**Statement by**

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*Madam President, Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

it is my **honour and great privilege** to present Croatia’s third report to the Universal Periodic Review.

As the Head of Croatian Delegation, I would like to **introduce several senior officials, namely;**

* **Madam Vesna Batistić Kos**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN in our mission in Geneva,

attending the UPR session in person,

* **Mr. Frano Matušić**, State Secretary for Political Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs,

Deputy Head of Delegation,

* **Madam Terezija Gras**, State Secretary for European and International Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior,

and

* **Mr. Tomislav Paljak**, State Secretary in the Ministry of Science and Education.

There are **fifteen other members** ofour Delegation, who stand ready to answer your questions.

**Croatia’s third report to the UPR** is the result of an inclusive process that has involved all relevant government bodies. It also involved consultations with civil society, whose suggestions were partly reflected by the Report. In addition, Croatian Parliament was briefed about the Report, Mid-term Report and recommendations.

**Croatia is committed to the UPR process** as it represents a unique mechanism that treats all UN member states on an equal footing. We advocate for an effective UPR implementation and an interactive national debate - with all relevant stakeholders, including national human rights institutions and civil society.

Furthermore, we used the voluntary practice of **Mid-term Report** as an excellent tool for presentation of human rights record in the first half of the UPR cycle. It helps us in more effective monitoring of the recommendations.

In the period 2017-2019, **Croatia was elected to the Human Rights Council for the first time**. During its mandate, Croatia cooperated closely with other members and took part in mechanisms aimed at enhancing respect for human rights. Croatia undertook a proactive role in the *Consultative Group* and in the *Working Group on Situations.*

In the course of the **Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU***,* Croatia had its priorities in the field of human rights – hate speech, gender equality, women’s empowerment, missing persons, child poverty, fight against domestic violence and death penalty.

In the ***Sustainable Development Goals Index* Report - 2019***,*Croatia was ranked as 22nd in ensuring rights of citizens, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

**Croatia accepted 162 out of 167 issued recommendations.** Only five were rejected, but with arguments. Three related to the ratification of the *“Migrant Convention*”; one was of technical nature about the creation of a special body for the UPR, where we still prefer direct responsibilities of the ministries, and the last one was unverified allegation on violence against LGBT persons. The implementation of all other recommendations is included in our Report.

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*Madam President,*

today, we have a unique opportunity to present our human rights progress and examples of good practices and to discuss all critical issues, with the aim of **ensuring human rights implementation at home and their strong advocacy abroad**.

I am pleased to present **areas of progress** that have been achieved since 2015. I will start with **legislation and judiciary.**

*(legislation and judiciary)*

Croatia has been **continuously strengthening its legislative framework** for promotion and protection of human rights through the adoption of international instruments, new pieces of domestic legislation and national strategies in specific areas.

Croatia ratified:

* the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communication Procedures*,
* the *Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs* and
* the *Istanbul Convention*.

Following the *Istanbul Convention*, two protocols were adopted: one on assisting the victims of sexual violence and other one on the victims of domestic violence.

Among the **national documents** adopted in the last five years, let me mention:

* *Anti-discrimination Plan*: it includes raising awareness, fight against hate crime and hate speech;
* *National Strategy for Persons with Disability* – it strengthens the implementation of the relevant Convention and principles of universal design and reasonable accommodation;
* *Strategy against Domestic Violence* – it strengthens the protection of victim’s life;
* *Operational Programmes for National Minorities* – it strengthens minority rights through concrete projects;
* *Strategy for Victim and Witness and its Action Plan* - both adopted with the aim of ensuring effective support for victims from the very first moment of committing the crime.

Allow me also to stress that we made a lot of **progress in the area of criminal law.** Details will be presented later, however I want to announce that one of the most significant novelties is the mechanism of individual assessment of a victim. Additionally, a definition of a victim was changed, distinguishing *"direct victim"* and *"indirect victim”.*

Furthermore, we have better situation in prisons - **overcrowding no longer exists** and the number of persons under probation has been constantly increasing. In cooperation with UNICEF, we have organised video-talks between children and their imprisoned parents in 13 prisons across the country. In just one year 300 video-visits were realized.

