Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the NPM of Georgia, let me share our experience of 7 years of work, success stories, challenges and thoughts on ways of moving forward.

By ratifying the UN Convention Against Torture in 1994, its Optional Protocol in 2005 and subsequently, establishing the National Preventive Mechanism with the Public Defender of Georgia, an independent NHRI, in 2009, Georgia has declared its commitment to participate in the global system of torture prevention. It has assumed the responsibility to have effectively functioning NPM and to take effective measures to combat and prevent torture and ill treatment. Notably, the establishment of the NPM coincided with the period of widespread torture and ill treatment in the criminal justice system of Georgia. This was why initially the work of the NPM of Georgia was more reactive than proactive. It had to handle hundreds of complaints on alleged torture and ill treatment as the Public Defender’s Office, the NHRI had handled for many years before designation of the NPM. The challenging situation was further aggravated by the initial low level of cooperation by the State authorities. Despite many challenges from the very outset, the OPCAT has nevertheless created new opportunities for more cooperation and more preventive work in Georgia.

The NPM of Georgia has carried out more than 1100 regular, unannounced, preventive visits to the places of detention and published 35 special and annual reports over 7 years. Strictly adhering to the professional ethics, the NPM members have been determined to bring thorough insights and practical solutions for torture prevention. Having opted for a multidisciplinary team and benefiting from different specialists, civil society members and academia, the NPM of Georgia has provided significant number of concrete recommendations.

As a result of the NPM work and the measures taken by the State authorities, Georgia has gradually overcome condemnable widespread practice of torture and ill treatment, as well as prison overcrowding. Decrease of number of prison population enabled the authorities to implement long-standing NPM recommendations. Several prisons were closed due to their poor conditions, many others were refurbished and prisoners’ access to healthcare significantly improved.

The NPM has constantly provided concrete recommendations on the functioning and management of the places of detention, making particular emphasis on the importance of education. It has also paid special attention to the prison management, recommending the implementation of dynamic security and a more rehabilitative approach. As a consequence, the Ministry of Corrections has started to implement several policies to increase staff accountability, improve staff training and supervision.

The NPM has conducted thematic monitoring of the situation of persons with disabilities in detention. The findings and recommendations arising from its visits attracted increased attention. As a result, several steps have been taken to adapt new penitentiary facilities to the needs of persons with disabilities. A special long-term care unit was also opened at the Prison Hospital. Furthermore, the issue related to addressing the special needs of persons with disabilities was included in the training curricula of prison staff.

Thanks to its regular monitoring of child care institutions, the NPM of Georgia has also contributed to the reform of the child care system. The old and large child care institutions have been dismantled and replaced by small homes for children providing better conditions and care. The process of further deinstitutionalization of children is still ongoing.

A number of specific NPM recommendations have been reflected in the strategies and action plans implemented by the State. Furthermore, the NPM has significantly contributed to the legislative process with a view to laying down safeguards against torture and ill treatment.

Yet, much remains to be done to achieve sustainable protection from torture and ill treatment. The NPM has its exclusive standing in this regard. The major lesson learnt during 7 years of work is that there will be very little impact of the OPCAT system without truly constructive dialogue between NPMs and States Parties at the domestic level.

The NPM of Georgia generally welcomes the existing level of cooperation with Georgian State authorities. It particularly welcomes the recent amendment to the Prison Code entitling NPM members to use photo cameras to document bodily injuries and material conditions in prisons, also steps taken to implement Istanbul Protocol. However, it should be noted with regret, that yet it cannot access the CCTV recordings in the places of detention unlike many NPMs. The NPM of Georgia greatly appreciates the support of the SPT in the efforts to rectify shortcomings affecting the NPM’s work. Seeing itself as a watchdog and a good advisor in the quest for torture prevention, mindful of the fact that the effective operation of NPM is a continuing obligation of a State Party and encouraged by instances of successful cooperation, the NPM of Georgia is strongly convinced that the NPM, the SPT and the State Party can engage in ever more constructive dialogue in the best interests of torture prevention.

And I thank you!