

**52<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

**Opening Statement by Mr. Gintaras Klimavičius,  
Vice-minister of Social Security and Labour of Lithuania  
at the consideration of the second periodic report of Lithuania  
6 May, 2014, Geneva**

Mr. Chair,  
Distinguished Members of the Committee,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania, it is my great pleasure and honour to appear before this Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and present the second periodic report of Lithuania under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The second periodic report was prepared in cooperation with public institutions and representatives of social partners. It provides a considerable amount of information updating the state of affairs and reflecting how the economic, social and cultural rights of the Covenant continue to be implemented and protected in Lithuania.

Let me introduce to you the members of the Lithuanian delegation:

**Mr. Rytis Paulauskas**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Lithuania to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva;

**Ms. Lina Charašauskaitė**, Chief Specialist of Equal Opportunities Division, Social Inclusion Department, Ministry of Social Security and Labour, responsible for the issues related to disabled, migrants, refugees, sexual minorities and for the overview of changes in social inclusion;

**Ms. Vanda Juršienė**, Head of Equality between Women and Men Division, Ministry of Social Security and Labour, in charge of questions related to Equality between Women and Men;

**Ms. Saulė Mačiukaitė-Žvinienė**, Head of Higher Education Policy Analysis Unit, Research and Higher Education Monitoring and Analysis Centre, in charge of questions related to the science and higher education;

**Mr. Zigmas Medingis**, Deputy Director of the Economics and International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Agriculture, is in charge of questions related to the agriculture;

**Ms. Rūta Pabedinskienė**, Chief Specialist, temporary performing the functions of the Head of Children Division, Family and Communities Department,

Ministry of Social Security and Labour, responsible for the issues related to children and for the overview of changes in the sphere of family and communities;

**Ms. Gintarė Pažereckaitė**, Chief Specialist of Division of International Agreements Law, International Law Department, Ministry of Justice, responsible for the overview of changes in legal aid, justice and general courts administration;

**Ms. Eglė Radišauskienė**, Deputy Director of Labour Department, Ministry of Social Security and Labour, in charge of questions related to labour law, labour market and working environment;

**Ms. Gražina Sluško**, Chief Specialist of National Minorities Affairs Division, Ministry of Culture, responsible for the issues related to culture, national minorities and Roma inclusion.

**Ms. Gaivilė Stankevičienė**, Second Secretary of the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Lithuania to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva;

**Ms. Vaiva Vaicekauskienė**, Methodologist of Policy Analysis Division, National Agency for School Evaluation, responsible for the issues related to the education;

**Ms. Rima Vaitkienė**, Head of Strategic Health Development Division, Ministry of Health, in charge of questions related to the health;

**Ms. Kristina Vyšniauskaitė-Radinskienė**, Deputy Head of International Law Division, International Affairs Department, Ministry of Social Security and Labour, responsible for the preparation of the report.

Mr. Chair,

Before presenting the recent developments since the submission of the report in 2010, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the Lithuanian Government's commitment to promote and protect human rights and to uphold our international human rights obligations. Let me start with our activities at international and regional level, which have contributed to the implementation of the obligations under the Covenant.

I would like to remind that as of 1 May 2004 Lithuania has been a full member of the **European Union**, therefore the Lithuanian legislation has been harmonized with EU legal acts and EU law is being implemented in Lithuania. I am glad to mention, that the *European Institute for Gender Equality*, the only EU specialised agency on gender equality issues, established in 2007 is located in Vilnius.

Lithuania held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2013, focusing on a number of areas related to the Covenant rights, such as, de facto equality between men and women, antidiscrimination, employment, in particular, youth employment. During the Lithuanian Presidency a common agreement to establish a new financial instrument for the most deprived persons was

found. Consequently this year a *Regulation on the Fund for European aid to the most deprived* was adopted and almost EUR 3.5 billion will be distributed to EU member states till 2020.

In general, the recent years witness Lithuanian intense cooperation with **international organisations**. As of 2014 Lithuania is a non-permanent member of *UN Security Council*. Lithuanian candidate was elected as a member of *UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* in 2012. We also nominated Lithuanian candidate for the election of the members of the *Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* this year.

