

Opening statement by the Head of the Czech Republic delegation,

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63rd Session of
the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixth Periodic Report of the Czech Republic

Palais des Nations, Geneva
23 February 2016

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Madam Chair, Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to be here today and to lead the Czech Republic delegation at the sixty-third session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I would like to start by thanking the Committee for the opportunity to discuss the Czech Republic's sixth periodic report on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the latest developments in promoting women's rights and gender equality. Meeting the Committee gives us the chance to move forward with our open and constructive dialogue, which is of great importance to us.

At the outset, allow me to reiterate that the Government of the Czech Republic holds the Convention and your Committee in high esteem. The Czech Government takes its obligations under the Convention very seriously and makes every effort to ensure that the recommendations of the Committee are acted on. The Convention sets a critical framework for women's human rights. Since it was formally adopted in 1979 the world has become a better place for women and girls in many important respects.

Madam Chair,

I am pleased to inform you that experts representing different sectors and ministries have joined the delegation in order to cover the wide range of areas of the Convention. Allow me to introduce the members of the Czech delegation:

Mr. **Jan Kára**, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the United Nations in Geneva

Ms. **Lucia Zachariášová**, Head of the Gender Equality Unit, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic

Mr. **Radan Šafařík**, Gender Equality Unit, Office of the Government of the Czech Republic

Mr. **Petr Pavlík**, Head of Advisors, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport,

Mr. **Jan Marounek**, Director, Department of Health Services, Ministry of Health

Ms. **Pavla Belloňová**, Director, Legislative Department, Ministry of Justice

Ms. **Barbora Pečivová**, Legislative Department, Ministry of Justice

Mr. **Jan Potměšil**, Security Policy Department, Ministry of the Interior

Ms. **Markéta Pokorná**, Department for Asylum and Migration Policy, Ministry of the Interior

Ms. **Eva Dianišková**, Department for the EU and International Cooperation, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Ms. **Lucia Viktorinová**, Department of Family Policy and Aging Policy, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Ms. **Barbora Cardona Ševčíková**, Department of Human Rights and Transformation Policy,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Madam Chair,

The sixth periodic report maps out developments in the Czech Republic in the period from 2008 to 2014. The report has been prepared in line with the Committee's general guidelines and sheds light on the implementation of the Convention's individual articles and the Committee's concluding observations on the Czech Republic's previous periodic reports. The report draws on input from state authorities, the Ombudsperson, the Constitutional and Supreme Courts and representatives of civil society, trade unions and academia. The report has also been discussed by the Government Council for Equality of Women and Men.

I would like to thank the Committee for sending its list of issues. We provided the Committee with replies in October 2015. With this in mind, I would like to take this opportunity to offer a brief response to some of the topics mentioned in the list of issues and also to outline some recent measures taken by the Czech Republic in its efforts to implement the Convention.

Let me start by mentioning the antidiscrimination legislation framework and its recent development.

The combating of discrimination against women and promotion of gender equality is firmly grounded in the legislation of the Czech Republic. Fundamental rights and freedoms are guaranteed to all under the Constitution, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, as well as by international treaties. All legislation must comply with them. This compliance is overseen by the Constitutional Court. Protection against discrimination, including discrimination against women, is an integral part of the Czech legal system. In addition to the key regulation of discrimination in the Penal and the Civil codes, specific legislation - the Anti-Discrimination Act - was adopted in 2009. The Anti-Discrimination Act has strengthened protection against discrimination, including discrimination against women and gender-based discrimination, in all major areas of social life. As the national body promoting equality, the Ombudsperson provides assistance to victims of discrimination, conducts research and disseminates information on discrimination issues.

It is important to mention that according to the Anti-Discrimination Act harassment, sexual harassment, victimisation, instructions to discriminate and incitement to discrimination are also considered discrimination. Discrimination on the grounds of gender also includes discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy, maternity or paternity and due to sexual

identification. In accordance with Article 4 of the Convention, the Anti-Discrimination Act permits the use of positive measures in order to prevent discrimination or eliminate the disadvantages of some groups of persons.

In order to increase the effectiveness of the Antidiscrimination Act, the Government prepared and submitted to the Parliament an amendment to the Act. The Amendment that is currently being discussed by the Parliament introduces the concept of public actions (*i.e.* *actio popularis*) brought by the Ombudsperson in discrimination cases, which will seek the cessation of discrimination and the elimination of the after-effects thereof.

Let me now move on to the policy and institutional level. Since 1998 the Czech Government has annually adopted a national action plan for gender equality entitled “Priorities and Procedures of the Government in Promoting Gender Equality”. The Government Council for Equality of Women and Men was established by 2001 and with minor adjustments to its structure it continues to play a major role in setting the gender agenda for the government.

