

**Statement by the Head of the Delegation of the Czech Republic**

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Government of the Czech Republic

**Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

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Dear Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Members of the Committee, ladies and gentlemen,

I first and foremost would like to thank the Committee for its consideration at today's meeting of the combined eighth and ninth periodic report submitted by the Government of the Czech Republic concerning the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Committee thereby gives us the opportunity to continue an open and constructive dialogue, which is very important and instructive for us in many respects.

I will devote most of my time to the situation of the Roma, on which many of the proposed discussion themes are focused. Other significant groups in Czech society with regard to protection against discrimination are other traditional national minorities, such as Poles or Germans, who enjoy special minority rights. A third group consists of a large immigrant community, most of whom are Ukrainian, Vietnamese and Russian. In relation to these three target groups, the Government has created specific strategies, which are implemented in conjunction with general procedures for combating discrimination, xenophobia and racism.

The 8th and 9th periodic report was prepared in the second half of 2009 by the office of the Minister for Human Rights. Although the report primarily provides an update on government activities — based largely, therefore, on information provided by ministries — we also have invited the cooperation of non-governmental organizations. We also have communicated with each of the regional offices of the Czech Republic, as well as the members of the governmental Committee against Discrimination. We thereby have tried as much as possible to take into account this body's previous recommendation.

The submitted report summarizes the situation in the Czech Republic in the period 2005-2009. Allow me to highlight a few successes we have achieved in these years. The Agency for Social Inclusion was established, underscoring the government's commitment to combating the acute problem of social exclusion. The Anti-Discrimination Act was adopted, as well as a new penal code, both of which augment protection against racism, racial intolerance and racial discrimination. The police, courts and other authorities have suppressed extremist activities motivated by racial intolerance, including racist concerts, and have weakened the influence of extremist views.

In the last two years, which the report does not capture, the Government adopted a number of other measures, responding to current challenges.

The office of the Ombudsman began to function in practice as anti-discrimination body. In addition to offering aid to persons in individual cases, the Ombudsman began to help develop new standards for protection against discrimination. This year, the Government adopted a new strategy for the integration of immigrants in response to the current migration situation and created a network of regional centres for the integration of foreigners. The Government has also focused its efforts on improving the relationship between the Roma and the majority population, as requested by one of the Committee's recommendations. As part of its campaign against racism and for tolerance, the Government has already organised two years of the "Gypsy Spirit" award. It also has implemented measures for the restoration of monuments and surrounding reverent places commemorating the Roma Holocaust and its victims.

The Czech Republic has contributed significantly to European activities to promote Roma integration, both at the EU level and through the Czech Presidency of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. In connection with the 2011 census, the Government worked intensely per the Committee's recommendation on the collection of ethnic data. The Government has actively responded to a number of other recommendations of the Committee: for example, regarding the creation of an independent body to investigate misconduct committed by police officers, the

situation of Roma children in the education system, employment of Roma and the use of minority languages, including Romani.

Allow me to now describe in greater detail the overall situation in the Czech Republic and some concrete steps we have taken.

Last year, **elections** were held to the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Republic and, according to their results, a new government was formed. Far-right parties did not receive any post-election positions in parliament and thus remain on the margins of the political spectrum. In this regard, I also would like to note that, at the request of the Government, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled that the Workers' Party, which openly supported the idea of racial intolerance and unequivocally aimed to restrict individual rights and freedoms, be dissolved.

In its **policy statement** of 4 August 2010, the Government affirmed the respect for human rights as the cornerstone on which society and the democratic order stand and as the basis for the free life of every citizen. The Government intends to support all measures that effectively enable all citizens to claim their rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Special attention should be given to members of vulnerable groups, for whom obtaining justice and equal standing is often an insoluble problem. The government will lead an uncompromising fight against all forms of racial, class and social intolerance and hatred. The government also noted with concern the growing signs of extremism and undertakes to adopt firm measures to suppress them.