In addition, current **judicial reform** aims to further increase efficiency and transparency of the judiciary. In this light, a number of laws have been amended, including those that improved criteria for appointing judicial officials. It is important to mention that these amendments have also strengthened the accessibility of courts to citizens, and that the procedure of legal aid was further improved.

*(women’s rights)*

When it comes to **women’s rights**, positive changes have been recorded in reconciling work and family life by expanding maternity and parental benefits on national level. In addition, the number of highly educated women in employment increased, including in STEM.

For the first time, the Government specified **gender equality** as a separate objective of its mandate. Besides the ratification of the*Istanbul Convention*, a number of measures to combat violence and gender discrimination have been implemented. In this sense, we will do our best to achieve regional distribution of shelters.

**However, domestic violence is difficult to eradicate.** Its definition was included in the *Criminal Code* in 2015 as an independent criminal offense that covers more serious forms of family violence. If it caused fear or humiliation, it will always be in the zone of criminal responsibility. Also, domestic violence was included as a misdemeanour in the *Act on Protection Against Domestic Violence*.

Allow me to add, that the *Act on the Rights of Victims of Sexual Violence during Military Aggression against the Republic of Croatia in the Homeland War* includes **reparative measures for victims**, such as financial compensation, psychosocial assistance, legal aid and medical rehabilitation.

In 2019, the Government adopted the *2nd National Action plan**for the Implementation of the UN Security Council's Resolutions on* ***Women, Peace and Security*.**

*Madam President,*

*(children)*

Regarding **children,** let me mention several steps forward.

The so-called ***Children's Budget*** for a 3 year period was developed for the first time in 2019 with the aim to encourage the real change in planning, implementation, and monitoring of the allocation of resources for children. It will also improve the implementation of the Convention on the Right of the Child and make positive impact on all Budget users.

Furthermore, new ***Foster Care Act***for the first time has introduced foster care as an occupation in addition to traditional foster care. In order to improve quality and mechanisms for monitoring foster care, various training courses were held for expert employees, educations and foster parents networking.

*(disabled persons)*

**There are several novelties regarding persons with disabilities.**

The *Central Disability Certifying Body* has introduced a new certifying system that is easier for the beneficiaries.In order to harmonise legislation with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities the *Family Ac*t abandoned *“****the institute of parental care after coming of age*”**.

It also accepted **“*the new institute of complete deprivation of legal capacity****”* and introduced ***“anticipated order”***, enabling parents to designate in advance a person for child’s care in the case of their death.

It is important to add that through European Social Fund we provided **60 mil € for personal assistance services** for persons with disabilities (for the period 2017 - 2023).

*(national minorities)*

Regarding **national minorities**, the Government’s *Operational Programmes for National Minorities* were adopted in 2017 with the aim to further improve protection of the rights of national minorities and ensure the appropriate mechanisms for their implementation. The new Programmes for next period are currently under preparation. We have increased state funds for umbrella associations of national minorities increased from 3. mil € in 2017. **to 7.3 mil € for this year.**

There has been progress in the field of **Roma** education, housing, political representation and inclusion and historical remembrance. In addition, our study “*Collection of Baseline Data for the Monitoring of the Implementation of the Roma Strategy”* has been recognised by regional organisations in Europe as an example of best practices and it was presented before the UN.

*(migrations)*

**On migrations:** As part of the *Eastern Mediterranean migratory route*, Croatia faces numerous challenges – among which most important are preservation of human life and protection of the human rights of all migrants.

Croatia implements the EU migration policy and has harmonized its legislation with the *EU acquis communautaire.* Conditions for migrants are in line with both UN global compacts, endorsed in 2018.

Particular importance has been put on the *Action Plan for Integration of Persons* for those who have been granted international protection. In accordance with the European resettlement programme, **250 Syrians have been resettled from Turkey to Croatia.**

Special attention is given to **unaccompanied children.** In 2018, the Government adopted a new protocol for their treatment based on key Convention’s principles on best interests of the child and protection of all forms of discrimination.

*Allow me to announce that the issue of migration will be elaborated in more detail in our intervention during the debate.*

*(THB)*

**On trafficking of human beings, trends have changed**. Croatia is a country of destination and origin. Also, up to 90% of victims are involved in internal trafficking.