At present, the Council has several working bodies – committees - covering different areas of women’s rights and gender equality. They are:

- the Committee for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women;
- the Committee for Balanced Representation of Women and Men in Politics and Decision-making;
- the Committee on the Institutional Framework for Equality of Women and Men;
- the Committee for the Reconciliation of Work, Private and Family Life;
- the Working group on Men and Gender Equality and
- the Working group on Obstetrics.

The Council and its working bodies bring together experts from different ministries and agencies, non-governmental organisations and academia. The Council provides a broad expertise in the field of women’s rights and gender equality and regularly submits recommendations to the Government.

As we informed you in the report, the position of Minister for Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Legislation was renewed within the Czech Government in 2014. This step was followed by an increased focus on gender equality. Active promotion of gender equality is now one of the priorities of the Czech Government enshrined in its Policy Statement.

As a signal of the reinforced commitment to gender equality and as a practical tool for planning, the Government adopted the Strategy for Equality of Women and Men in the Czech Republic for 2014 – 2020 in November 2014. It is the first long-term, detailed strategic document specifically aimed at gender equality to be adopted by the Czech Government. The Strategy covers 8 main strategic areas based on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other international documents.

Furthermore, the Strategy covers horizontal strategic areas such as gender stereotypes, legislation, data collection, men and gender equality; and cooperation with stakeholders.

Each of the strategic areas includes specific indicators in order to monitor and evaluate progress achieved. The Strategy also sets up a so-called Minimum standard for gender equality in state administration – a set of regular tasks to be fulfilled annually.

Together with the Strategy, the Report on Improvement of Data Collection to Evaluate Gender Equality was adopted. The Report evaluates the current level of gender disaggregated data collection and identifies statistical areas for further development, such as victimisation statistics, bio-statistics or statistics on gender equality in the labour market.

Following the adoption of the Strategy, an international conference on strategic approaches to gender equality was held in Prague in June 2015. Experts from Austria, Slovakia, Latvia and the European Institute for Gender Equality presented their experiences and examples of best practices.

Implementation of the Strategy is monitored by the Gender Equality Unit located at the Office of the Government and the Government Council for Equality of Women and Men. Annually, the Report on Equality of Women and Men and on the Implementation of the Government Strategy is adopted and submitted to the Government.

Recently, the Government of the Czech Republic has intensified its efforts to implement the principle of gender mainstreaming within its activities. For this reason the Office of the Government has decided to produce a Methodology for Gender Impact Assessment which presents a practical and easy-to-use tool for gender impact assessment for all relevant officers. The methodology was created in September 2014. Last year the Gender Equality Unit organised a series of workshops for ministry officers in order to train them to use the methodology and we plan to continue with this training.

In order to support activities of non-governmental organisations a grant programme was established in 2013. The grant scheme supports projects from the non-profit sector specifically aimed at promotion of women's rights and gender equality. Its current allocation is 5 million Czech crowns, approximately 200 thousand USD annually. In 2015, ten organisations were supported by the new grant programme.

One of the key areas of women's rights and gender equality that the Czech Government has been paying increased attention to is gender equality in the labour market. We are aware that the situation in this field still demands substantial, concerted efforts by various branches of the government and authorities as well as changes in many still-prevailing attitudes and stereotypes.

In this respect we can identify several positive trends in the Czech Republic. In 2015 women made up 56 per cent of all university students and 60 per cent of graduates. The employment rate of women aged 20-64 is over 64 per cent and has increased by more than 3 percentage points since 2010. The gender pay gap reduced from 24 per cent to 21.6 per cent in 2015. Despite these positive developments women still face many challenges and barriers in balancing their professional and private life including a low level of male participation in childcare as well as other forms of care.

In order to help reconcile work and private life, the Act on Children Groups was adopted and came into force in November 2014. The Act provides the legal framework for providing childcare services on a non-commercial basis, which should be an alternative to educational care provided to children within the pre-school education system. In order to increase the availability of children groups, projects focusing on the establishment of such facilities will be supported by grants within the EU Employment Operational Programme. In October 2015, a call aimed at the establishment of children groups was announced with a total allocation of 1 billion Czech crowns, i.e. 40 million USD.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is preparing a project entitled "22 per cent to Equality". The project will be implemented from 2016 to 2020 and will include a public campaign focusing on equal pay, gender stereotypes in the labour market, lack of women in decision-making positions and the lack of men in nursing. The project will also include proposals for legislative measures to increase the transparency of wages in order to narrow the gender pay gap and an online wage calculator and other tools for equal pay.