The Government supports measures for the social integration of excluded persons and, to this end, the activities of the Agency for Social Inclusion, which I will discuss later in greater detail. Among the governmental priorities is also support for the development of adequate care for children with specific needs.

The Government continues to support the work of the **advisory bodies of the government** in the area of human rights and the prevention of discrimination, in particular the Government Council for Human Rights, the Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs and the Government Council for National Minorities. Other

important bodies combating racial hatred and intolerance function within the Ministry of the Interior: for example, the National Committee for Crime Prevention and specialized working groups on extremism.

As mentioned, the Government of the Czech Republic, in its August 2010 policy statement, pledged to support the social integration of persons living in excluded communities through the work of the **Agency for Social Inclusion in Roma Localities**. The agency provides support to municipalities, cities and micro regions in the processes of social inclusion. Its mission is to connect local entities such that they can effectively collaborate on social inclusion efforts.

Since its inception in 2008, the Agency has operated in 12 localities (Slezská Ostrava, Holešov, Přerov, Jesenicko, Šluknovsko, Ústí nad Labem, Roudnice nad Labem, Brno, Břeclav, Most, Cheb, Broumov). The activities of the Agency have continued to spread: in 2010, the Agency expanded into 10 additional localities (Mělník, Kolín, Děčín, Vejprty, Hodonín, Kadaň, Větrní, Sokolov, Duchcov a Krupka); and, most recently, on 1 July 2011, the Agency further expanded its operations into additional municipalities. The agency is gradually beginning to operate at the national level as coordinator of state policies on social inclusion and is currently preparing a **National Strategy to Combat Social Exclusion**.

In the periodic report, we have already mentioned an important legislative change in the legal system of the Czech Republic: **the adoption of the Anti-Discrimination Act**. The greatest benefit of this Act is the extension of the competences of the Ombudsman, to whom victims of discriminatory behaviour can turn with their concerns. The Ombudsman will assess their situation, offer a solution, and help victims of discrimination with further possible actions. If the victim decides to assert his or her rights in court, the Ombudsman can provide assistance with securing evidence and other materials.

In terms of legal process, the Anti-Discrimination Act ensured a stronger position for the victims of discrimination: the shared burden of proof asks the plaintiff to show only certain basic facts, while the defendant must then prove that the

disparate treatment of the plaintiff was not motivated by race, ethnic origin or other legally protected grounds.

Almost two years since the Anti-Discrimination Act came into force, it can be said that the work of the **Ombudsman** is developing propitiously. Since December 2009, the Ombudsman has already received several hundred complaints of discrimination. In 2010, the Ombudsman received 38 racial discrimination complaints (out of a total 176 complaints). Racial discrimination thus was claimed in 21% of the complaints submitted. In 5 cases, the Ombudsman initiated investigations; in the remainder of the cases, he responded by providing information on the means of redress; and in one case, he found discrimination in the field of housing.

Based on his activities, the Ombudsman issues **recommendations** and **legal opinions**. He also carries out research initiatives, and the results of this work are publicized and published online. The Ombudsman's recommendations, while not legally binding, still constitute important normative standards.

In 2010, the Ombudsman dealt with discrimination in access to municipal housing. The Ombudsman subsequently issued recommendations, which emphasized that any form of discrimination is unacceptable. He said the municipality as a public entity is legally bound to a duty of care for its residents, and therefore the requirement for equal treatment is even stronger for them than for conventional private renters. The material recommends that municipalities properly establish rules for the allocation of council flats. One of the recommendations specifically concerned improving access for Roma to municipal housing.

Other important general recommendations of the Ombudsman concern the equal treatment of foreigners.

In the last two years, the Government has continued its efforts to **improve relations between the majority population and the Roma minority** and the effectiveness of Roma integration. Allow me to summarize the most important steps in this area.

