

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2015**Monday, September 25, Working Session 9****Latvian delegation, Right of reply**

Madam Moderator,

I would like to reply to the statements referring to the situation in Latvia, as once again there are attempts to deliberately misrepresent the state of democracy and human rights in my country.

As one would expect of a modern European democracy, the fundamental principle of the Latvian constitution is equal rights for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity or other traits. It explicitly guarantees, and this is implemented also in government policies, the right of national minorities to preserve and develop their languages and their ethnic and cultural identity, *inter alia*, Latvia provides a unique education system with state financed national minority education programmes in seven languages, including Russian.

Regarding the non-citizens in Latvia. The status of a non-citizen was created as a temporary status after regaining independence due to the well-known historic situation. Everyone can become a citizen of Latvia through an open and simple naturalization procedure. More than 143,000 of them have already used the naturalization procedure to become citizens of Latvia. In 2013 the Latvian parliament adopted amendments to the Citizenship Law which, *inter alia*, significantly simplified naturalization for children. Latvian citizenship is granted automatically to new-born children of stateless persons and non-citizens. Unfortunately, due to some personal, sometimes also practical reasons, not all non-citizens have chosen to become citizens of Latvia. Also for the reason that the scope of rights of Latvian non-citizens is very close to those of Latvian citizens.

Thank you.