In order to assist public authorities as well as the private sector in implementing the gender mainstreaming principle, Gender Audit Standards were created in October 2015 by the Gender Equality Unit. The aim of the Standards is to provide employers with a guide for effective implementation of gender standards in order to secure women's rights and gender equality in the workplace.

An Expert Commission for Family Policy was set up within the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to discuss measures for work-life balance. The Commission suggested establishing a paternity benefit – so-called post-natal paternal care lasting one week.. Furthermore, the Commission is revising the parental leave with a view to allowing more flexible drawing of parental allowance.

Another innovative measure is a new type of childcare service called a micro-nursery. The micro-nursery is inspired by Tagesmutter in Germany and designed for children from six months of age to four years. To ensure individual care it is a service for a small group with a maximum of four children. The micro-nursery is currently being tested by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Grant calls for municipalities and non-governmental organisations were announced in January 2016 in order to financially support creators of micro-nurseries.

In order to support the availability of child-care services and to prepare better all children, including children from disadvantaged groups, for primary education the Government of the Czech Republic has also prepared an amendment to the Education Act which guarantees pre-schoolers the right to a place in kindergarten from the age of four by 2017 and from the age of three by 2018. The amendment is currently being discussed by the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament. In addition, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport is implementing a special grant program aimed at increasing the capacity of kindergartens and elementary schools. Available analyses show that there will be sufficient capacity for all pre-schoolers by 2017.

Another important aspect of women's rights and gender equality is the elimination of violence against women. Prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls has been an integral part of the gender equality policy of the Czech Government since the 1990s. Moreover, the topic of gender-based violence is being increasingly researched by Czech academics and it is also a domain of activities for many non-governmental organisations.

Over the past few years we have implemented a number of important pieces of legislation aimed at protecting victims of gender-based violence. One of the most significant instruments is the Act on Victims of Crimes which came into force in August 2013. Victims of crimes involving violence or threats of violence are considered to be particularly vulnerable victims and are provided inter alia with certain crucial rights to protect them from secondary victimization. Particularly vulnerable victims are then given certain special rights, such as the right to prevent contact of the victim with the offender, the right to free professional assistance and the right to interview by a person of the same or opposite gender.

The new Action Plan for the Prevention of Domestic and Gender-based Violence for 2015 – 2018, which is a follow-up to the Plan for the period 2010 - 2014, was approved by the Czech Government in February 2015. The Action Plan includes 70 specific measures focused on prevention divided into 7 strategic areas.

The Action Plan was created in cooperation with the Committee for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Violence against Women, bringing together experts from non-governmental organisations, relevant ministries and academia. The Norwegian organisation Alternativ til Vold also participated in the preparation of the Action Plan allowing exchange and sharing of Norway's experience and knowledge.

In order to broaden our knowledge of gender-based violence the Czech Grant Agency supported a research project focusing on partnership violence. The project followed up the International Violence Against Women Survey and provided a comparative analysis of partnership violence in 2003 and 2013. Several research studies were published within this project recently, showing that during the last 10 years both physical and psychological violence against women has decreased but remain a rather widespread problem in Czech society. The Gender Equality Unit also commissioned other studies focusing on particular issues, such as availability of specialised social services for victims of domestic violence or the media coverage of gender-based violence.

In November and December 2015 the Gender Equality Unit organised two international conferences within the 16 days of activism against violence against women. The first was focused on the economic and societal costs of domestic violence and included speakers from the Council of Europe, Spain and Norway. The second was focused at the issue of rape with the objective of opening up a public debate on this topic within the Czech Republic.

In addition, two workshops for teaching staff and social services providers were organised in December 2015. The workshops were organised in cooperation with the Norwegian organisation Alternativ til Vold with the aim of providing relevant stakeholders with training related to the educational movie "Sinna Man" (Angry man).

The Czech Republic is one of the remaining countries yet to sign the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. I am glad to announce that the Czech Government formally agreed to sign the Istanbul Convention at its session on 8 February 2016 and recommended signing of the Convention to the President of the Czech Republic. The Czech Government has also authorised the Minister of Justice to initiate legislative measures necessary for ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

Madam Chair,

Please allow me now to move on to the external dimension of our gender equality policies. Active promotion of gender equality is now the priority of the Czech Government not only at the domestic but at the foreign level as well. This has been embedded in the Government's Policy Statement and in the recently adopted Strategy for Human Rights and Democracy Promotion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Issues of particular concern for the Czech Republic in its foreign human rights policy are equal political participation and non-discrimination, i.e. including of women.

