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Statement by

**OF MS MARTINA VUK, STATE SECRETARY,**

**HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA**

**AT THE PRESENTATION OF THE INITIAL REPORT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA ON THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**AT THE 19TH SESSION OF THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

Geneva

22 February 2018

Dear Madam Chair,

members of the Committee,

ladies and gentlemen,

It is a special honour for me today to present the first Initial Report of the Republic of Slovenia on the implementation and realisation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as the head of the delegation.

Firstly, let me express our regret at the delayed submission of the Initial Report. In that period, Slovenia submitted three important reports to the UN bodies and also prepared the new introduction document. I assure you that Slovenia is committed to respect its obligations towards the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which plays the central role in ensuring that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is respected.

Now I would like to introduce our delegation:

* My colleagues from the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities Ružica Boškič, Jana Lovšin and Cveto Uršič;
* then, Nadja Čobal and Damijan Jagodic from the Ministry of Health;
* Vojmir Drašler from the Ministry of Infrastructure;
* Polona Šoln Vrbinc and Anida Sarajlić from the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports;
* Jasna Močnik from the Ministry of Public Administration;
* Pavli Koc from the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning;
* Irena Možek Grgurevič from the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology;
* Maja Velič from the Ministry of Justice;
* Robert Ferenc from the Police.

Dear Madam Chair,

The Initial Report of the Republic of Slovenia covers the period from 2008 when Slovenia ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to 2012. The Report was prepared in 2013 and submitted to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2014. The Report also includes replies to the list of preliminary questions of the Committee, which was sent to us in November 2017.

I would now like to present you some of the recent developments, which took place in the period after the report was delivered and are important for the implementation and realisation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

In 2014, the Council for Persons with Disabilities of Republic of Slovenia was established pursuant to Article 33 of the Convention. The Council is a tripartite independent professional and consultative body. The president of the Council is always a representative of suitable disability organisations. The Council operates as a mandatory counselling forum on the issues of disability policy and as a body for the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention.

At the beginning of 2014, the Government adopted a new Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities 2014–2021 whose purpose is to protect, promote and guarantee full and equal enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities, and to promote the respect of their dignity. The programme comprises thirteen fundamental objectives with a total of 91 measures, which comprehensively regulate all areas of life of persons with disabilities. In the preparation of the Action Programme, the principles of the implementation of the Convention and other fundamental documents, such as the Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons than also the European Action Plan of the European Union and the Council of Europe’s Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in society 2010–2020, were taken into account. Similar to the first action programme, representatives of disability organisations took part in the preparation of the Action Programme.

In 2013, the National Assembly adopted the Resolution on the national social assistance programme 2013–2020. The resolution is the key document for the development of social assistance. The whole document underwent extensive public discussion, and was discussed and supported by the Social Protection Expert Council, where representatives of various NGO’s and academic institutions participate. The national programme is based on three key objectives:

– to reduce poverty and enhance social inclusion of the most vulnerable population,

- to enhance the availability of and provide accessibility to services and programmes,

- and to enhance the efficiency of the implementing organisation management with the emphasis on greater influence of service users.

The Resolution particularly highlights the development, quality and accessibility of programmes and services in communities. The document also includes specific quantitative objectives to reduce the number of adults included in whole-day institutional care and to prevent new institutionalisations.

On the basis of the Resolution, the Government adopted the “National Social Assistance Programme” which contains numerous measures related to the development and expansion of community care. Deinstitutionalisation processes foresee the relocation of 1,100 persons who are currently included in various institutions and community care. For this purpose, 130 small housing units will be set up. In 2016, a study which contains specific proposals for deinstitutionalisation throughout the country, was prepared. At the same time, the drafting of legislation was intensified. Last year, the Personal Assistance Act was adopted. The Act on Social Inclusion is currently in the parliamentary procedure and the Long-Term Care Act was submitted for public discussion at the end of 2017.

Already in 2014 Slovenia introduced renewal of the legislation that binds the operator of emergency call numbers to enable users with disabilities to make emergency calls by using spoken and sign languages, and other forms of non-spoken languages.

The Act Amending the Enforcement of Penal Sentences Act, which entered into force in August 2015, stipulates that convicted persons who need additional assistance in carrying out their basic needs due to their age, illness or disability in the form of nursing or social carereside in adapted premises or sections.

