# **Giorgi Kldiashvili Speech at the Opening Plenary of the Open Government (OGP) Fifth Global Summit in Tbilisi**

# **July 18, 2018**

From the very beginning, we have been looking at OGP as an enabling platform for meaningful reforms in areas of transparency, citizen participation, integrity and service delivery. Since the beginning of OGP process in Georgia government and civil society created a dialogue mechanism – Forum, the coordinating platform of OGP. This is truly the best practice of co-creation process.

OGP can be a truly remarkable tool to achieve highest standards of good governance; however, the existence of OGP tools does not necessarily guarantee that a country will undertake citizen-centered reforms.

Over the past years action plans on government, parliamentary and local levels, Georgia has managed to take and implement commitments that truly resonate the spirit of OGP and help citizens to demand greater accountability from their Government. For example, some of the most impactful initiatives undertaken in OGP have been development of One stop shop for public services – Justice House and also Community Centers for increased access to public services in rural areas, development of the electronic petitions portal, creation of data. gov.ge website, proactive disclosure of public information by government institutions, monitoring system of asset declarations of public officials, disclosing information on political party financing in open data format, Electronic system of public procurement, disclosure of court statistics on secret surveillance, etc. There is a number of important ambitious commitments implemented in the direction of legislative openness as well presented in three Parliamentary Openness Action Plans.

I think that these reforms are tools that directly empower citizens, giving them possibility to participate and influence the policy process without the assistance of others. As the medium between the government and the population, we always look at potential commitments from the point of view of citizens and how they can benefit from initiatives implemented in OGP. Some initiatives do have a transformative effect and directly relate to the need of citizens, others give them possibility to engage and voice their concerns directly.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to talk about the Georgian experience in OGP without highlighting challenges that we are facing in the process. Very often, the Government is not able to see what the public demands. I have listed the star commitments that Georgia has initiated in its Action Plans and I have to say that most of these star commitments have been recommended by civil society and sometimes we needed to advocate for them to be adopted.

Commitments elaborated by state institutions are sometimes less relevant to public needs and closer to the political and bureaucratic comfort zone. The failure to see the issue from a different perspective results in commitments that are not ambitious and do not have a transformative effect. The latest National Action Plan presented by the Government is an example of the above-mentioned problem. Despite constructive criticism of civil society and numerous concerns voiced in the consultation process, reaching a consensus becomes more difficult with each action plan.

The promise that OGP can be a real tool for real people becomes questionable with every year, as the Chair country of OGP fails to deliver on its promises. Throughout the years, we have also seen commitments that were undertaken by the Government and not fulfilled. We have seen the consultation process become less proactive and more formalistic. We have seen initiatives developed with great disregard of public needs and critique of civil society. As an example, I want to reiterate the concerns that civil society in Georgia has over the initiation of the Freedom of Information Law, a several years old star commitment that has not yet been implemented by the Government.

So, to answer your question, the efforts of the Government can have a real impact on its citizens when the process is backed up with sufficient political will and disregard for political ramifications. What we need from the Government is to abandon its comfort zone and develop initiatives that might be politically painful but effective in all and citizen oriented.

I still believe that OGP is a tremendous platform and we have some results to show for it, so please, remember to cultivate political will in the process and let us collaborate and build on the co-creation experience that we have accumulated together.