**Introductory Statement by the Head of Romania’s delegation, the State Secretary, Mr Traian Hristea**

**Mr. Vice-president,**

**Excellencies,**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is my great pleasure to be here today leading the Romanian delegation for this Universal Periodic Review, supported by Ambassador Răzvan Rusu, our Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Geneva, as well as by colleagues from the main institutions that participated to the elaboration of our national report for this UPR cycle.

In my intervention, I will introduce to you some of the main aspects characterising the current human rights’ situation in Romania. Since our last review, in 2018, we have continued our efforts in promoting and protecting human rights at national, regional and global level, while batting, like so many other countries, subsequent crises.

The subsequent interventions from the other members of our delegation will explore in greater depth certain subjects and themes of interest – as indicated by the advance questions we received – and will update on the implementation of previously received recommendations.

In choosing this scenario, our goal was to realise to its fullest extent possible the interactive characteristic of our today dialogue and provide to you the substantial and recent information, so that your recommendations also be informed and offer us support in the next cycle of UPR follow-up.

**Mr. Vice-president,**

It is already an understatement to refer to the last three years as being challenging, firstly due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, and afterwards following the Russia’s illegal war of aggression against Ukraine.

These crises required urgent and decisive whole-of-government reactions, focusing on immediate and medium term effects that, firstly the pandemic, and subsequently the war against our neighbouring country, had on human rights and fundamental freedoms of Romanian citizens, on individuals under Romanian jurisdiction and on people in serious, sometimes vital need of protection.

For Romania also, the pandemic meant not only fighting for the life and health of our citizens, but also for their well-being – supporting financially the parents during the closure of their children’s schools, adopting measures to alleviate the burden of employers and employees during the suspension of business activities, transitioning to online education, work, life. Administration, justice, social and health care were moved online and from this perspective, the technological impact and the creativity in its application revealed, amidst hard times, the solution for a much needed recovery.

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine required from neighbouring countries at first, an onwards for Europe to provide a safe space for persons displaced because of the illegal war. Over 4 million Ukrainian citizens crossed our borders since the end of February 2022, of which over 2.5 million benefited from direct support from the Government of Romania or our partners. This can be seen in the resources allocated for ensuring basic needs, as well as for their protection and inclusion in our communities: over 500 million euros allocated from the budget of state and international partners, 6 ministries involved in the National Plan of medium and long-term measures, more than 20 laws amended and adopted for the management of displaced persons from Ukraine, more than 1,500 local authorities and 300 non-governmental organizations involved in providing direct support to refugees from Ukraine.

Romania has developed mechanism for coordination and collaboration between all parties actively involved in crisis management; we launched a European platform for dialogue, with the participation of 23 EU Member States and the European Commission, as well as other European countries, to exchange information and best practices on the road to ensuring an independent life for Ukrainian citizens on our countries.

**Mr. Vice-president,**

At the same time, against less optimistic odds, 2018-2023 was a fruitful period from the point of view of completing and renewing the Romanian institutional architecture and human rights legislation. Vital National strategies were adopted or renewed on combating corruption, promoting equal opportunities between women and men, on social inclusion and reducing poverty, on inclusion of Romanian citizens belonging to Roma minority, on rights of persons with disabilities. Other national programmatic documents are currently in their adoption stage, and my colleagues will offer a more detailed insight in their interventions.

As far as the international legal landscape is concerned, the domestic procedure for the ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance is ongoing. Inter-institutional consultations take place, at different levels and in different stages, for the ratification of the Kampala Amendments on the crime of aggression to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, various optional protocols to UN Human Rights Treaties and the Violence and Harassment Convention.

**Mr. Vice-president,**

Since the last Universal Periodic Review, Romania was committed to comply with as many recommendations as possible under the **justice** field. During 2018, the Romanian institutions were placed under a controversial vail when proposing some of the reforms in the justice sector at that time.

Romania followed through the recommendations made by the European Commission under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) and having that in mind, our progress was recognized by the European Commission. In the last CVM Report, from November 2022, it was recommended that CVM was lifted and Romania's evaluation be placed, as for all other EU Member States, only within the General Mechanism on the Rule of Law.

On January 25, 2022, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (**OECD**), through its Council, decided to start the accession discussions of Romania. On April 17, 2023, Romania was invited to become an associate member state of the Anti-Bribery Working Group (WGB) and to accede to the Anti-Bribery Convention.

**Mr. Vice-president,**

On May 13, 2021, the Romanian Government formally adopted National Strategy for preventing and **combating antisemitism**, xenophobia, radicalization and hate speech and its Action Plan, as the expression of our continuous and firm commitment for combatting Antisemitism.

This strategy’s aims is to equip Romanian authorities and the society as a whole with the necessary tools for preventing and sanctioning the facts associated with anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalization and hate speech.

As the first programmatic document in this field, the Strategy’s goal is to achieve a correlation of sectoral efforts aimed at preventing and combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalisation and hate speech by:

- improving the collection of data about these phenomena in Romania;

- securing the legal framework;

- training programs for law enforcement agents and magistrates;

- consolidating the school curricula;

- developing pilot cultural programs to prevent the proliferation of such phenomena in Romanian society.

**Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,**

The past two years have been fundamental in shaping a new and robust institutional architecture against **trafficking in human beings**, steered by strategic leadership, driven by effective coordination and equipped with the necessary tools to respond to the complex realities on the ground. Thus, Romania has a National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator for an inter-sectoral strategic coordination, pivoted on prevention, prosecution and protection.

Furthermore, Romania took important steps in the process of victim identification, by adopting a new national mechanism for identifying and referring victims, putting in place a state-of-the-art cyber forensics system for detecting online sexual predators and setting up dedicated hearing rooms for children victims of trafficking and multidisciplinary teams across the country. We are at the forefront of the battle that aims to reduce the market that fosters trafficking, by incriminating the use of exploited services of trafficking victims. We also prioritize the reduction of vulnerabilities of target groups, particularly women and children, as traffickers exploit and prey on victims’ vulnerabilities.

**Mr. Vice-president,**

As the UN Secretary General stated, progress in human rights respect, fulfillment and promotion can only be achieved in close interlinkage with the implementation of the **Sustainable Development Goals**. In Romania, the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches co-exist when it comes to sustainable development. The central policy on sustainability is the National Strategy for the Sustainable Development of Romania 2030, adopted in 2018 to guide the sectoral strategies in order to support SDGs implementation, and the corresponding human rights.

Recently approved legislation paves the way for embedding an SDG perspective in policy planning methodologies across the public administration, in elaborating and executing budgetary programmes, and in strengthening the system of regulatory impact assessments. A multi-disciplinary statistical data aggregator, is in use from 2022, with a double role: to support the decision-making process at the level of the central public administration (including in areas related to human rights), and to monitor the implementation of the Strategy.

Mr. President, my introductory intervention ends here. I look forward for the interactive dialogue that is to begin.