A proactive state policy in the issue of Roma integration was initiated in 1997, when the Government adopted the first comprehensive report on the situation of Roma. This new policy resulted in the adoption of the first **Concept of Roma Integration** in 2000. Most recently, the concept plan was extended in 2009, when the Government approved a concept for the period 2010-2013. This document develops in the medium-term a strategic plan for Roma integration policy, which itself implements Principles of a Long-term Concept of Roma Integration through 2025 that the Government approved in 2005.

Roma integration policy in the Czech Republic traditionally seeks to address Roma issues from three perspectives: human rights, minority rights and socio-economic status. The Government recognizes that, in order to achieve full integration of Roma minority, it is necessary to institute measures sensitive to the different socio-cultural experiences of Roma communities.

For the purpose of promoting and implementing government integration policy at the all levels, a coordinating institutional structure was established. At the national level, Roma issues are addressed by the **Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs**. The Council acts as an inter-ministerial organ, and its activities prompt the work of the regional coordinators for Roma affairs, who operate at regional offices in all 14 regions of the country. Their task is to coordinate the implementation of the government's policies of Roma integration at the regional level, as well as in municipalities in conjunction with Roma advisers.

In 2010 the Government approved a change in the statute of the Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs that would increase the overall prominence of Roma inclusion as part of government policy. The Chairman of the Council under the new statute is now the Prime Minister himself. The members of the Council include Ministers from key ministries. The Council also includes 16 Roma representatives. The new statute connects the activities of the Council with those of the Agency for Social Inclusion and allows for greater participation of regions and municipalities in the formulation of Roma integration policy. Roma representatives are also members of several committees that work under the Council. Roma experts thereby have the

opportunity to share their views and to create briefings, recommendations and suggestions for the Council at the highest political level.

In recent years, the Czech Republic has been able to contribute to the **development of Roma integration policies at the European level.**

During the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2009, for the first time, a meeting was held of the new European Platform for Roma Inclusion, and 10 Common Basic Principles of Roma Inclusion were adopted by the Council of the EU in June 2009.

One of the major international initiatives in which the Czech Republic is involved is the initiative of twelve European countries called **Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015**. The year 2010 was very important for the Czech Republic's role in the Decade, as the country assumed the Decade Presidency from 1 July - 30 June 2011. The Presidency focused on the following priority areas:

- Inclusive education;
- Children's rights and well-being;
- The role of Roma women in all areas of integration;
- Local implementation of integration policies and self-government;
- Media image of the Roma.

Many events were held under the auspices of the Czech Presidency of the Decade including international conferences on Collection of Ethnic Data, Housing and on Inclusive Education. Under the auspices of the Government Commissioner for Human Rights, a celebration of International Romani Day was also held.

All international events in the Decade were translated into Romani, which not only broadened the spectrum of participants but also contributed symbolically to highlight Roma cultural heritage. Roma representatives, with a special focus on Roma women, have been involved at all levels and have participated in planning, implementation and monitoring.

Under the Czech Presidency, the Member States of the Decade also addressed the future operations of the Decade itself. Czech Republic suggested that Member States each draft an annual progress report and prepared a uniform structure for reports and a set of indicators on which all countries should collect monitoring data. At the 20th Meeting of the International Steering Committee of the Decade, which was held in Prague in June 2011, each country presented its national progress report. Moreover, a transnational Progress Report was drafted, which will constitute a comprehensive monitoring system of the situation of the Roma minority across participating countries.

Allow me to now describe some concrete measures for the integration of Roma. I will begin with the prominent issue of **education of Roma pupils**.

In the presented report, we have already mentioned some of the measures to increase the education level of Roma children, to prevent their discrimination in the school system, and to increase the openness of mainstream schools to the education of disadvantaged Roma children.

Measures being undertaken to compensate for the disadvantages faced by Roma children can be divided into two groups. Some of the measures have already been implemented and have long since proven to be effective: for example, the preparatory classes, teaching assistants, and the reforms of the procedure for assessing pupils' educational needs and of the procedures for pupil enrolment. These measures had a positive impact, helping to decrease the number of pupils educated in the former special schools.

