

Committee on the Rights of the Child, 42nd session

1. Distinguished members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,
2. Today, I have the honour to present the second periodic report of Latvia on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As has already been introduced by the Ambassador, our delegation includes numerous national experts in order to ensure professional dialogue with the Committee.
3. In my introductory speech, I will outline the founding principles of the family and youth policy in Latvia highlighting some of the most important changes that have taken place during the reporting period, as well as will present answers concerning two items of the list of issues that were not covered in our additional information.
4. The family and youth policy in Latvia is based on the principle that family is the natural environment for the growth and well-being of the child and the parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The main responsibility of the state is to create, through legislative framework and financial assistance, a social environment that would be friendly to family and children thus facilitating full and balanced development of children. Another responsibility of the state is to create an efficient system of monitoring and control to ensure that the rights of children are being respected both within and outside the family, keeping in mind that children are vulnerable in terms of having limited abilities to represent themselves

5. I have to admit that many people still live under the influence of the old Soviet stereotype that it is the duty of the state to provide everyone with a job, a home, a pension, an education, and so on. As much as we would like, it is an impossible thing to have. At the same time, the Government of Latvia continue making efforts in ensuring better social and economic conditions to its residents, through opening borders, creating friendly environment for private business, improving state-guaranteed loan system, social protection and education system.
6. In 2003, Latvia has joined the European Union, meaning that it has subjected itself to very strict economic and political standards set by the Union. We do not deny that Latvia is one of the poorest EU member states. However, we believe that it is better to be the worst among the best, rather than to be the best among the worst. We do have an example of more developed EU member states to follow. However, this process takes time. I truly hope that the Committee experts will value both our successes and problems against this background.
7. I invite the Committee to pay attention to the achievements that have already been made. For instance, during the past two years a non-taxable income level has increased by 50%. The child-birth benefit has increased by 30% to 70%, depending on the number of children in the family. The child-care benefit has been increased to the level of a parent's income prior to the childbirth. In addition, families which are not able to ensure the child subsistence at the level of the state-guaranteed subsistence minimum, are entitled to local governments' financial support.

8. During the reporting period Latvia has ratified a number of international multilateral treaties in the field of children's rights, the most recent being the 1999 International Labour Organization's Convention No 182 Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, which was ratified in April 2006..
9. The major development in the institutional infrastructure at the national level that took place during the reporting period was establishment of the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs in 2003, and replaced the Children Rights' Protection Center. The Ministry is entrusted with developing the national policy in the matters of family and youth affairs, protection of children's rights, as well as supervision of compliance with the legal standards in the field of protection of children's rights. The Ministry is entitled to audit the work of any state or local government authority in the field of protection of children's rights, either at their own initiative or following a complaint. The Ministry also provides methodical guidance to Orphan's Courts and Parish Courts, as well as assists local government experts in the field of protection of children's rights. Since 2004, offices of Regional Inspectors for Protection of Children's Rights have been operating within the framework of the Ministry.
10. The Government has started promoting an active policy for removing children from institutions and restoring family ties by introducing alternative arrangements, and especially by returning children to their own families, placing them in foster families or family-type homes, setting up day centres, as well as promoting adoption within the country.
11. In March 2004, the Government approved the Principal Positions *Latvia Fit for Children*. This document is based on the document A World

Fit for Children adopted in conclusion of the 27th Session of the UN General Assembly in May 2002. The Principal Positions *Latvia Fit for Children* is a long-term policy planning document (from 2004 to 2015) covering the basic principles, goals and priorities of the state policy for exercising children's rights. Detailed information on the content and implementation of the Principal Positions has been provided in our written submissions to the Committee.

12. In addition, Subsistence Guarantee Fund has been established in 2004 in order to provide subsistence for children. The fund is financed by the State budget and is responsible for providing subsistence allowance to a child when implementation of the court's decision on the collection of the child support payment is declared impossible.
13. I am also proud to inform the Committee that Latvia not only has one of the most liberal citizenship laws; it also has the fastest naturalization rates among the EU member states. In the last 10 years 117,674 persons have obtained Latvian citizenship, which is approximately 17% of the overall number of the permanent Latvian residents not having any citizenship. The highest naturalization rate has been observed since Latvia has joined the EU – more than 22,000 naturalized per year in 2004 and 2005. The rate remains high also in 2006.
14. After years of hard work at the national level, the education reform of Latvia has recently received an appraisal from the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities, who invited Latvia to share its knowledge and experience with other countries having several linguistic communities. At the same time, the Latvian Government remain

committed to continue close monitoring of the reform process to ensure its high quality.

15. I would also like to underline that children in Latvia have effective access to professional assistance and representation – a toll-free national crisis management and information telephone service (available throughout Latvia from landline and mobile numbers); inspectors of the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs; the Latvian National Human Rights Office (a national human rights institution set up in compliance with the Paris Principles).
16. Since 1997, the Latvian National Human Rights Office is a full member of the International Ombudsmen Institute, while the Section for Protection of the Rights of the Child in October 2003 became a member of the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children (ENOC).
17. With the entry into force of the new Criminal Procedure Law in October 2003, a system of investigative judges in charge of deciding on the application and individual regime of the restraint measures has been established. Before taking the office, the investigative judges have received an extensive in-depth training on the human rights aspects of applying restraint measures, including special requirements in cases of children.
18. In addition to the information already presented to the Committee in Latvia's reply to the list of issues, I would like to specifically note that the procedural law in Latvia does not allow for a child to be tried as an adult, as well as to keep underage persons together with adults. So far, Latvia

has complied with its obligation, which has also been confirmed by international monitoring mechanisms.

19. The Committee has certainly noted that we have not been able to provide information on the rates of malnutrition in Latvia. I must admit that such statistical data is not being gathered, since no such cases have been reported for some time. At the same time, the Government is making efforts to ensure that all children have access to healthy nutrition through offering a free lunch and milk programs to schools.

20. Using this opportunity, I would like to stress that the Government of Latvia recognize that, although we have made a significant progress, we need to continue our efforts in improving the situation of family in children to achieve the best possible standards in this area. We would like to see further improvement in our demographic situation, social benefits to families, to expand the state-guaranteed loan system to families and education, to decrease the number of children in institutions, as well as to improve the knowledge of international standards of the responsible officials.

21. I thank you for your attention and look forward to your questions.