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**UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

**32nd session**

Introductory Statement

by

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of the Slovak Republic

*Mr Vice-President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is an honour for me to be here today to lead the Slovak delegation to the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review. I am joined by colleagues from various relevant government’s institutions.

Slovakia remains fully committed to the Universal Periodic Review mechanism and the implementation of the relevant recommendations offered through it. We see the UPR process as an effective tool. Not only to review States´ progress in the field of human rights but more importantly to outline ideas and ways for further elevation of the human rights at the national level. Slovakia continues to value deeply the international community constructive engagement in this mechanism.

Recommendations, that we will receive at this review provide important and valuable guidance to national authorities for better protection and promotion of the human rights. In accordance with our constitution and respective legislation, the implementation of our human rights obligations at the national level is a shared responsibility.

The Government and all its relevant institutions cooperate to ensure the highest level of the implementation of all human rights obligations across the country. Civil society, national human rights institutions and other partners have an indispensable place in our effort to advance further the human rights and play an important role in a successful implementation of the UPR recommendations. We are looking forward to their continued engagement in a follow-up process to this review.

*Mr Vice-President*,

In the legal order of the Slovak Republic, the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and the Constitutional Act laying down the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms are the basis of the human rights law. This system of human rights legislation complements international treaties to which the Slovak Republic is a party.

The Slovak Republic practically ratified all fundamental international treaties on human rights and fundamental freedoms in the UN system and at the regional level within the framework of the Council of Europe. International human rights treaties, which are part of the Slovak legal order, have superlegislative power.

In February 2015, the Government of the Slovak Republic approved the National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights in the Slovak Republic. The participatory and inclusive process of creation of this framework document has proved to be justified and indispensable for two years of intensive work.

The key role in this process played the Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality. The Council is as an advisory body of the Government of the Slovak Republic and is composed of representatives of the state and non-governmental sector.

*Mr Vice-President,*

Now, I would like to turn to the main developments that have taken place in the Slovak Republic since the second UPR cycle.

The Government approved the proposal for signing of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture with reservation of ratification. The procedure of ratification shall follow an analysis of obligations. Correspondent legislative changes are being prepared and approved.

The amendment to the Act on Slovak National Centre for Human Rights is close to its final approval. The amendment aims to update the status of Slovak National Institution for Human Rights to be in full accordance with Paris Principles. It specifies the position of Slovak National Centre for Human Rights as an equality body.

Several substantial changes are proposed, including the system of creation of the Board and the selection procedure for the position of the Director. Proposed changes emphasize the independence of Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, its mandate, reports, reviews, and standpoints.

In the field of protection of victims of crime:

* as of 1st of January 2018 the Act on victims of crime entered into force introducing new definitions of 'victim', 'particularly vulnerable victim', 'secondary and repeated victimisation' and 'domestic violence crime' into our legal system and comprehensively regulates rights of victims;
* based on the Victims Act, each and every victim is entitled to obtain adequate explanatory information and professional assistance based on his/hers needs. This assistance in general includes psychological support and legal assistance;
* due to changes connected to the Victims Act, the Code of Criminal Procedure was amended. This amendment is aimed at strengthening the position of victims in criminal proceedings and introduced principles of prevention of secondary and repeated victimisation. Based on these principles, rules on respecting the needs of victims were adopted.
* A special attention is paid to the case in which a child is a victim. When taking testimony of child victims and child witnesses, a special emphasis is put on observing provisions of the Criminal order on interrogating the witness and person bellow the age of 18 years.

Now I will briefly touch upon the situation of persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, including Roma:

* The government’s intention is to make the preschool education mandatory for children one year prior to the start of primary school. At the same time, we intend to extend the legal entitlement for a place in a kindergarten to all children from the age of 3. The measure will impact preschool participation of Roma children that is currently one third in comparison with majority population.
* Free meals in kindergartens and primary schools are introduced as of January 2019. This policy will be extended to all children in the primary schools and in the final year of kindergartens. This extension might help children living in poor households.
* Further measures are being implemented, such as improving education and training of teachers to work with diverse groups. These initiatives provide more professional support staff to improve inclusiveness. We aim to lower the socio-economic impact and to improve future job prospects of affected children.
* The Government is aware of challenges related to an access of Roma to public services. Their problems are interconnected in various areas, such as education, health and housing. Therefore, between 2018 and 2019, a total of 279 health education assistants in over 300 villages in all regions of Slovakia are planned to be employed through the Healthy Community project. This policy should help improving health access for Roma in less developed districts in Slovakia.

Healthcare represents a complex of relationships where many fundamental human rights and freedoms are exercised.