Another set of measures, part of the upcoming pro-inclusive comprehensive reforms, has been prepared and will be implemented in September 2011. Strategic steps currently being prepared in the forthcoming comprehensive reform include not only Roma and other socially disadvantaged children such as children of foreigners, but also children with health impairments.

To increase the ability of disadvantaged children to begin primary education, schools have established preparatory classes. In 2010, 176 schools in the Czech



Republic established 208 preparatory classes that were attended by 2,609 children. A further proven measure is the presence of an assistant teacher for socially disadvantaged children. In 2010, supported by the Ministry of Education, 440 assistant teachers worked in schools with the support of nearly 3 million EUR, with another 320,000 EUR being invested by the regional governments.

In the field of educational and psychological counselling services, a number of steps have been taken to refine and improve diagnostic and intervention work with Roma clients. Counselling facilities must now comply strictly with the newly defined rules of informed consent. Their staff must consistently inform children's legal representatives of all learning opportunities, of the rights of legal representatives in this area, and of the impact of a curriculum designed for students with disabilities on children's future educational opportunities.

Non-governmental organizations play an important role in the support of Roma pupils making the transition to secondary school by offering programmes to enhance their educational achievement: for example, by providing tutoring, motivational activities, education guidance, and schemes to prepare them for entrance exams. These programs are financed from the European Social Fund, the state budget administered by the Ministry of Education and the Office of the Government, and regional and municipal budgets.

Through its specific grant policies, the Ministry of Education supports the inclusion of socially disadvantaged Roma pupils by means of funding a broad range of relevant programs in the fields of early intervention, support for mainstream education generally, and access to secondary and higher education. Specific financial support is given for the professional development of teachers and their abilities to work with socio-cultural differences.

An available source of support to schools is a comprehensive national project — the **Support Centre for Inclusive Education**. In 2010, the centre had 11 branches in selected locations, whose services covered the needs of schools in all regions of the Czech Republic. The centres offer schools the services of psychologists, special educators, social workers, teaching methodologists, project

managers, and cultural anthropologists, with the goal of supporting the successful education of socially disadvantaged pupils in mainstream schools.

In addition to these specific steps, the Ministry of Education has been working since 2008 to prepare an overall reform of the education system in order to increase its inclusivity. The main aims and objectives of the planned reforms are contained in the "**National Action Plan for Inclusive Education**", which was adopted by the government in March 2010. In the preparatory phase of the reform, which should be completed by 2013, proposals will be put forward for strategies and measures aimed at promoting inclusive education at all levels of the educational system.

At the beginning of 2011, the reform of key regulations governing the education of pupils with special educational needs was passed. According to this new legislation, it is forbidden to educate socially disadvantaged pupils according to the curriculum adapted for pupils with mental challenges. The decree provides for the integration of socially disadvantaged pupils in mainstream schools. For this purpose, the decree defines a range of compensatory measures. The decree will take effect at the beginning of the upcoming school year.

The Czech Government is aware that the current situation in many schools in the Czech Republic is still far from the goal toward which we are striving. A number of measures have already been adopted by the Czech Republic and have brought positive results. In a growing number of schools, the inclusive education model has worked successfully. We expect that positive outcomes of further measures will soon be reflected in practice. It can, however, be noted already today that, according to the findings of the Czech School Inspectorate, 36.3% fewer students were educated in practical elementary schools (the former special schools) in the 2009/2010 school year than were in the 2004/2005 school year.

A persistent problem is the prevalence of **high unemployment among the Roma population**. Therefore, the government is undertaking a series of steps aimed to increase the employment rate among Roma. Focusing on this area are the Concept of Roma Integration for 2010 - 2013 and the Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 - 2015.

The basis for the creation of employment measures was the study carried out by the World Bank in collaboration with the Office of Government, entitled "The Czech Republic — A Chance to Improve the Employment of the Roma". In 2010, the World Bank published a follow-up study. These studies confirmed that the basis for increasing Roma employment and income from work is the completion of at least a secondary education.