Gender mainstreaming belongs to the cross-cutting principles reflected in the Czech development cooperation and transition promotion programme. We are making efforts for its application in programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all development projects focused on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2014 and 2015, projects focused on protecting women's rights and enhancing their participation in public life were implemented in Albania, Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Burma/Myanmar, Nepal, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Palestine and Egypt. Projects also contributed to improving health care for women in Georgia, Cambodia, the Central African Republic, Namibia, Senegal and Zambia. In addition, Czech development cooperation has supported economic empowerment of women and prevention of gender-based violence in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Serbia.

The Czech Republic has started preparing a National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. In March, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs will host a workshop where experts from Sweden and Austria will

share their experience and lessons learned from drafting and implementing their National Action Plans.

In June 2015, several members of the Czech government, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, held meetings with Ms Lakshmi Puri, the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations focusing on the issue of gender equality. Prime Minister Sobotka, Foreign Minister Zaorálek and Minister for Human Rights Dienstbier also joined the international campaign "He For She" which aims to engage men in gender-related issues.

We strive to broaden our cooperation with international agencies. In November 2015 a delegation from the European Institute for Gender Equality undertook a two-day visit to the Czech Republic. The aim of the EIGE's visit was to discuss possible cooperation, especially in the field of data collection and gender-based violence.

Another important challenge I would like to mention is the situation of women belonging to minorities, in particular the Roma minority. The key Roma integration document is the Roma Integration Strategy up to 2020, adopted by the Government in February 2015.

As education is regarded as one of the most important prerequisites in the pursuit of successful integration, the Strategy requires that Roma girls and boys be provided with the same opportunities as non-Roma children.

Steps have been taken in the Czech education system to block the inappropriate placement of Roma children in schools that teach according to the framework curriculum for primary schools with an appendix for pupils with mild mental disability. The most significant change in the education system has been an amendment to the Education Act, adopted last year, which is dedicated to pupils with special educational needs. In order to enjoy their rights to education on an equal footing with others, these pupils need support measures responding to their state of health, cultural background and situation in life. The amendment guarantees that schools are duty-bound to provide children with support measures.

The Government supports the active involvement of Roma women in public and communal affairs. In 2015 a project of the pro-Roma organisation Slovo 21 was supported by a governmental grant programme to the value of 800 thousand Czech crowns, i.e. 32 thousand USD. The project was implemented by the Roma women's group Manushe which established eight regional local women's groups in order to support the participation of

Roma women in local politics and public affairs. More than 80 women participated in the project.

Based on the opinion of the Ombudsperson and the recommendations of international bodies, the Czech Government has also considered establishing a mechanism that would allow the state to compensate persons for unlawful sterilisation on an extrajudicial basis. After a very careful consideration and evaluation of all the relevant circumstances, the Czech Government finally decided not to establish this special mechanism.

Another important group that is a focus of the Government's attention are migrants and refugees. In response to current developments in the world, in July 2015 the Czech Government adopted a new Migration Policy Strategy. The primary goal of this Strategy is to underscore the positive aspects of migration while battling the negative phenomena and risks associated with migration.. Beyond its borders, the Czech Republic will intensify its humanitarian and development aid, with a stress on providing relief to refugees and those internally displaced as a result of large-scale conflicts, disasters or persecution. The MEDEVAC (medical evacuation) programme will be further developed, making it possible to provide care in the Czech Republic to seriously ill girls and boys from war-ravaged or otherwise distressed areas who are unable to be treated in local conditions.

Madam Chair,

Let me briefly describe other important activities and events which have taken place in cooperation with the Czech Government. In May 2015 an international conference focusing on violence against women was organized in Prague. Experts from the Council of Europe, European Commission, Norway, Poland or Estonia discussed various issues of violence against women, including the role of information and communication technologies in protection and prevention which we consider an issue of increasing importance.

In June 2015 the second session of the Women's Congress focusing on women and media took place in Prague. The Women's Congress was attended by more than 1000 women and men interested in gender equality. Opening speeches were given by European Commissioner Věra Jourová and Minister for Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Legislation Jiří Dienstbier. The Gender Equality Unit was actively involved in the preparation and organised a seminar on the image of Roma women in the media.

To sum up, the Czech Government has recently undertaken a number of specific and ambitious measures to improve women's rights and gender equality in our country.. However, a number of challenges still remain ahead of us. Women in the Czech Republic earn more than 20% less than men, continue to be under-represented in politics and decision-making positions, face a lack of child-care facilities and are victims of gender-based violence. The Czech Government is aware of these remaining gaps and plans to continue in its efforts to achieve gender equality and to empower women. Furthermore, we will continue to focus on women facing multiple disadvantages.

Madam Chair,

To close, I would like to stress that the Czech Republic remains determined to comply with its commitments under the Convention and to remain an active player in promoting women's rights at national and international level.

Thank you for your attention.