

## STATEMENT

by H.E. Ashot Hovakimian, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

at the 52<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished members of the Committee,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our delegation is ready to discuss Armenia's report and fulfillment of its obligation under the Covenant on Economic, Social Rights.

The Second and Third periodic reports of Armenia have been prepared by the inter-agency working group with participation of all relevant stakeholders, and according to the established practice, discussed with representatives of civil society and NGOs. In particular, a roundtable discussion took place on September 2009 with participation of 40 representatives from non-governmental and international organizations.

The report was prepared and submitted in 2009 with delay due to some technical reasons. After its submission to the Secretariat in New York, the report has been lost in strange circumstances, which we never able to clarify. In 2011 therefore we re-submit it again. The reply of Armenia to the Committee "List of issues" was submitted in March 2014. The same month we introduced to UN Secretariat the updated version of Common core document, which is this time becoming an integral and complementary part of this joint report.

Mr. Chairman,

After establishment of its independence Armenia has signed and ratified all main UN Human Rights treaties. The last one of the ten UN monitoring treaties - the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and members of Their Families – was signed on September 26, 2013. Recently we

presented also reports to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Committee on Enforced Disappearances.

Armenia continues strong cooperation with all UN bodies, including the office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and special procedures. The standing invitation to UN human rights special procedures was sent in May 2006.

We are confident that effective implementation of recommendations of various UN committees helps the country to promote human rights. In particular in 2012 with the aim to assess the work in the area of protection and promotion of human rights, Armenia prepared a mid-term report on the implementation of recommendations raised within the framework of the Universal periodic review process.

We consider that presentation of Armenia some human rights problems at this meeting could be useful.

The issue of prevention of genocide has a specific importance for Armenia. Armenian authorities consistently have brought forward the issue of genocide prevention not only because it is a tragedy which the Armenian people has suffered, but we also consider it as the first egregious crime against humanity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Armenia has traditionally presented resolutions related to Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The latest resolution was adopted by consensus on March 22, 2013, at the 22<sup>nd</sup> session of the UN Human Rights Council and co-sponsored by 62 countries (A/HRC/22/2).

The situation of refugees in the country is under constant attention of the Armenian Government. Since the first days of receiving refugees and addressing their urgent needs, the Government started the implementation of policy towards full naturalization and integration of these peoples into society. However, the housing issue for the refugees from Azerbaijan still remains the most acute.

In order to solve this problem and raise the required financial resources, the Government of the Republic of Armenia organized an International donors' conference on May 17, 2011, in Yerevan with the aim to direct the secured financial resources and pledges received during the Conference towards the solution of housing issue for the refugee families that currently live in temporary dwellings.

Armenia has also become home to over 4000 Iraqi refugees of Armenian origin who moved to Armenia after the escalation of conflict in Iraq.

Since the recent deterioration of situation in Syria, Armenia has already received almost 15.000 refugees from Syria. The Government of the Republic of Armenia has carried out wide range of activities for the solution of the housing and other most urgent issues of the refugees who have settled down in Armenia.

Mr. Chairman,

Being committed to the purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as guided by the principles enshrined in two UN important documents – International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Republic of Armenia regards the right of peoples to self-determination as a fundamental and indispensable human right and takes consistent steps towards its realisation. We consider, that application of force and annihilation of the population which is merely implementing its right to self-determination is simply inadmissible.

The blockade imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey is the main impediment to the economic development of Armenia today and violates of international law. As a result of the blockade losses have reached billions of dollars. Despite the efforts to maintain stable economic growth, blockade renders serious negative influence on the exports of Armenian products. Withdrawal of the blockade would decrease the prices of Armenian exports at least by 15 %. It is also noteworthy that due to the blockade some 70 % of the imported products that Armenia receives via Georgia are always at risk and are at least 15% more expensive due to extra transit fees.

Blockade is also one of the reasons of state budget tax losses. Studies have shown that if there was no blockade the gross domestic product of the country would substantially grow.

Mr. Chairman,

Since the submission of the Second and Third periodic reports in 2009, Parliamentary and Presidential elections were held in Armenia on May 6, 2012 and February 18, 2013, accordingly.

Ruling Republican Party has gained majority of the parliament seats. Prosperous Armenia has come second, with about one fourth of the seats, while ANS, ARF, Rule of Law and heritage won less than 10 percent each. Out of total of 131 seats in the National Assembly, 90 are distributed between parties using a proportional

system, while the other 41 are elected from constituencies by a majoritarian voting system. The election threshold is 5 percent for parties and 7 percent for alliances.

The Presidential elections resulted in a victory for incumbent President Sargsyan, who received 59% of the vote. The Government of Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan worked till April 3 of this year and was dissolved after Prime Minister's resignation.