Unemployed Roma can participate in conventional public employment services. Employment office staff draft individual action plans with Roma job seekers who fail to find employment. In addition, special social programs are implemented at the local level by employment offices or non-governmental organizations. For specific projects operated by employment offices the largest level of participation was recorded in the Ústí nad Labem Region (10,200 participants, including 4,900 women), followed by the Moravian-Silesian Region (484 participants, 226 women) and the Central Bohemian Region (330, including 170 women).

Roma women account for a high percentage of participation in the employment programmes, making up an average of 50% of participants. This can be viewed as a positive trend in view of the accumulated disadvantages they face in the labour market.

A particularly arduous problem is the **poor housing situation of many Roma**. The Government supports the revitalization of the socially excluded localities and seeks to increase the availability of housing for people with low incomes or other special needs.

The Ministry for Regional Development annually provides direct funding for the construction of new rental housing for socially defined target groups. In this regard, the Ministry has developed a new "Concept of the State in the Area of Housing Through 2020," approved by the Government in July 2011. The Concept envisages the adoption of a comprehensive solution to social housing, utilizing housing necessity provisions. A housing necessity is defined by the social situation in which vulnerable people find themselves, in conjunction with the determination of a

corresponding unsatisfied housing need. The proposal will be finalized by the end of June 2012.

With financial support from European funds, several **integrated pilot projects** intended to improve the general environment of settlements inhabited by Roma have been implemented in the Czech Republic. The pilot projects directly combine the restoration of houses and public spaces with social inclusion activities. The implementation of the integrated pilot projects has begun in six cities, and examples of such work have been provided to you in the distributed leaflet.

Since 2010 the concept of a multi-stage housing model *with insurance guarantees* has been developed. Through this system, the provision of housing is connected with participation in social programs aimed, for example, at the ability to plan and manage household finances. Non-governmental organizations for several years have been operating with this model with very good results. Within the scope of the model, a system of financial guarantees insures municipalities, NGOs, and private owners against the risk of operating social housing, guaranteeing replacement income in the event of the tenants' refusal or failure to pay and other eventualities. The Agency is currently discussing the possibility of implementing this model at the local level with financial institutions, experts in the field of social housing, local government representatives and nongovernmental organizations.

Another important issue I would like to briefly mention is the **situation of Roma women**. Roma women face the same problems as women of the majority population, but they also struggle with specific challenges within their own communities. Promoting equal opportunities for Roma women, therefore, is one of the tasks arising from the Concept of Roma Integration for the period 2010-2013.

The Government is aware of the complexity of the status of Roma women in Czech society and also of their importance for the successful integration of socially excluded Roma families. Roma women are an important element determining the lifestyle of a family, providing for its everyday needs and for the education of its children. Roma mothers greatly influence children's attitudes about education and

often provide a communicative link with the external social environment—the social institutions, schools, etc.

As I mentioned before, the situation of Roma women and their perception of the Roma integration policy was one of the priorities of the Czech Presidency of the Decade. The Office of the Government worked on this issue in close cooperation with the civic association “Word 21” (“Slovo 21” in Czech language), which implements several projects in support of Roma women. For example, an inspiring “Word 21” project is its *“Political Training of Roma Women,”* which took place in 2010. Nine Roma women from different parts of the Czech Republic, who wanted to be more deeply engaged in public affairs, participated in the program.

Another project is that of the association *Manušňija*, working to support low-skilled, and unemployed Roma women. The project is implemented in the Olomouc, Ústí nad Labem and Central Bohemia regions and attended by 60 women.

The Czech Republic, however, will undoubtedly address the issue of Roma women more vigorously. The primary concern is that the situation of Roma women be taken into account in formulating the general integration policies.