The *National Plan for Combating trafficking in human beings 2018-2021* and several protocols were adopted with the aim to **help victims** in the areas of identification, aid, protection, return and reintegration. Furthermore, a comprehensive training is organized for judges, state attorneys and police, while regular financing has been provided to NGOs managing two national shelters for victims.

The state attorney’s offices cooperate with the Ministry of the Interior to enhance the detection of perpetrators, especially in the case of trafficking in children and sexual and labour exploitation. During proceedings, **state attorney's offices pay special attention to the victims** in orderto provide them access to justice and prevent their additional victimization. It is important to note that we have no recorded cases where victim has been punished.

*(hate crime)*

In addressing **hate crime**, our policy framework includes a broad collection of instruments and a close cooperation with all responsible stakeholders, including NGOs.

The *National Anti-Discrimination Plan (2017- 2022)* contains measures on: data collection, raising awareness, victim support and monitoring implementation of the *Code of Conduct on Online Hate Speech.*  The State attorney's offices are continuously improving their professional work and skills with the aim to raise the quality of prosecuting hate crime and hate speech.

Furthermore, the definition of hate crime in the Criminal Code has been amended, adding **language** as an additional discriminatory motive.

It is of special importance to mention that in the context of comprehensive efforts to **supress all forms of radicalisation in society, the new Law on Electronic Media is being prepared.** It will strengthen editors’ responsibility not only for journalistic texts but also for readers’ comments with the aim to quickly react to hate speech and other forms of intolerance.

*(refugees)*

In relation to the remaining issue from the Homeland War, when Croatia hosted more than a million refugees and internally displaced persons, **today there are only 37 persons** still in this status. The resolution of their status is in a final stage of a procedure.

Also, we have **97 requests for reconstruction of damaged housing units** that will be all provided with a housing solution within the *National Programme for Housing Care and* within the *Regional Housing Programme*.

Following the adoption of the *New Act on Housing Care within the Assisted Areas,* the State Budget allocation in 2019 has been doubled compared to 2015, amounting to **15** **mil €.**

*(missing)*

Faced with a large number of **missing persons**, Croatia has been devoted to this issue since 1991. The search is based on efficient inter-ministerial cooperation and non-discriminatory approach and is recognized as a unique *Croatian model of searching for missing persons.*

Last month, in **my talks with Serbian President Mr. Aleksandar Vučić** I pointed out that resolving fate of the missing Croatian citizens is our priority.

However, the fate of 1,468 missing and the burial location of 401 victims are still unknown, which equals **1,869 unresolved cases from the Homeland War.** Thus,dedicated to resolve all these cases, Croatia **still expects a full cooperation of the Republic of Serbia**

*(war crimes)*

Effective prosecution of **war crimes** and justice for victims remain one of primary interests of our judiciary.

**To date, criminal proceedings were initiated against 3,708 persons and 648 persons were convicted of war crimes**.

With the application of European standards and case-law of both European Courts, **processing of war crimes has been raised to a higher degree.** As the law standards for the respect of the rights of victims in early proceedings are still a great challenge in the neighbouring countries, **Croatia strives to improve cooperation** and joint work in conducting investigations.

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*Madame President,*

*(COVID-19)*

in relation to the situation with COVID-19, it should be noted that all measures that have been taken in supressing the pandemic have been balanced and taken to ensure public health and avoid discrimination. A special care was taken towards the most vulnerable social groups.

Based at the *Minister of Health’s Decision* *declaring the danger of an epidemic of the infectious disease COVID-19,*from March 2020, **key epidemiological indicators have been monitored and published.** Also, the Croatian Institute of Public Health regularly provides recommendations and instructions regarding the implementation of measures.

Furthermore, at the international level we have supported the UN, by taking on the co-chair role for drafting the **Omnibus resolution** on the global response to COVID-19 and have also joined the **Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire** in war-torn countries during a pandemic.

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*Let me announce that the* ***measures against COVID-19 pandemic in other areas*** *will be communicated through our UPR discussion.*

*I would like to thank countries for the submission of the* ***advanced questions****. Most of the issues contained therein are addressed in our recorded statements.*

***Mr. Frano Matušić****, State Secretary for Political Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, as a Deputy Head of Delegation, will coordinate the debate and address all potential remaining issues.*

**Thank you.**