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High-Level Segment

Statement by

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of the Czech Republic

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Geneva, 1 March 2016

Mr. President,

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to address the Human Rights Council at its ten years anniversary. The Czech Republic spent almost half of the Council's existence as its active member. We take human rights seriously – both here at the international scene as well as at home. At the domestic level, we have various mechanisms that promote the progressive realization of all human rights, including rights of employees and collective rights at all.

My position – the post of Government Minister for Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Legislation – is one of such mechanisms. It is for the first time that the Czech Minister for Human Rights appears before this Council and I am very pleased to have this privilege.

The Czech Republic strongly supports a robust multilateral human rights system which responds timely and effectively to human rights violations and abuses around the globe. We are therefore committed to playing a consistent and active role in the Human Rights Council. The Czech Republic was the founding member of the Council and with the end of 2014 finished its second membership. In less than three years, we hope to be back.

The Czech Republic highly values the Council's ability to address, within its mandate, all thematic human rights issues and situations which require its attention. We firmly believe that its prompt and adequate responses to human rights situations can contribute to strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights and thus prevent the outbreak of a human rights crisis. Discussion and action on country-specific human rights issues represent an important strand of the Council's work and mandate.

I believe that the international community not only should be able but must deliberate on grave human rights situations wherever they occur. Not for the sake of "naming and shaming" as opponents of such deliberations call it but for the sake of concrete individuals on the ground suffering from violations and abuses of human rights and for the sake of stopping and preventing atrocities, violence and injustice. The Czech delegation will address

the specific human rights situations (that deserve attention of this body) more concretely in the debates under the respective agenda item.

In order to function effectively and face the current human rights challenges boldly, the Council must increase its efforts to rationalize its programme of work and boost its visibility and impact on the ground. In this regard, Mr. President, the Czech Republic supports your and your predecessor's activities that aim at streamlining the work, increasing effectiveness of the Council, assessing the UPR mechanisms after its two cycles and strengthening linkages and complementarity between the Council and the General Assembly. At the same time, we constantly put an emphasis on the independence of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council's special procedures as well as Treaty Bodies.

Mr. President,

This Council Session also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). This anniversary provides an opportunity for stocktaking and increasing our efforts to promote awareness and strengthen implementation of the rights set out in the Covenants. The Czech Republic is a strong promoter of universality, indivisibility, interdependence and inter-relatedness of human rights.

While advocating for all human rights, in line with the recently updated Human Rights and Transition Promotion Policy Concept, the Czech Republic focuses on: supporting civil society, including human rights defenders; promoting the freedom of expression and free access to information, including the freedom of the media; promoting full and equal participation in political and public affairs; supporting institution-building in the area of the rule of law; promoting equality and non-discrimination, as well as human rights in employment and in the environmental context.

The promotion of human rights, as it is mentioned in Concept of the Czech Republic's Foreign Policy approved by my government last year, includes sharing the Czech experience

of the transition to democracy and sustainable social market economy with transition countries and societies interested in this experience. The Czech Republic will pay attention to harnessing social dialogue for the more effective promotion of economic and social rights.

In the context of the Human Rights Council, the Czech Republic continues working on improving and widening the exercise of the right to participate in public affairs, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in the ICCPR, representing a cornerstone of democracy and functioning societies. Three resolutions on equal participation in political and public affairs consensually adopted by this Council are witness to our efforts in this field.

In this respect, I would like to extend a warm invitation to a workshop dedicated to effective implementation of the right to participate in public affairs which will be organized in the Palais des Nations on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May. The Czech Republic also strongly supports free and enabling space for civil society. Respect for the freedom of assembly and association, freedom of expression and of the media are essential building blocks of democracy, rule of law and public participation.

Mr. President,

A week ago, on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the delegation of the Czech Republic took part in the 63rd session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which considered the Czech Republic's periodic report on the legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures that we have adopted to give effect to the provisions of the Convention and on the progress made in that respect. The Czech delegation consisted of national experts from relevant ministries and was led by the head of the Department for Human Rights and Minority Protection from my office.

The delegation had the opportunity to discuss the position and the rights of women in the Czech Republic. The Committee raised various questions with significant emphasis on the situation of women from minorities, specifically that of Roma women, women with disabilities and migrant women. We are well aware of the fact that many challenges in the area of gender equality still lie ahead of us. Therefore, the concluding observations, which

the Committee will issue in the next days, will be one of the crucial documents for the further development of gender equality in the Czech Republic.

Let me give you a few other examples of concrete steps my country takes in the area of human rights. I will shortly submit to the Czech Government the Action Plan on Equal Representation of Women and Men in Decision-making Positions for the years 2016–2018. A few weeks ago, the Government approved the Czech Republic's signing of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention).

In relation to the promotion of human rights the Czech Republic devotes specific attention to the situation of people living in socially excluded localities. In mid-February the Government adopted the Strategy to Combat Social Exclusion for the years 2016 - 2020. We have set specific objectives in the areas of security, housing, family support, social services and social work, education and employment that we want to achieve by 2020. The Strategy newly elaborates on the topics of debt and health that represent forgotten areas essential for solving the issues of socially excluded localities.

We are also interested in the topic of business and human rights. I have established a working group that focuses on the effective national implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The group, comprising representatives from the business field as well as civil society, trade unions and relevant ministries, has begun to draft the Business and Human Rights National Action Plan which is to be completed in a year from now.

My office also takes part in discussions about social dimension of foreign policy of the Czech Republic, which should take into account all types of rights also on the level of international relations. In its multilateral activity, the Czech Republic will continue to be involved in the work of the United Nations Human Rights Council and other UN bodies, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). We also approved financial contribution for ILO projects and UN Women.

The Czech Republic strongly supports the Universal Periodic Review mechanism, a unique State-driven process, which provides an opportunity to review Human Rights record of all countries as well as to inform about the actions taken to improve human rights situations and to fulfil human rights obligations. Under my leadership, we are currently undertaking a review of implementation of recommendations addressed to the Czech Republic in the second cycle and we will soon start preparations for the third cycle of the process.

Mr. President,

I wish the Human Rights Council, under your able leadership, to effectively continue its work and successfully tackle the challenges it faces.

Thank you.