In the presented report, we informed you about the apology issued by the government in 2009 in relation to individual errors identified in the performance of sterilization in contravention of the directive of the Ministry of Health. The question of how to provide redress for so affected women who could not obtain redress through the courts because of the statute of limitations is still being discussed by the Government Council for Human Rights. Indeed, the very concept of limitation in these cases is under review. In late June of this year, the Supreme Court delivered a judgment which would waive the statute of limitations in cases concerning unlawful sterilization. While the possible impact of this judgment has yet to be fully assessed, it can be anticipated that the Supreme Court’s opinion could be applied in other cases of unlawful sterilization, as well. Currently, the Chamber of Deputies is discussing new legislation which would define conditions for the performance of sterilization in a complex way.

Allow me to speak briefly about the activities supported by the government for the development of **Roma culture and for building respect for Roma history and traditions**. The government sees these measures as a means for the emancipation of the Roma and for improving relations between them and the majority population. Acquainting the public with its own culture and history, as well as the cultures and histories of other nations and minorities, including non-European, is an integral part of society-wide education that promotes ethnic and religious tolerance. A very important role in this regard is played by specially designed **historical museums**, such as the unique Museum of Roma Culture, the Jewish Museum, the Lidice Memorial and the Terezín Memorial, which commemorate the victims of the Second World War.

Certainly, a significant task is to educate all citizens about the **Romani Holocaust**. Studies and educational activities in this field have been conducted and supported by the Ministry of Culture.

The Holocaust became a highly discussed topic mainly with regard to the memorial, or reverent sites, of former Roma concentration camps in Lety and Hodonín u Kunštátu. As already mentioned in the report, the restoration and administration of memorial sites in the reverent area of Lety was entrusted to the Ministry of Culture, which in 2009 commissioned the Lidice Memorial. In the years 2009-2010 the memorial site in Lety was reconstructed, the forest access roads were improved, and work was completed on the drainage system for the natural amphitheatre. In 2010 the final stage of the reconstruction of the Lety Cultural Memorial was completed, and the site was inaugurated on 18 June 2010.

In addition to the physical restoration of the memorial sites, accompanying promotional materials were also created. A booklet entitled "Lety — life behind the fence" and a travelling exhibition of the same name were produced, as well as related educational activities. In 2010 an instructional DVD for elementary and secondary schools was released. Entitled "Lety u Písku — A Place about Which We Must Not Be Silent," the DVD was created in cooperation with the Lidice Memorial and the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. The disk, which we have distributed to you, reconstructs the history of the Roma camp Lety through short texts and visual

documentation and contains three language versions—Czech, English and Romani. Today, there is also an accredited seminar for teachers, "CAMPS—INSTRUMENTS OF PERSECUTION."

In 2010, the Lety memorial site received over 10,000 visitors, which is a positive sign that Czech and Roma society is expressing interest in this chapter of our history.

The second Roma reverent site is at **Hodonín u Kunštátu**. Here, too, the Ministry of Education has implemented positive changes. Just before the end of 2009, the site of the former Roma camp was purchased by the state from a private owner. During 2010, in order to ensure its preservation and security, plans were drafted to establish a Roma Holocaust Memorial, including the construction of educational facilities which will serve to commemorate the victims of the Roma Holocaust on Czech, or respectively Czechoslovak territory and to inform about the Roma Holocaust and its relationship to the Holocaust of the Jews in historical context.

With regard to other activities intended to improve understanding between the Roma minority and the majority population, I would like to emphasize the governmental Campaign against Racism and the World Roma Festival Khamoro, which has been held regularly since 1999.

The **Campaign against Racism** aims to eliminate latent racism and xenophobia among the majority population and to publicize the Government's firm opposition to prejudice, racial violence and intolerance. For the last two years, the **Gypsy Spirit** project has been an important part of the campaign. Gypsy Spirit is an award given to non-governmental organisations, companies and individuals for successful efforts addressing the integration of the Roma or for extraordinary acts in support of coexistence. The project builds on the experience of the Slovak Republic, from which the idea originates. With national media interest and the active participation of government officials, including the Prime Minister, at the awards ceremony, the project was able to attract the attention of Czech society.

