
Mr. President, Distinguished Members and Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address you all here, in this unique conference hall, on behalf of Slovenia. My country's historical experience makes it beholden to the promotion of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The preparation of the National Report, which is in front of you, was therefore a wide-ranging exercise that involved all the relevant government institutions, as well as representatives of the civil society. This attention is also reflected in the composition of the Slovenian national delegation to this session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, which consists of twenty people from seven ministries and three government offices, including Mr. Goran Klemenčič, the State Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior, Mr. Aleš Gulič, the Director of the Office for Religious Communities, and Mr. Stanko Baluh, the Director of the Office for National Minorities.

The highest legal act in Slovenia is its Constitution. It is therefore significant that one third of all its provisions are related to human rights issues. In fact, in our Constitution the chapter entitled "Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms" follows directly after the introductory, "General Provisions" part of the document. Moreover, according to the Constitution, the international legal instruments are directly applicable in the Slovenian legal order. Slovenia is thus subject to all communication procedures of the United Nations human rights treaties it has ratified. In this connection, let me also point out that my country has extended an open invitation to all bodies mandated for special procedures.

Slovenia has an active national human rights institution, the Human Rights Ombudsman, providing an independent assessment of the national implementation of human rights obligations and standards. The Government, for its part, endeavours to secure to all people residing in the country all human rights and fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and binding international agreements. In this connection, it also supports the existence of a strong, free and independent civil society and the inclusion of its views in the efforts aimed at improving the human rights situation at the national, regional and international levels.

I would now like to update you on the developments in the last few months, since the adoption of the National Report.

Let me start with the issue of the so-called erased persons. Being fully aware of the need to settle the issue of people who did not apply for Slovenian citizenship in 1991/1992 and were consequently removed from the register of permanent residence, the Government decided to implement the relevant decisions of the Constitutional Court. Thus, over 2,300 supplementary decisions were issued in 2009 to those whose permanent residence registration in Slovenia had terminated and those who had already obtained a permanent residence permit in Slovenia. Moreover, a law which will remedy other established inconsistencies of the Act Regulating the Legal Status of Citizens of the Former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Living in the Republic of Slovenia with the Constitution is currently under debate in the National Assembly. This means that after eighteen years the issue will be finally solved.
in a comprehensive manner, consistent with the Slovenian Constitution and international human rights standards.

Another recent development is the on-going work on the proposed new Family Code. The draft text regulates comprehensively the entire family law, focusing on relations within the family for the child’s benefit. The first reading of the code will be held by the National Assembly this March or April. The new proposals include the prohibition of corporal punishment of children and the system of children’s advocacy. The draft Family Code also recognizes equal status to same-sex partnerships and to heterosexual partnerships.

The Government has also prepared a new Act on Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities. The public debate has just concluded and the act is supposed to be adopted later this year. The act will regulate the protection of disabled persons, in particular the prohibition of discrimination based on disability and measures to provide equal opportunities for the disabled. Moreover, a public debate has been launched on a new Placement of Children with Special Needs Act, which proposes the idea of inclusion of children with special needs in regular schools and a better inter-sector cooperation with different institutions coping with children with special needs.

With regard to combating domestic violence, the efforts of all stakeholders have been stepped up on the basis of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act and a new Penal Code – both from 2008 – and the Resolution on the National Programme of Domestic Violence Prevention for the Period 2009-2014. The police have established a system of training for the prevention of and reaction to domestic violence. In addition, the police implement preventive programmes for younger children. This past December, the Ministry of the Interior launched a broad awareness-raising campaign, in cooperation with a number of NGOs. The Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs, as well as other relevant ministries, have also prepared the Rules on Cooperation on Procedures for dealing with domestic violence in the field of health, education and family.

In connection with the Roma community, I would like to point out that following the adoption of the umbrella Act in 2007, the Government is planning to adopt a new, integrated National Programme of Measures for Roma for the Period 2010-2015, probably later this very month. The document contains measures in key areas of social life; namely, education, schooling, health care, employment, living conditions, culture and fighting discrimination.

There are also new developments in the area of integration of immigrants. In accordance with the Decree on Aliens Integration from 2008, free courses in Slovenian language and classes in Slovenian history, culture and constitution were launched in autumn of last year. The implementation of programmes marks the development of a comprehensive governmental integration policy and represents the first real opportunity for creating positive effects for both the migrants and Slovenia. We have also published special leaflets with key data in nine languages in order to provide as many aliens as possible with correct and understandable information about the country they are in. A new website is also being prepared to facilitate access to all integration measures.

In the field of international protection, the Act Amending the International Protection Act remedied non-compliance with the Slovenian Constitution. Moreover, the quality standards of accommodation and care of applicants for international protection have been gradually improving through strengthened cooperation with NGOs and implementation of their programmes that are co-financed by the European Refugee Fund.
In order to step up efforts in combating all forms of discrimination, an awareness-raising campaign "Equal in Diversity" was launched in December 2009. Special attention is given to human rights education and training, which we see as a key tool for an efficient protection and promotion of human rights. Instruction in human rights is also incorporated in the training of Slovenian armed forces, police and the judiciary. Additional courses are organized with the aim to enable the police to deal with family violence and to work with the Roma community.