* The present legislation of the Slovak Republic allows the application of the conscientious objection by healthcare professionals. Applying the conscientious objection allows the full exercise of the right to the freedom of conscience and to personal conviction of healthcare professionals regarding the protection of an unborn life.
* The topic of reproductive health is dealt with by the National Programme for Care of Children and Youth. Its goal to ensure optimal care for pregnant women and newborns. It also includes the effort for and successful implementation of reducing maternal mortality and morbidity rates.
* Equally important is improving the health of newborns by securing equal access to healthcare, including planned parenthood with a focus on marginalised Roma communities and other disadvantaged population groups.

The Government of the Slovak Republic has long been trying to ensure decent working conditions. It promotes and takes action to raise the minimum wage, which helps to raise the standard of living and fight poverty.

* Growth in real wages is also greatly improved thanks to a regular and robust increase in the minimum wage. As two-thirds working for a minimum wage are women, it also decreases the gender pay gap. In addition to the minimum wage, social benefits and pensions are increasing every year.
* The maternity allowance is already at the level of gross salary before joining the maternity leave.
* In the area of gender equality, we paid particular attention to creating better conditions for reconciling family and working life and reducing the gender pay gap.
* A positive trend is the increasing number of fathers who take the opportunity to take care of their child and receive a maternity allowance for seven months.
* Last year, 17% of fathers stayed with their children, which is a historical maximum.
* Another historical achievement is the proportion of women in the current government when women represent a third of all ministers.

An important agenda is the protection of women and children against violence. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family runs a free non-stop phone line for women and supports services for victims of domestic violence, including various NGO projects.

* The access of services for women and the rate of reporting and prosecution of domestic violence have been steadily rising in recent years. In the field of violence prevention, we have implemented various information and media campaigns with a particular emphasis on sexual violence.
* In the area of child protection, great emphasis is put on raising awareness of child violence. Reforming the system of social protection of children becomes the centre of concern for child protection and family consolidation to keep the child in the family environment if possible.
* The current law gives new possibilities to solve problematic situations directly on the ground and to work with parents in families at risk.

We also paid great attention to senior citizens and people in need, especially disabled people.

* Historically, since July, we have increased the care allowance, up to 120 euros monthly.
* Likewise, we have significantly improved the contribution for retirees of up to nearly 100 euros.

The Slovak Republic has a very well-structured system of support for persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

* The system preserves, protects and develops further their identity and cultural values.
* The aim of the Act on the Fund for the Promotion of the Culture of Persons belonging to National Minorities, which came into effect on July 2017, was to transform the previous subsidy system of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic.
* The task was to create an institution which ensures effective and systematic promotion of cultural and arts activities of all persons belonging to national minorities in the Slovak Republic.

The Slovak Republic pays the attention to the improvement of the educational process at all levels. In order to create a comprehensive system, including children of belonging to national minorities, disadvantaged children and children in inclusive education.

* The Government of the Slovak Republic approved in 2018 the important strategic document - National program for development of education and training and his implementation plan. That is a reform for the next 10 years which will be implemented through two-year action plans containing specific measures, timeframe and budget. The main topics are:
  + the development of lifelong education;
  + integration and inclusion from marginalized Roma communities and children based on a socially disadvantaged space;
  + and interconnection with the needs of the economy and the labor market.

In the Slovak Republic housing is one of the major challenges not only for a large part of the Roma community but also low-income households. The objectives and priorities of the Slovak Republic in the area of housing are set out in a framework document “State Housing Policy Concept 2020”. The objective of state housing policy is the gradual increase of the overall housing standards to make housing affordable for population and allow each household to procure adequate housing.

*Mr Vice-President,*

The General Prosecutor's Office of the Slovak Republic fulfills its role in the fight against extremism and the prevention of all forms of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance as follows:

* a significant amendment to the Criminal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure effective since January 2017 was adopted in order to prosecute all forms of criminal conduct with elements of extremism more effectively;
* the criminal offences of extremism are in the competence of the Special Criminal Court and within the preliminary proceedings they are supervised by the prosecutors of the Special Prosecution Office;
* criminal offences of extremism including the prosecution of defamation of a nation, race and belief, as well as inciting to violence based on race, origin, nationality, skin colour, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion were broadened and redefined.

*Mr Vice-President, Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,*

This was the short overview of the human rights situation in Slovakia.

Slovakia recognizes the importance of the human rights for the benefits of people living in our country as well as the development of our society.

We remain fully committed to protection and promotion of the human rights in Slovakia and beyond.

We look forward to fruitful and constructive dialogue today and are keen to answer questions put forward by member States.

*I thank you, Mr Vice-President.*