



## NGOs disapprove of the Defense Ministry's position about special electoral precincts

The following NGOs – International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy, Georgian Young Lawyers' Association and Transparency International – Georgia, - refuse to accept the offer of the Defense Ministry to visit a special electoral precinct few days ahead of the elections. The special electoral precinct has been established to allow military workers to participate in Gamgebeli by-elections scheduled to be held on January 28.

We believe that visiting the precinct will not solve the problem that can only be remedied through legislative amendments. As you may recall, the NGOs have criticized provisions in the existing Election Code allowing military servicemen to participate in local self-government elections (Gamgebeli/Mayoral and Sakrebulo elections) as well as in parliamentary elections through majoritarian system even if they are not registered in the electoral district concerned.

The Georgian Election Code allows Georgian citizens to participate in local self-government elections and in parliamentary elections through majoritarian system by casting a ballot at electoral precincts where they are registered. Consequently, taking

the above privilege away from military workers means that they will vote on equal basis with other voters and contrary to some beliefs, it will not strip them off their voting rights.

In addition, we believe that allowing military workers to vote in local or majoritarian elections at precincts where they are not registered will create an opportunity to manipulate votes, especially considering that the election administration has announced that it is neither entitled nor responsible to verify conformity of the list of military workers provided by a military unit with the applicable requirement of the Election Code (only the military workers deployed on the territory of the military based for the term of one year or more are able to participate in local self-government elections). Privileging military workers by allowing them to participate in Gamgebeli elections even if they are not registered in the electoral district concerned is unfair in more than one way. In particular, results of Gamgebeli elections at an electoral district have no impact whatsoever on military workers or on rights of voters in other electoral districts. Military service is highly centralized and therefore, local government has a limited to none influence on both legal and factual conditions of military workers.

We strongly disapprove of the Ministry's statement that NGOs and political forces seeking to "strip the military off their voting rights".

Our initiative will allow military workers to vote on equal basis with other voters, and to maintain their right to participate in parliamentary elections through proportionate system, in presidential elections and in referendums. The proposal that NGOs plan to present to the parliament next week allows military workers (similar to other citizens of Georgia) to participate in local self-government elections and in parliamentary elections through majoritarian system only when they are deployed within the boundaries of their places of registration.

International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association

Transparency International - Georgia