In 2016, the Protection Against Discrimination Act was adopted, which determines the protection of all persons against discrimination in various fields of social life, when exercising human rights and fundamental freedoms, and when exercising rights and obligations and in other legal relationships in political, economic, social, cultural, civil or other fields. Disability is one of the personal circumstances, which is explicitly written in the act.

This Act established the Advocate of the Principle of Equality as an independent state authority in the field of protection against discrimination. The Advocate *inter alia* addresses cases of discrimination and performs inspection tasks, provides independent assistance to persons discriminated against, files lawsuits and participates in judicial proceedings related to discrimination, and monitors the general situation in the Republic of Slovenia in the field of protection against discrimination. The Advocate, who is a state official appointed by the National Assembly at the proposal of the President of the Republic of Slovenia, was established at the end of 2016.

Equal treatment is also desired for all persons who encounter, or participate in, proceedings before courts, including persons with disabilities. In this regard, the amended Court Rules, which entered into force in January 2017, stipulate that participants with disabilities or persons with special needs have the right to equal participation in the proceedings

In recent years, Slovenia has introduced systematic training at judicial seminars of judges, state prosecutors and other judicial staff in relation to the treatment and consideration of persons with disabilities. Last year’s focus was on training on the problems of the deaf and hard of hearing, while this year trainings will also focus on the blind and partially sighted. Persons who are hard of hearing will soon be able to use special translation units, which will facilitate their easier and more independent participation in the proceedings.

In April 2017, the changes of the National Assembly Elections Act were adopted, which eliminated two unconstitutionalities established by the Constitutional Court, regarding the accessibility to elections for the persons with disabilities. Pursuant to the amended act from this February, all polling stations must be accessible to persons with disabilities**,** voting devicesare eliminated and persons with disabilities are eligible for postal voting instead. That means that all polling stations will have to be architecturally accessible to persons with disabilities in time for the next National Assembly elections and local elections, which will take place this year.

Last year the National Assembly adopted the long awaited Personal Assistance Act which systemically regulates the right to personal assistance and the method of its exercise. In accordance with the law, personal assistance is assistance to users in all tasks and activities which they cannot do on their own due to the type and degree of disability, but which are needed daily at home or outside their home for them to live independently and actively, and to be equally included in society. Users may freely select a provider of personal assistance and a personal assistant.

The Act on Social Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities, which I have already mentioned, is about to be adopted and will replace the Act from 1983. The proposed act regulates the position and rights of persons with severest disabilities, which occurred prior to their reaching 18 years of age or during their regular schooling prior to their reaching 26 years of age. In comparison with the applicable legislation, the range of beneficiaries is wider, which means that, in addition to persons with moderate, severe and profound mental disabilities and persons with the severest physical disabilities, persons with severe form of autism spectrum disorder, deafblind persons and persons with moderate to severe brain injury or damage, will also be able to obtain the status of a person with disability - if their disabilities occurred prior to entering pension and disability insurance.

According to the Act, the beneficiaries will be entitled to financial allowances and social inclusion services. Services will enable them to lead an independent life, to participate in life-long learning, living with the assistance and to preserve social inclusion of elderly persons with disabilities. All of the aforementioned enables persons with disabilities to live in a community – if possible with suitable support in their domestic environment – and to participate in the labour market.

Currently, the public discussion on the Act on accessibility of the websites and mobile applications is taking place,. The Act also stipulates that civil servants should undergo training to implement suitable adjustments of websites or mobile applications.

Also, Slovenia has been developing towards “accessible tourism” with the basis provided by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Pursuant to the Promotion of Tourism Development Act, we determined that persons with established disabilities or physical impairments are exempt from the payment of tourist tax.

The beginnings of accessible tourism development in Slovenia are related to health resorts and particularly the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities in them. now Very good exemple in the field of accessible tourism sets the Premiki Travel Agency which was founded by a NGO, Slovenian Association for Mental Health and received the prestigious UN Ulysses Prize for Excellence in the Creation and Dissemination of Knowledge in Tourism.

Dear Madam Chair,

Slovenia sent its written replies to the list of preliminary questions within the set deadline. However, in accordance with the procedural guidelines of the Committee, I would like to point out some of our successful projects.

The internationally recognised and established programme of the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance – ITF, which has been operating since 1998 under the auspices of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia is a project of assistance to victims of mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO), and to victims of armed conflicts implemented at three levels:

· Rehabilitation of victims of mines/UXO and of armed conflicts.

· Projects of psychosocial and economic assistance to victims.

