith reception for the visiting Orthodox Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada Herman, attended by Georgian governmental officials, NGOs and representatives from a wide-range of religious communities.

Released on September 15, 2004

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