The development of a positive image of the Roma is also the goal of the unique **World Roma Festival Khamoro**, which is co-financed by the state budget since 2003. In May 2011, the festival celebrated its 13<sup>th</sup> year and was supported by the Ministry of Culture with funding. The World Roma Festival is always accompanied by specialised events promoting intercultural dialogue; for example in 2010, an international seminar on Roma Identity was held.

As I indicated at the beginning, the Government devotes much attention to the sensitive issue of **collecting ethnic data**, a matter which has become quite topical in connection with the 2011 census.

In response to the significant difference between qualified estimates of the number of Roma in the Czech Republic and the census results from 1991 and 2001 showing a much lower number of people who self-identified as Roma, the Concept of Roma Integration in 2009 also included measures intended to support socially excluded Roma in the course of census-taking in 2011.

The **census** utilises the traditional method of data collection of ethnic self-identification, which is ethically most acceptable as it gives Roma the opportunity to voluntarily and freely register their nationality. Roma thereby do not become the objects of qualified estimates, in which Roma affiliation is attributed to them by others without regard for their own opinions.

The Government Council for Roma Minority Affairs therefore developed a joint strategic approach with the Czech Statistical Office. The strategy aimed to provide detailed information to Roma about the census, to eliminate the fear of misuse of the information they would provide about their ethnicity, to increase awareness of the relation between census results and specific minority rights, and to offer practical assistance to residents of socially excluded localities in filling out census forms.

Leaflets were printed with answers to frequently asked questions. (This leaflet can be found in the materials we distributed.) Roma advisers and community outreach workers were trained and provided advice to Roma in the field. Some 139



Roma assistants to census takers were utilised in selected locations. Most were experienced field workers who knew the people's needs and often spoke Romani.

The actual census forms were designed so that the interviewee was not asked to select a predefined nationality. Rather, they contained an open-ended question on ethnicity, the answer to which was not mandatory, and allowed the indication of dual nationalities (e.g., Czech and Roma). Another question asked about one's mother tongue, and the form included pre-determined languages, including Romani, and the possibility of other options.

The census is important for other ethnic minorities, as well, and census forms were therefore available in the languages of national minorities, English and Vietnamese. It is expected that the census results could also shed new light on the inclusion of newer communities, such as Vietnamese, among the more traditional ethnic minorities in the Czech Republic. Since 2007, the Vietnamese community has been represented in the Government Council for National Minorities as an observer. Similarly, the Council in 2011 added one more permanent observer, a representative of the Belarusian minority. (I should note that Council members currently include representatives of the Bulgarian, Croatian, Hungarian, German, Polish, Roma, Ruthenian, Russian, Greek, Slovak and Serb minorities.)

Unfortunately the results of the 2011 Census are not yet known. The first census results will be published at the end of the year, and a comprehensive evaluation of the results will be available in 2013.

Dear Mr. Chairman, Dear Members of the Committee,

Please allow me now to focus, in the last section of my remarks, on the issues of combating racism and extremism and the integration of immigrants.

As I already mentioned, the Government is devoted to the struggle against all forms of racial, class and social intolerance and hatred. For this purpose, the government adopted a **Strategy to Combat Extremism**. Its implementation is evaluated annually and updated accordingly. The strategy includes increasing public

awareness about the issue of extremism; fighting false propaganda disseminated over the Internet; educating children and young people about tolerance, responsible citizenship, and respect for the identity of others; and eliminating negative attitudes towards minorities, which can result in right wing extremism.

The elimination of racially, ethnically and religiously motivated crimes is also addressed specifically by the **Crime Prevention Strategy for the period 2008–2011** and by the **Strategy for Police-Minority Relations for the period 2008–2012**. The goals of both documents are, *inter alia*, the prevention of racism and xenophobia, the promotion of peaceful coexistence of the majority and ethnic minorities, and the reduction of the sources of extremist attitudes and manifestations.

In recent years, Czech police practices have incorporated the work of anti-conflict teams, which are increasingly utilized to prevent illegal activities during public assemblies.