· Trainings and workshops for rehabilitation experts. Approximately 470 experts from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Kosovo and Palestine attended trainings in rehabilitation, prosthetics and orthotics through the ITF.

From 2013 to 2015, the National association for the blind and partially sighted Persons carried out the project, called “Library for the Blind and Partially Sighted. The important part of this project was to connect the aforementioned library with the public libraries, and to coordinate services for them to make materials more accessible also to all persons with disabilities. Within the project, the library also got the new facilities, adapted to the needs of beneficiaries and it still fully operating.

From 2014 to 2015 “We can do it” project to promote equality and combat discrimination of persons with disabilities was carried out. The objectives of the “We can do it” project were to raise the awareness of Slovenian society of the issues of disabilities and to better inform persons with disabilities of their rights. The project was carried out together with the NGO, Association of the Students with disabilities, the Urban Planning Institute and the Association of Vocational Rehabilitation Providers. The project also followed the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and better attainment of the objectives of the Action Programme for Persons with Disabilities and of the European Disability Strategy. The implementation and results of the projects, particularly in the field of accessibility, were also beneficial for other population groups such as older persons, children and functionally-impaired persons due to illness.

In 2016, Slovenia introduced the “EU Disability Card” international project which concluded in mid-2017 and will have a long-term impact on the better inclusion of persons with disabilities in the society. The disability card enables persons with disabilities to enjoy more benefits when travelling at home and in some other European countries. The preparation of the card linked non-governmental disability organisations, ministries and local communities.

Last year we started with preparations for the project titled “Development and Transition of Young People with Special Needs from Schools to the Labour Market”. It is estimated that 2,100 young people with disabilities will enter the labour market until 2021. The cooperation of all experts and institutions as well as their families is of key importance for young people.

In 2017, a project called “Facilitating multimodal mobility for persons with various impairments” was also prepared. The project will bring better quality of life also for other vulnerable groups, such as elderly persons and families with children who use wheelchairs, and temporarily injured children. This is a multiannual task which will run until 2022.

Our capital Ljubljana has won three prizes at the European Commission competition Access City Award for its wide approach to accessibility which includes the whole population. Ljubljana won the silver prize at the Access City Awards 2018, the bronze prize for 2015, and a special mention for 2012. Accessibility is one of Ljubljana's priorities.

Dear Madam Chair,

Before I conclude, let me point out activities carried out in our country in relation to awareness raising and informing all the stakeholders of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I would like to point out that the Convention was translated and adapted in an easily readable version immediately after its ratification, and is available in various printed versions and also on websites.

To raise awareness and provide information on legislation in the field of the protection of persons with disabilities, the renewed Guide to the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was published in 2015, (The first such guide was printed in 2007) Due to adjusted techniques, the Guide is also available to the blind and partially sighted, deaf and hard of hearing, and to persons with intellectual disabilities, and published on websites.

The Report presented today by our delegation was prepared on the basis of contributions from numerous ministries, government authorities and professional institutions in the field of the protection of persons with disabilities. I would particularly like to emphasise that civil society organisations in Slovenia were notified of the report and given the opportunity to submit their opinions, comments and proposals. Prior to being approved by the Government of Slovenia, it was discussed by the Inter-Ministerial Commission on Human Rights and by the Council for Persons with Disabilities with members of both being representatives of ministries NGO’s, professional institutions and academia. In December 2017, representatives of civil society organisations were notified of the time of the presentation of the Initial Report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Dear Madam Chair,

The Republic of Slovenia is a democratic country governed by the rule of law, where special attention is paid to equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities, which is written in the Constitution. It should be highlighted that the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Slovenia established years ago that the right of persons with disabilities to special protection is a special human right anda right of a positive status with which the state undertook to actively manage disability policy and to take various measures within its scope to improve the position of persons with disabilities in society. Therefore, the right of persons with disabilities to special protection is a collection of various rights of persons with disabilities in the field of parental protection and family benefits, education, employment, health, disability insurance, social assistance, culture, sports and recreation, tax and other relief or exemptions, information and communication technology, the accessibility of the built environment and information, and all other fields which enable persons with disabilities to lead decent and equal life.

I emphasise that Slovenia is committed to the implementation and realisation of obligations adopted with the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Republic of Slovenia always prepares regulations in cooperation with persons with disabilities and respects the principle “NOTHING ABOUT PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES WITHOUT PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES”.

Madam Chair, members of the Committee, in this two days I expect an open and constructive exchange on the progress and challenges of the implementation and realisation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Thank you very much for your attention.