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Working Session 7: Tolerance and non-discrimination I
National Minorities

ENGLISH only

Statement of the Slovak Republic

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Slovakia is a multiethnic state. There are more than 800 000 persons, approximately 14 % of the population, who declared other than the Slovak ethnicity in the last census in 2001 and belong to some of **13 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.

In its **Programme Manifesto**, the new Slovak Government created after the June 2010 elections, expressed a commitment to rigorously protect and promote human rights. In this context the Government is prepared to remedy restrictive legislative and political measures taken in the previous period that are inconsistent with human rights principles, including the government initiating eliminating individual cases where the dignity of a citizen might have been infringed upon by the state.

The Government recognizes and appreciates the importance and contribution of **cultures of traditional national minorities** living in Slovakia to its cultural heritage, spiritual values and cultural diversity. On that account, the Government is committed to create the best possible conditions for national minority members to exercise their right of expression, preservation and development of their own identity. In order to accomplish this task and to enhance social coherence in Slovakia, the Government plans to develop a long-term policy on the protection and promotion of culture and school systems of national minorities, as well as a long-term policy on inter-ethnic cooperation and intercultural dialogue and education. The

Government's priority is to mainly improve intra-state Slovak-Hungarian relations and relations between the majority population and the Roma community. As its priority, the Government will **draft a bill on the protection of and support for the preservation and development of national minority cultures** which will enact their integral position in the context of cultural wealth and diversity of the state and set out the rules for their financing.

The Government has established the **post of a Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and National Minorities**, with stronger managing and decision-making powers in the area of national minority culture and education. When performing his tasks, the Deputy Prime Minister shall closely cooperate and consult with national minority representatives and other representative ministries, especially the Ministry of Education.

The Government shall amend the statute of the **Government Council for National Minorities** so as to make this body a representative and functioning forum for the national minorities living in the Slovak Republic that will give them space for effective participation in governing their own affairs.

The Government shall set up a group of experts in order to prepare a background paper for the Government concerning the possibilities of, and alternatives to, drafting an **act on the position and rights of national minorities**, which could possibly be adopted during its current term.

The Slovak Government will continue to create conditions for persons belonging to national minorities to have equal opportunity to be effectively involved in the public life and economic activities and it will also take measures to protect their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity.