

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 24 September – 5 October 2007
Working Session 1: Tolerance and non-discrimination I
National Minorities

Statement of the Slovak Republic
(Full version)

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to speak at this particular occasion and I would like to inform you briefly about the latest developments in the area of protection and promotion of human rights in the Slovak Republic. Slovak delegation plan to deliver more specific and particular speeches to some other topics during following two weeks, such as Roma issue and recently amended legislation on anti-discrimination.

This year Slovakia ratified 2 very important Council of Europe human rights instruments - Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. This very week Slovakia sign two new significant UN conventions - the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. For us the protection and the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms is one of the most important elements in efforts to consolidate the international security and peaceful co-existence. We are ready to take the global responsibility for the development of the democracy and fundamental freedoms and this led us to candidate to the UN Human Rights Council for the years 2008 – 2011. Slovak Republic will continue to actively contribute to solving global and regional problems; threats and challenges to security, including those related to human rights issues.

From November 2007 until the May 2008 Slovakia will be a chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. For us it will be the first time to lead this oldest pan-European institution and we are preparing very responsibly for our chairmanship. As today's session is devoted primarily to national minorities let me just mention that during our chairmanship the Council of Europe will commemorate the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Slovakia supports full observation of the principles defined by the convention and will enforce a preservation of the

current concept of international protection of national minorities, which is based on individual rights of persons belonging to national minorities.

The protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities is essential to stability, democratic security and peace in Europe. As a pluralist and genuinely democratic society, the Slovak Republic not only respects the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of each person belonging to a national minority, but also creates appropriate conditions enabling these persons to express, preserve and develop their own identity and fully participate in the life of the society. The Slovak Republic endeavours to create a climate of tolerance and dialogue between national minorities, the Government and the majority population, which is necessary to enable cultural diversity to be a source of enrichment for the society.

Slovakia is a multinational state. There are more than 700 000 persons, approximately 14 % of the population, who declared other than the Slovak nationality in the last census in 2001 and belong to some of 12 national minorities.

In its Manifesto from last year the Slovak Government assumed to develop multiethnic and multicultural character of the society and to declare unambiguously an intention to fight against all forms of racial, ethnic, religious and political intolerance as well as an intention to combat discrimination, racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, extreme nationalism and chauvinism.

The Government intends to establish the new Office for Minorities, which will complement the existing institutional structure comprising the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Knowledge Based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities, the Council of the Government for National Minorities and Ethnic Groups and the Office of the Governmental Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities.

One of the topics for this afternoon is the full and active participation of the persons belonging to national minorities in public life.

Effective participation of national minorities on public life is an essential component of a peaceful and democratic society. Slovak Constitution is the basic legal document anchoring the human rights and freedoms including the rights of persons belonging to national

minorities. Development of citizens representing national minorities or ethnic groups in the Slovak Republic is guaranteed, particularly the right to develop their own culture, together with other members of the minority or ethnic group, the right to disseminate and receive information in their mother tongue, the right to associate in national minority associations, and the right to set up and maintain educational and cultural institutions.

At least very briefly I would like to mention one very effective example of such an institution in the Slovak Republic – the Council of the Government for National Minorities and Ethnic Groups, which is an advisory body to the Slovak government bringing together the representatives of all 12 national minorities living in Slovakia. Next meeting of this body will take place in few weeks and among other things they will discuss the ways of effective co-operation between the government and the national minorities.

Government has some other ideas and intentions how to improve the situation of the national minorities, for example by preparing the law on financing the culture including the culture of national minorities. Talking about more concrete and particular positive developments I would like to inform you that recently this summer the government adopted the Programme of health care support for disadvantaged Roma population. The aim of this programme is improvement of health condition abroad Roma population and also education of Roma population in the area of health care. There is a number of health mediators working directly in and with Roma community.

Slovak Republic is aware of fact that no country is immune against nationalism, racism or intolerance, especially in today's Europe. It is very important, that if incidents of this kind appear, the state must have the effective mechanisms to solve them.

The Slovak Republic remains convinced that a universal development and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as the strengthening of citizen's participation is of benefit to the state and international community.

Thank you for your attention