I am pleased to inform you that Lithuania has ratified the ***Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol*** in 2010 and submitted its initial report in 2012. The legal framework developed in Lithuania created the institutional mechanism for the implementation of the Convention covering both the public sector and non-governmental sectors. The social integration and anti-discrimination programmes for persons with disabilities have been successfully implemented, aiming at enhancing and ensuring their rights and possibilities to fully participate in the political, social, cultural and economic life. In recent years Lithuania also undertook several steps in legislature ensuring higher accessibility of persons with disabilities into tertiary education and the number of students with disabilities increased three times.

Lithuania is a titular member of the Governing body of the International Labour Organization. In 2013 Lithuania ratified **International Labour Organisation's Maritime Labour convention** which provides comprehensive protection at work for seafarers. Lithuania has reported on implementation of a number of ratified ILO conventions.

Recently Lithuania has expressed its will to adhere to the **Organisation's for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Recommendation of the Council on Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship** and to the *Action Plan for Youth – Giving Youth a Better Start in the Labour Market*.

Speaking about **Council of Europe Conventions**, Lithuania has submitted periodically national reports under the *revised European Social Charter* and *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. In 2012 Lithuania ratified the *Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings*. Since 2002 we have been providing the financial support for NGO's projects that focus on social assistance and reintegration into the society and labour market of the victims of trafficking in human beings and commercial sexual exploitation.

In 2013 Lithuania signed *Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*. We ratified the *Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*. It was decided to establish a *Help Centre for children who are victims of sexual abuse* before the year 2016, in accordance with Icelandic model Barnahus. Recently Lithuania has introduced amendments to the *Criminal Code* and the *Code of Criminal Procedure* which will render more effective fight against the sexual abuse of children, especially online, providing more tools to investigate such crimes, additional guarantees for victims during the criminal procedure and more severe penalties.

Now let me briefly present to you the most recent changes in the Lithuanian legislation that were not reflected in the second report.

Our long-term attention to women's issues and work towards elimination of inequalities and ensuring **de facto equality between men and women** within the framework of the long-term *National Programme on equality between women and men*, led to some positive results. Lithuania is proud of high level of well educated women, small gap between employment rates of women and men, and women's unemployment rate lower than men's. We succeeded to decrease gender pay gap almost twice and increased number of women entrepreneurs. All these results contributed to women's empowerment, economic independence and higher status. There was an increase of women in political decision making. Total number of women managers in public sector is close to 40 percent. And finally - Lithuania is the country, where two out of three highest state positions are held by women: Woman-President and Woman-Chair of the Parliament.

We have also made very important steps against domestic violence. Under the new **Law on Protection against Domestic Violence** domestic violence is attributed to the category of offenses of public importance. It covers action and inaction which makes intentional physical, psychological, sexual, economic or other effects to person incurring physical, material or non-pecuniary damage. The Law provides that victim of domestic violence is not only a person against whom the violence has been used, but also a child, who witnesses such a violence or lives in a violent environment. The police officer is obliged to take immediate measures to protect the abused person and to initiate an investigation without submission of an official complaint.

Last year the specialised assistance centres in our all municipalities started to offer integrated assistance services to the victims of domestic violence, including psychological, medical and legal help.

Implementation of the *National Programme for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Assistance for Children 2011-2015* provides for complex of instruments to eliminate causes of abuse, develops a system of assistance and preventive measures

of abuse and bullying of children, who are likely to suffer or who have suffered from psychological, physical and sexual abuse and neglect at school, as well as their families. We are also developing positive child raising skills without violence.

Lithuanian Government proceeds with consistent measures promoting **non-discrimination** under the *Inter-institutional Action Plan for 2012–2014*, for instance, by implementing educational measures of non-discrimination and equal opportunities, raising legal consciousness and public awareness, increasing mutual understanding and tolerance on a number of grounds such as gender, race, nationality, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion and others. In recent years Lithuania has undertaken several steps in legislature imposing severe criminal liability for the hate crimes.