In the foreign policy area the strengthening of the international human rights norms and standards is one of our key priorities. We are therefore in the process of drafting a national action plan for the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions for the protection of women and children in armed conflicts. We are proud to have been among the first to sign the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Its ratification is our priority for this year. Similarly, the ratification process of the Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance is also due to start this year. There are also some regional human rights instruments of the Council of Europe, such as the Convention on Access to Official Documents, which we plan to ratify later this year.

Let me now address some of the questions that were submitted in advance and that have not been already covered in my remarks.

Argentina, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Germany enquired about women's rights, in particular in relation to access to the labour market, equal pay, stereotypical attitudes, violence, and decision-making.

The situation and role of women is constantly being monitored by the Government with a view to eliminating discrimination against women and closing the gap between de jure and de facto gender equality, in particular in the areas of participation of women and men in the labour market, as well as in public and political decision-making. Actions include the identification of obstacles in achieving gender equality and the development of response mechanisms to overcome them. In this connection, I am glad to report that last year my ministry carried out a pioneering research project, which resulted in the publication at the beginning of this year of an in-depth analysis on equal opportunities in Slovenian diplomacy.

The National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men sets out the goal of limiting stereotyped presentation of female and male roles in the media and advertising. To overcome the traditional division of duties and responsibilities between women and men, as well as girls and boys, the Government is implementing various activities aimed at encouraging the men and employers in reaching a more balanced share of responsibility in professional, family and private lives.

All acts of violence are criminalised and defined either as criminal offences or minor offences under the Protection of Public Order Act. An important step was also the adoption of the Family Violence Prevention Act. Slovenia has been actively undertaking measures to reduce violence against women and girls for a number of years. These activities also involve the police and its repressive and preventative measures.

The United Kingdom and the Netherlands enquired about court backlogs and, in this connection, about the so-called Lukenda Project to eliminate them. Court backlogs indeed remain a challenge, one that my Government has been addressing with various measures.

In 2006 a special act was adopted to assist parties in legal proceedings, which introduced acceleratory legal remedies in cases of excessively long judicial proceedings, as well as
means of just satisfaction or compensation, especially in the form of financial indemnity. Already in 2005, a special programme for eliminating court backlogs was adopted, containing a series of measures relating *inter alia* to staff, premises and finances. The effectiveness of the implementation of the mentioned act and programme is being monitored by the European Court of Human Rights. To date, the reviews have been positive.

In 2009, amendments to the Act on the Protection of the Right to a Trial without Undue Delay were adopted with a view to strengthening the effectiveness of the act. Also last year, the upper level of the judicial branch assessed that the project for eliminating backlogs was being implemented fairly successfully. Preliminary results for 2009 thus show a significant, 11% decrease of court backlogs in Slovenia as compared with 2008. The Lukenda Project is thus on track to eliminate most of the court backlogs by the end of this year. However, efforts at eliminating backlogs will also continue in the future.

The Czech Republic enquired about the efforts of the Slovenian Government to strengthen effective protection against discrimination.

In this connection, it is important to point out that, in accordance with the Slovenian Constitution, all persons on the territory of the Republic of Slovenia are guaranteed the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, irrespective of their national origin and without any discrimination whatsoever. Anti-discrimination legislation includes a basic and general law on eliminating discrimination, as well as provisions ensuring equal treatment in laws regulating areas such as the labour market, social security, education and health. For example, with regard to discrimination in the labour market, the Employment Relationship Act prohibits discrimination based on ethnicity, race or ethnic origin, national or social background in the recruitment and appointment phase, during the employment relationship and in the termination of employment contracts. In the event of a violation of the prohibition of discrimination, the employer must provide compensation to the candidate or employee, and is subject to fines imposed by labour inspection.

As mentioned before, this past December the "Equal in Diversity" campaign, aimed at raising awareness of the prohibition of discrimination and of its detrimental effects, was launched in Slovenia. The main project activity is a national media campaign in the form of TV and radio ads, posters and billboards, t-shirts, a documentary for the school population and a special website. Seminars will also be held for judges, equal opportunities co-ordinators, members of the business sector, representatives of trade unions and government officials, with the aim of raising their awareness and training them on non-discrimination mainstreaming. Current problems and priorities for further work towards elimination of multiple forms of discrimination will be identified at workshops with NGOs.

Furthermore, a special brochure is being prepared with basic information on the prohibition of discrimination, including on the grounds of nationality, racial or ethnic origin, sex, health condition, disability, language, religious or other grounds. It will be translated into several languages – Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Romani, Italian and Hungarian – and published also in a Braille version and distributed to all target groups.

In conclusion, I would like to express my satisfaction at the fact that I have the opportunity to participate in this new and important mechanism for the protection and promotion of human rights. Slovenia was actively involved in the creation of the Universal Periodic Review and we regard it as a major achievement for the international community. On behalf of my Government, I therefore look forward to a productive and rewarding exchange of views.

Thank you.