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Opening address by

**Levan DAVITASHVILI**

**Minister of Environment protection and Agriculture of Georgia**

on the occasion of the  
High-level conference on “Environmental protection and human rights”

(Strasbourg, 27 February 2020)

Dear participants, Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here, today, and to attend this wonderful event on behalf of the Government of Georgia, represented by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture. It is my privilege to address the distinguished attendees of this Conference on the environmental protection and human rights organised under the aegis of Georgian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Georgian Government has set the human rights and environmental protection as the first priority for the period of our Chairmanship. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani in its capacity as the president of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has already stated that the human rights issues will be attempted to address as the Georgian Presidency's priority "by focusing on achieved progress and remaining challenges".

Since the human rights protection has the significant importance for the Council of Europe the Government of Georgia expresses its desire to bring into attention of the European States one of the crucial aspects of fundamental human rights and freedoms, namely, the right to live in healthy environment, receiving and sharing environmentally related information and other important aspects of environmental protection. There are clear inter-linkages between effectively exercising the human rights and fulfilling the obligations of the States concerning the protection of environment.

Climate change, extinction of species, loss of biodiversity, pollution and the overall degradation of the earth's ecosystems have a profound global impact on the enjoyment of human rights and require the widest possible cooperation by all Council of Europe Member States.

I would like to emphasize at the outset that we as the European State stand strongly for Europe's fundamental values, such as the human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We will continue intensive co-operation within the international instruments to ensure the sustainable development, protection of civil and social rights of the individuals by implementing Sustainable Development Goals.

The process of incorporating international standards in national legislation is one of the crucial milestone for establishing the effective systems of human rights and environmental protection. Georgia is a Party to approximately all the international instruments related to the environment. Our country has adopted significant amendments by reflecting implications of treaty based obligations, this amendments include provisions creating fundamental guarantees to the free access of environmental information, access to the court, raising awareness through the civil society on the respective subjects, implementing Forest Management reforms, improving soil, water and air quality.

Despite the progress, vulnerability of Environment and Climate remains as the challenge for Georgia as well as other Council of Europe States.

I would like to underline the significant role of the European Court of Human Rights as one of the fundamental human rights mechanism in the sphere of environmental protection.

Despite the absence of a specific reference to the environment in the Convention of Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights has clearly established that various types of environmental degradation, ineffective assessment of environmental risks and obstacles while accessing the relevant information, can result in violations of substantive human rights, such as the right to life, to private and family life, the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment, and the peaceful enjoyment of the home.

We are intending to strengthen co-operation in environmental protection through the Council of Europe, our main goal is to balance development and nature needs, to provide the healthy environment for current and future generations.

Today, we have the opportunity to discuss on the topics of correlation between human rights and environment, role of civil society and other important issues in this regard.

At the end of the conference, I will have the privilege to introduce the draft declaration on the environmental protection and human rights before the distinguished attendees and cover the main themes enshrines in this document.

Now, I will give the floor to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Marija Pejčinović Burić.  
Thank you.