Lithuanian Government is committed to embed respect for human dignity and tolerance into the educational system. Throughout the secondary school pupils are getting introduced to the subject of human rights and get acquainted about UN human rights system.

In 2010 *Ministry of Culture* took over coordination of issues concerning the protection of rights of persons belonging to **national minorities** as well as fostering their culture. Implementing *National Minority Policy Development Strategy* every year we allocate partial funding to projects submitted by national minority NGOs, such as *cultural centers or weekend schools* where national minorities learn their native history, traditions, language and culture.

The *Action Plan for the Integration of Roma into the Lithuanian Society for 2012–2014* was prepared in consultation with representatives of the Roma national minority. It focuses on Roma education, participation in the labour market, development of social skills and promotion of public tolerance. By the end of this year it is planned to adopt a new Action Plan which additionally will include measures on Roma housing and empowerment of Roma women.

We have recently prepared the *Draft Law on National Minorities*, among other issues allowing the traditional names of locations, streets and other topographic objects to be written in the languages of national minorities alongside the names in the State language. According to the legal procedures, the draft is being discussed among relevant State institutions, as well as with public society.

Seeking to ensure that families have adequate **housing facilities** we have drafted the *Law on Support for Acquisition or Rental of Housing* which establish compensation of a part of rental payments for families and persons entitled to social housing, who rent housing from natural or legal entities.

The Lithuanian Government has taken complex **employment decision** providing support to employers, employees, education and vocational guidance under Inter-institutional *Action Plan 2014-2016* implementing the *Employment Increasing program*. In 2012 we have started to create the *Specialists Qualification Map* aiming at ensuring a compatibility of vocational and tertiary education with labour market.

Dealing with the **problems of youth** we have approved the priority measures for 2012-2016 increasing youth employment, promoting entrepreneurship, enhancing youth unemployment prevention, improving vocational orientation and counselling. Seeking to ensure adequate provision services, higher education institutions develop open online courses, establish necessary infrastructure for increasing accessibility and quality of studies. By the way, state social insurance is guaranteed to full time students, until a diploma is obtained or up to 24 years of age.

The *National Programme for Voluntary Activities of Youth* creates conditions for young people to participate in voluntary activities and acquire personal, social, professional competences and work experience. Furthermore, the *Programme for Intensive Long-Term Assistance for Young People Who Are Not in Education, Employment or Training* promotes integration of socially excluded youth into the labour market and education system.

We proceed with measures promoting health of the society, for instance, promoting safe contraceptive methods, the use of them increased 1,5 times during last 12 years and the number of abortions as a method of birth control decreased more than twice. I would like to remind you, that it has been prohibited to smoke at the public places in Lithuania since 2007.

In 2012 we established the **Lithuanian Film Centre**, focusing on film educations of children and youth, cooperation with educational and cultural organizations, training and professional development of representatives of the audio-visual sector. Seeking democratisation of culture and cultural education, the **Lithuanian Culture Council** was also established that year.

Aiming to improve further the overall system for the protection of human rights, Lithuanian Government has initiated the procedure to reinforce the status and role of Parliament's Ombudsmen Office, which should function as an **independent national human rights institution in accordance with the Paris Principles**. After the public consultations, including the consultations with the *Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights*, the draft law was presented to the Parliament in 2012 and is now being considered under the ordinary legislative procedure.

Admittedly, we have faced challenges too. The global economic crisis was one of such challenges. However, even though it posed significant difficulty for maintaining the same level of the protection of economic and social rights, austerity measures,

such as temporary reduction of salaries in the public sector as well as revision of certain benefits in 2010-2011 made it possible to keep the social protection at relevant level and provide social assistance at least for the most vulnerable groups of the population. Now reduced benefits are restored to the previous amounts.

Mr. Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by emphasising that Lithuania highly values cooperation with the United Nations human rights bodies and procedures. We feel that quite some progress has been made since our Initial Report was presented to this Committee in 2004 and yet we see that there is still much to achieve.

My delegation is ready to provide you with more detailed answers regarding any topic of interest. Looking forward to a truly interactive exchange on these and other issues, I thank you, Mr. Chair.

