**Wypowiedzi Pana Ministra Pawła Jabłońskiego, przewodniczącego delegacji polskiej na odbywające się pod auspicjami Rady Praw Człowieka ONZ posiedzenie Powszechnego Przeglądu Okresowego (*Universal Periodic Review, UPR*) dotyczące Polski w Genewie**

**15 listopada 2022 r.**

*Mister President,*

*Excellencies,*

*Distinguished Delegates,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to lead the Polish delegation during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Poland was one of the first countries to have been reviewed in the first cycle of the mechanism. During the fourth cycle Poland is again one of the first countries to undergo the procedure.

For my country, the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) constitutes one of the UN Human Rights Council’s greatest achievements to date. The most prominent feature of the review is its universal and interactive character, which reminds us of the universality and importance of human rights. This is the attitude the Polish delegation has adopted to the UPR session in Geneva.

We are hoping for a good, frank, and interactive exchange of experiences. I promise we will lend an attentive ear to all recommendations presented by our partners.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

This year’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) coincides with the end of Poland’s membership of the UN Human Rights Council for the 2020-2022 term and with the approaching end of our chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe in 2022. Our active involvement in the work of these bodies has enabled us to consistently implement our human rights priorities.

We have paid special attention to the situation of human rights and democratic aspirations in Eastern Europe and the Eastern Partnership countries – and we will continue to do so. We will also continue to emphasise the importance of protecting and promoting human rights as a key element in achieving sustainable development. We will furthermore undertake actions to ensure freedom of religion or belief, including the protection of religious minorities, to protect the groups in the most vulnerable situations, including children and persons with disabilities, as well as measures to promote democracy and principles of good governance.

Poland invariably attaches great importance to active participation in international human rights protection mechanisms. Since 2001, we have been extending the standing invitations to all Special Procedures, and all requests for country visits have been granted. It should be stressed that the most recent such visit took place in July this year, when we hosted the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Mr. Felipe González Morales.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We are presenting you with a report prepared by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs based on the contributions by individual ministries responsible for the implementation of human rights in Poland.

When compiling the report, we spared no effort to make the process transparent. In line with the procedure for replies to requests for access to public information, we kept non-governmental organisations up to date about work on the report. NGOs could also present their positions during an information meeting. We have also stayed in touch with the Ombudsman for Children and the Commissioner for Human Rights.

*Distinguished Delegates,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

As regards the past five years since Poland’s last Universal Periodic Review (UPR), it is hard not to mention two key factors which have had a major impact not only on the human rights situation in Poland but also on global politics.

I am talking here first of all about Russia’s unjustified and unprovoked war of aggression against Ukraine this February. Another major challenge involved addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine has triggered an unprecedented migration of Ukrainian citizens. In the first place, our assistance centered on receiving refugees, many of them women, children and older persons, making sure that they are safe, and on addressing their needs. Today, our efforts are focused on ensuring a safe, dignified and normal life for them.

Many of you may find it difficult to believe, but even though more than 7 million people have crossed our border with Ukraine since the beginning of the Russian aggression, we did not have to set up a single refugee camp for them. We just didn’t need to do that. When the situation was at its most serious, 41 reception points and 148 information points were launched for the refugees. Everyone arriving in Poland found decent accommodation. Moreover, citizens of 179 countries, excluding Ukrainians and Poles, have crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border since the beginning of the war, and any foreign national fleeing Ukraine can apply for international protection in Poland.

The inflow of refugees also required us to amend our legislation, which is why a law was immediately enacted on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in Ukraine. It granted people coming from Ukraine the right of legal residence for 18 months, extendable to 3 years, and gave them access to a wide range of benefits, social assistance, health care, and education.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

As regards COVID-19 pandemic in the context of human rights, I would like to draw your attention to a number of measures in the areas of health policy and education.

We responded to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic with digital transformation of health services. Its main objectives were to provide patients with the best possible care and access to information on their state of health, to ensure appropriate support to medical staff, to improve the functioning of healthcare providers, and to increase the efficiency, quality and accessibility of the offered services.

Poland has also pursued solidarity measures with respect to the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. So far, we have donated almost 13.5 million doses of vaccines to 22 countries, mainly in South-East Asia, the Balkans, and in countries of the Eastern Partnership. Also the refugees from Ukraine were given access to free vaccination programme.

To counteract the effects of the pandemic, open and free distant learning tools were made available. Under the “Remote School” and “Remote School+” programmes, the government has transferred to local governments PLN 367 million for the purpose of buying distant learning equipment for schoolchildren and teachers. A total of 4,836 local governments have received the aid.

Further means, amounting to PLN 130 million, have been earmarked to support children in foster care.

Polish government’s assistance programmes for schoolchildren also continue after the pandemic. Their value is about PLN 244 million. Funds were allocated to undertakings in the areas of children’s and teenagers’ physical health and fitness, pedagogical and psychological support, as well as enhancing acquisition and retention of matter taught.

It should be noted that the above solutions do not entail different treatment based on any grounds such as sex, race, skin colour, language, religion, political and other views, nationality or social background, membership of national minority, wealth, birth, citizenship, disability, age, or sexual orientation. Quite the opposite, they add to ensuring equal opportunities and facilitate integration.

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Due to time limitations I will not elaborate on all areas of the human rights situation in Poland. Please be invited to read our national report, where we refer to the recommendations of 2017 on a broad range of topics.

But now let me just mention social policy, which is of particular importance to Polish government. Our goal is to increase the quality of life of Poles through enhancing active family policy, improved access to social and health services, and supporting groups at risk of poverty and exclusion.

Measures to create conditions for decent lives of Polish families and for balancing family and professional life receive priority treatment. We take particularly good care when launching initiatives to protect persons in the most vulnerable situations – children and persons with disabilities.

Among Poland’s flagship projects there is the setting up of the so called 500+ child benefit and its 2019 extension to all children under 18, whatever the family’s income. Currently, around 7 million children benefit from the Family 500+ programme. The programme has already resulted in significant improvement of families’ material conditions, which also translates into decreased number of individuals receiving social benefits and sponsored meals.

Moreover, on 1 January 2022, another element of support system for families with dependent children was introduced, namely the Family Care Capital, which is mainly designed to partly refund the maintenance costs of the second and further children at 12 to 35 months of age.

In recent years, Poland also adopted new legislative solutions and programmes whose goal is to improve the exercise of rights of persons with disabilities.

In this area, it is worth mentioning the Act on Guaranteeing Accessibility to Persons with Special Needs, adopted in 2019, that imposes an obligation on all public entities to comply with the minimum accessibility requirements. It aims to improve the quality of life and functioning of persons with special needs, thus implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The act is a key element of the government Accessibility Plus programme, adopted in 2018.

A special form of support for persons with disabilities, in particular children is also the Pro-Life comprehensive family support programme, aimed at providing special support for pregnant women, their families, children who have been diagnosed severe irreversible impairment or incurable life-threatening illness arising during the prenatal development period or during childbirth.

Unfortunately, due to limited time I will not mention other activities, but I assure you that the Polish government will spare no effort in implementing measures with respect to children’s rights and the rights of persons with disabilities.

*Distinguished Delegates,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I would like to thank representatives of countries, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as of non-governmental organisations for attending the today’s session. We are interested to hear your recommendations and comments. We will make every effort to answer your questions diligently.

Thank you for your attention.