**5**  Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen,

One of the key priorities of the Government is to overcome poverty using human rights based approach.

The Government has set the target to eliminate the extreme poverty by 2023 which inevitably refers also to child and elder poverty.

Last year, a new term has been introduced in the pension legislation: "Minimum Pension Size". The Government policy is to define the rate of the minimum pension not less than the extreme poverty line. According to this policy, the sizes of minimum pensions were increased both last year and this year based on the predicted extreme poverty line.

Starting from January this year the size of different types of pensions has been increased in average for 10% affecting about 560 thousand people. This is a continuous policy to ensure progressive increase in the average pension over inflation.

During the last four years the extreme child poverty was decreased by 40 percent and the extreme poverty level among elderly people was decreased by more than 50%.

 The Government implements continuous policy to multiple employment opportunities and possibilities for creative self-realization of people as one of the main ways to overcome poverty.

 To promote decent work the legal framework expanding the scope of state control over the fulfillment of the requirements of labour legislation has been adopted. The current Health and Labour Inspectorate, in addition to overseeing the implementation of health and safety regulations, as of July next year will also oversee the implementation of other requirements of labour code, collective and labour contract requirements. This period will be used to build capacities of the Inspectorate in cooperation with ILO and other partners to have high-quality and effective mechanism.

 According to another amendment to the Labour Code the definition of discrimination in labour relations has been introduced and it has clearly been stated that discrimination is prohibited by the Labour Code.

Madam President,

 A comprehensive 4-year Social Protection Strategy has been developed. Besides, several sectorial strategies and action plans, such as Gender strategy, have been adopted by the Government reflecting the issues of regulatory framework for informal sector, including access by women in this sector to social protection, maternity protection and childcare support.

 From July this year all women living in rural areas will receive childcare support regardless of the fact if they possess registered or unregistered job. Taking into account that the biggest share of informal sector belongs to the agricultural sphere, this will be a significant support to women engaged in agriculture in rural areas.

 From July this year the size of childcare support benefits for all working women will be increased by 68%. Besides, birth allowances for the first and second children are increased by six and two times respectively.

 Also, public campaigns are being implemented by the state in cooperation with civil society and international organizations to change the stereotype of one breadwinner in the family, including interactive theatre in the regions and other non-traditional ways to achieve wider audience.

Madam President,

 Deinstitutionalization has been one of the priorities of the Government for the last years in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child aimed at ensuring the right of the child to live in family. The number of children in institutions has decreased significantly. If in 2006 the number of children in institutions was about 10000, at the beginning of 2015 it stood at about 4000. Now only about 600 children are in the state-run care institutions. Altogether (with special educational institutions) there are about 2000 children in institutions.

 At the same time intensive state support is provided to the biological families including material support and services, as well as capacity building aiming to ensure safe and sustainable environment for the children and their families.

 Intensive reforms have been undertaken to extend state funded community based day care services around the country for all children. In particular, this year services are available in 30 major communities of the country. The number of beneficiaries was increased for about three times.

 Prevention programs have been fully revised and more than tripled the number of beneficiaries for this year making the service available in all regions.

 Now specialized foster care is available for 18-23 age old persons with disabilities to ensure family environment for those who have been previously engaged in specialized institutions.

 Last year the Government provided housing certificates - to about 300 graduates of care institutions to receive apartments among which the graduates of specialized institutions are also included.

 Small Community Houses for the adult beneficiaries of specialized care institutions are being established to create family type environment for the people with disabilities and ensuring their right to live in communities. State funding for the procurement of ten houses was provided last year. It is planned to enlarge the project for the coming years gradually increasing the number of persons with disabilities living in small houses. It is planned also to deinstitutionalize the elderly care and enlarge community based services creating small community houses for older people in all regions during the coming five years.

 On January 16 this year the Government adopted a decision to accede to the Marakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired, or Otherwise Print Disabled.

 Starting from 2017, state budget resources have been allocated for specific services aiming at facilitating access to published works for these persons such as printing of Braille books, recording of audio books, etc.

 To ensure further social inclusion of these persons, they are provided with white canes from the state funds and starting from these year also will be trained.

 This year the compliance of Laws on ”Language” and “Freedom of Information” with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will be ensured to stimulate dissemination of the Armenian sign language and ensure the rights of persons with disabilities to receive and seek information.

 People with disabilities have a priority in participating in all state employment programs. Different procedures have been improved to enable people with disabilities to take part in these programs.

 Currently there are about 2500 unemployed people with disabilities registered at the State Employment Agency, out of which 42% are women. This data is close to the data for the same period of the previous year.

 There was an increase for about 10.5% in getting constant jobs for people with disabilities comparing to the previous year. Also, there was an increase for about 20% in the overall numbers of people with disabilities who obtained job with the assistance of the State Employment Agency in comparison with the previous year.

 The number of people with disabilities who have participated in employment projects has increased for more than three times in comparison with the previous year.

President,

 A delegation of the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment carried out the fifth periodic visit to Armenia in December last year, during which it visited Dzorak Mental Health Care Center. The delegation noted that there was no any improper attitude or behavior from the staff towards residents of the institution both in terms of physical or psychological point of view. On the contrary, the delegation witnessed that all the residents who were able to speak noted the staff's kind and cordial attitude. This fact is particularly appreciated by the delegation given the challenges faced by small number of employees in taking care of the large number of residents.

Great progress could be observed in the state policy to prevent domestic violence and provide support for the victims of domestic violence. Last year two more new mechanisms were introduced by the Government: state financial assistance for the victims of domestic violence and minimum standards for shelters.

 The Council on Prevention of Domestic Violence was established with the involvement of the state and civil society organizations, which acts as an effective platform for discussion of relevant matters proposing solutions for the urgent issues and providing feedback on the reforms in the sector.

 Trainings and capacity building are one of the key components of the state policy to combat domestic violence. Last year several trainings were organized for the staff members of the domestic violence victims’ support centers; besides, staff members of the hotlines have been trained. Moreover, mapping of the regional organizations dealing with domestic violence was carried out, whose staff members were trained as well.

 Last year, mechanism for the comprehensive statistics on domestic violence in Armenia was introduced. The first results will be published in April this year. The data will be available also for public and it will serve as a good basis for evidence-based policy in prevention of domestic violence in the country.

 In total there were 6 state centers in 3 regions and in Yerevan providing support to domestic violence victims during the last year. In total about 700 persons received state support during the year. Starting from this year, in cooperation with civil society, support for domestic violence victims is available in all regions of Armenia and the number of beneficiaries is supposed to be increased for about three times. Also, for the first time ever for the country, state financing will be provided to two shelters run by NGOs for domestic violence victims.

Thank you.