Many of these measures had direct and indirect impacts on extremism. In 2010, there was a slight decrease in racially-motivated criminal behaviour (a 4.9% decline from 2009) and a significant decrease in the number of anti-Semitic crimes. 2010 also saw a number of anti-neo-Nazi measures adopted by security forces and state judicial organs that greatly curtailed the operations of right-wing extremists. Such measures resulted in a considerable decline in the number of extremist public events, which were limited to traditional assemblies held to commemorate deceased members or to display support for those imprisoned or under criminal prosecution.

Closely monitored was the trial in the case of arson attacks on Roma homes in Vítkov that took place on 19 April 2009. The perpetrators were punished with exceptional prison sentences ranging from 20 to 22 years, and the court described the case as a racially motivated attempt at multiple murders.

As I noted before, an important group of people with respect to protection against racial discrimination are **immigrants**. At present, immigrants from countries outside the EU make up 2.8% of the population of the Czech Republic. The largest

groups originate from three countries - Ukraine (132,000 people), Vietnam (61,000 people) and Russia (30,000 people).

The Czech Republic has become an **immigration country**. In the period 2006 – 2008, up to 40,000 foreigners annually immigrated to the Czech Republic. However, the economic crisis in late 2008 and 2009 significantly limited employment opportunities and temporarily resulted in the stagnation of immigration. Some problems associated with immigration have become more visible and have impacted the needs of immigrants and the priorities of integration policies.

These developments prompted the Government in February of this year to adopt an **Updated Concept of Immigrant Integration in the Czech Republic**, called **Joint Coexistence**. At the same time, in 2009 and 2010, the most financial resources to date were set aside for the integration of immigrants, and fundamental reforms were implemented.

One of the new integration tools are the so-called **emergency projects**, which address potential crisis situations in cities with a significant number of foreign immigrants. These projects also provide impetus to municipal governments to formulate their own integration strategies.

Another new important tool is that of the regional **Centres for the Support of Integration**, financed by the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals. These centres provide immigrants with information, guidance, Czech language courses, socio-cultural orientation, etc. They create a new platform for regional cooperation for the integration of foreigners, bringing together all actors that can contribute to the successful implementation of integration policies, including non-profit organizations. Currently, 10 centres are in operation, with the intention to have functional centres in all 14 regions of the Czech Republic.

The new Strategy also promotes street work in order to assure that integration measures successfully reach all target groups, including women who are economically inactive.

With regard to citizenship, no amendments have been made to the law in the past two years. However, the Ministry of Interior is preparing, in conjunction with the Government's policy statement, a comprehensive proposal for a new law on acquiring and losing Czech citizenship. In terms of dual citizenship, there will be a fundamental change in that Czech citizens who acquire foreign citizenship at their own request will not automatically lose their Czech citizenship, and the status of dual citizenship will be recognized. The withdrawal of former citizenship for those individuals applying for Czech citizenship will be subject to further consultation in the legislative process.

We can confidently state that, thanks in part to the adopted integration measures, the Czech Republic remains a country with almost no conflicts between immigrant communities and the local population.

Dear Mr. Chairman, Dear Members of the Committee,

In these opening remarks, I spoke mainly about the efforts of the state. Equally important in eliminating racism is the role of civil society and NGOs. An active civil society is the initiator of social change and a bulwark against extreme racist manifestations in society. We therefore greatly value its work, whether it's hundreds of small grassroots organizations and associations of minority individuals, or a large, professional and international NGO. We also welcome the independent reports, which some organizations have submitted to your committee, as they contribute to our dialogue. In the end, we can achieve progress only together, and only for the benefit of us all.

In my opening remarks, I have tried to summarize the main developments of the last two years, but it is not possible to respond adequately to each of the issues raised. Therefore, in the discussion that will follow, my colleagues from the relevant Ministries and I are prepared to expand upon these comments and to answer your questions.

Thank you for your attention.