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Appeal of the Georgian Civil Society Representatives to Goga Khachidze, Minister of Environment Protection and Natural Resources Regarding the World Environment Day

At the modern stage of human development, speed of environment degradation has reached unprecedented scales. As UN assesses, degradation of environment is one of the important factors endangering world peace; hence, UN included preservation of global ecosystem and biodiversity in its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), linking the issue with democracy development, poverty eradication and preservation of human welfare. Progressive society, well-aware of existing threats, has attached greatest importance to environment protection in the 21st century.

Contrary to the above-noted, over the last couple of years, the Georgian Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources has been heavily focused only on maximum involvement of natural resources in economic turnover. Therefore, intentionally or unintentionally, the ministry has not been performing other functions efficiently; money added to the budget as a result of selling the right to exploit natural resources was viewed as a measure of the ministry's success, rather than degree of water and air quality improved, or biodiversity preserved. Basic function of the ministry – environment protection and development of mechanisms for its stable use was forgotten. Law for environment protection was frequently violated with the cause of supporting entrepreneurship. A number of environment protection issues have accumulated in the country: air and water pollution, degradation of forests and other ecosystems, reduced species, etc. Disregard of environment protection principles,

which violates the right of individuals to leave in healthy environment and puts future generations in danger, will cause graver outcomes in the nearest future.

Issuing license for exploitation of natural resources has become authority of the Ministry of Economic Development; regrettably, the change was followed neither by fundamental shifts in priorities of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources, nor by improvement and reinforcement of the environment protection management mechanisms. Under such circumstances, it is no longer surprising that environment protection is identified with one-time actions of tree planting and household garbage collection; environment protection still remains to be a the sphere of least concern and the ministry remains to be secondary, politically insignificant unit of government.

It shall necessarily be noted that over the last months positive shifts have been observed in certain fields of environment protection; but unfortunately government still takes no notice of violations of licenses and permits for exploitation of natural resources and its actions are focused on finding mechanisms for issuing new licenses and permits, which will cause less “buzz” in society. Decisions made over last couple of years legalizing influence of major industrial polluters of the country on environment, are nothing but shameful.

We consider that at least following actions are necessary to improve current condition:

- Environment protection shall be established as one of the main priorities of the country; mechanisms for securing the priority, including its integration in other sectors shall be defined;
- Mechanisms for raising public awareness and involvement in the decision-making process effecting environment and public health shall be restored;
- Proper amendments shall be made to the law of Georgia, ensuring adequate and timely involvement of the Ministry of Environment Protection and Natural Resources in the process of establishing license conditions for exploitation of natural resources, issuing license and inspection of keeping to the terms of license.
- Procedure of evaluating impacts on the environment and issuing permission to affect the environment shall be improved. The list of activities that have significant negative influence on environment and public health, regulated by the state shall be reviewed.
- Environment protection obligations defined by licenses and permits shall be

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improved; inspection of keeping to the terms of these licenses and permits shall be tightened.

We are certain that declaring readiness to meet the above listed points will be the best way to mark the World Environment Day – June 5, while implementation of the above listed points will serve as a solid guarantee for preservation of our country's unique nature and stable use of its resources.

1. Manana Kochladze – Green Alternative (Tbilisi)
2. Khvicha Vashakmadze – Kutaisi Information Center (Kutaisi)
3. Nanuli Ramishvili – Education and Universe, union of teachers (Kutaisi)
4. Tea Chitadze – Elkana, association of biosciences, Akhaltsikhe branch (Akhaltsikhe)
5. Ia Gurchiani – Group of Young Conservationists
6. Zaza Bochorishvili – Community union Sadmeli (Ambrolauri)
7. Manana Bochorishvili – Association Zekari (Ambrolauri)
8. Bakur Oniani – Union Sinapsi (Lentekhi)
9. Tsiala Kevlishvili – House of Free Opinion (Tbilisi)
10. Guliko Shoshitashvili – Association for Georgian Civil Society Development (Tetri Tskaro)
11. Tamar Uchidze – journalist (Akhaltsikhe)
12. Tamar Totadze – journalist (Akhaltsikhe)
13. Irakli Absandze – Association for Neighborhood Development of Nabadi (Poti)
14. Marika Vacharadze – Independent Union of Journalists (Kutaisi)
15. Iase Jikia – Association Dea (Zugdidi)
16. Zurab Karbelashvili – Elkana, association of biosciences (Tbilisi)
17. Manuchar Kublashvili – Asa, youth science centre of Imereti region (Kutaisi)
18. Irma Zoidze – House of Independent Journalists (Batumi)
19. Irina Gurchiani – Consultation and Training Centre Foundation, resource-centre of Mestia
20. Zaur Chartoliani – Tourism Centre of Svaneti (Mestia)
21. Nino Zanguridze – Association Betlemi (Gori)
22. Manana Grdzlishvili – Union Ecomedexpress
23. Tamar Khidasheli – Young Georgian Lawyers' Association