The new Prime Minister Hovik Abrahamyan, who was appointed a couple of weeks ago, underlined the importance to develop small and medium-size businesses, during the first meeting of the new Cabinet. "We are going to make great strides to ensure that each businessman might enjoy great investment opportunities. The State should use all its leverages so that any businessman working within the framework of the law would not meet any obstacle whatsoever. It is going to be a principled decision on my part," the Premier said.

With the aim of drawing constant attention and effectively monitoring all commitments assumed by the State within the framework of international instruments, we plan to initiate establishment of an inter-ministerial commission by the end of this year. Commission will be headed by Prime-Minister. This will allow us to use strategic approach for the development of new legislation as well as guarantee full implementation of recommendations received by Armenia in practice.

National Strategy on Human Rights Protection was approved by the President on October 29 2012, and refers to all fields of human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights. On February 27, 2014 the Government approved a Plan of Action for the National Human Rights Strategy. The Plan of Action includes the implementation of such important issues as elaboration of programs for reduction of youth unemployment, improving employment security conditions at the workplace, establishment of integrated social services system to assist most vulnerable part of population, to reduce unemployment among disabled persons, to improve health care system in detention facilities, etc. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that among other issues the Plan of Action included also question of ratification of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Mr. Chairman,

The legislative and judicial reforms are ongoing in Armenia. According to the Presidential decree signed on September 4, 2103, a Commission to deal with the constitutional reform was set up and is headed by the Chairman of Constitutional Court. The presidential decree also envisages certain procedures for the

Commission activities. The president instructed the Commission to submit a Constitutional Reform Concept before April 20, 2014. The draft concept is already prepared and available at the Ministry of Justice website. The decision to start Constitutional reform is conditioned by the necessity to enforce the principle of the rule of law, to improve constitutional mechanisms for ensuring the basic human rights and freedoms, to provide a full balance of power and increased efficiency of public administration.

2012-2016 Strategy Program for Legislative and Judicial Reforms has been adopted, which foresees large-scale activities both with regard to judicial legislation, and penitentiary and criminal legislation and with regard to all those laws that are related to the human rights sphere.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Armenian Government has a conceptual approach towards implementation of human rights standards. In particular, for many years the Cabinet approves thematic programs in the field of human rights, including rights of the child, women's rights, rights of disabled persons, anti-trafficking action plan, etc.

All these programs are the basic components of the national anti-discrimination policy. The adoption and further implementation of these national strategies is a targeted work, whereby one Program of Actions is followed by the next one, containing detailed plans for each year.

One of the first national Programs approved by Government was the National Plan of Action for the protection of the rights of the child for 2004-2015, adopted in December 2003. The main directions of the NPA are – legislation, health, social security, education, leisure, entertainment and cultural life, juvenile justice. In the areas mentioned, particular focus is placed on the needs of children in especially difficult situations and in need of special attention: disabled children, beggars and vagrants, orphans, victims of abuse and poverty, and those in conflict with the law. All of the above main directions of the NPA are comprised of the following components – relevant articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, main problems in the field, goals and national strategy, monitoring methods and further actions.

The decision “On approving 2011-2015 Strategic Programme and 2011 Action Plan for Gender Policy” was approved on May 2011 within the framework of annual programmes together with their monitoring instruments. It envisages activities aimed at promoting participation of women in all spheres of public life.

During the same 2011 “Gender policy concept paper” was also approved which underlines the importance of elaborating normative legislative acts as a means of ensuring gender policies which are aimed at implementing gender equality policy,

as well as the importance of carrying out gender expertise taking into account the effect it may have on men and women.

2011-2015 Strategic Action Plan to Combat Gender-Based Violence was approved by the Government in June 2011. Last year, following civil society's initiative, "the Law on equal rights and equal opportunities of women and men" has been drafted and adopted.

The Fourth National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Armenia for 2013-2015 was adopted in February 2013. The new NAP was elaborated based on the implementation of the previous NAP, as well as the relevant recommendations received. An independent annual monitoring on the implementation of the Plan is currently being conducted, the outcomes of which will serve as a basis for development the next tri-annual Plan.

Strategy on social protection of disabled persons for 2006-2015 was adopted in November 2005. Strategy for social assistance to the elderly persons for 2012-2016 was approved in August 2012.

Financing of the largest part of these programs and strategies is provided from the State budget. All these programs are comprehensive documents that contain policies related to human rights to be implemented in all relevant areas. These National Action Plans and Strategies are mechanisms through which Armenia's obligations in the human rights field are implemented. Protection and promotion of the rights of most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, within these programs, are among our priorities.

I would like to thank Armenian Human Rights Defender office as well as the NGOs for the preparation and submission of the alternative reports which will be important contribution to this process.

Thank you.

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