

Honourable Mr. Chairman,
Your Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to extend to you the most cordial greetings on behalf of the Montenegrin Government, our delegation, and that of my own. It is my great pleasure to take part in the plenary session, for the adoption of the final report on the status of human rights in Montenegro, within the Second Cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Montenegro presented the National Report on the Status of Human Rights at the session of the UPR Working Group in January this year, when we were given the total of 124 recommendations. Montenegro has endorsed all except three of those recommendations and one partially. As the process continued, Montenegro exercised its right to addendum, where we acknowledged our positions with regard to the UPR Second Cycle recommendations, the addendum having been distributed in the course of the plenary session preparations. The document is a result of common work by governmental institutions, members of judiciary and prosecutor's office, the Protector of Human Rights Office and non-governmental organisations, and makes a summary of the commitments by the state of Montenegro regarding further implementation.

Enhanced building of institutions for protection of human rights and freedoms pursuant to international standards and obligations is in the focus of our Government's efforts.

Montenegro will continue full cooperation with the system of treaty bodies and mechanisms for human rights protection. To that extent, drafting is underway of the Initial Report on Implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as of the Initial Report on Implementing the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Montenegro pays particular attention to cooperation with the system of special procedures, keeping a standing invitation thereto. In that context, but also as a confirmation of openness and cooperation, Special Rapporteur for the promotion and protection of freedom of thought and expression will visit Montenegro from the 12th through 17th of June, which will be the first visit by a special rapporteur since the regaining of independence. We consider this visit to be a contribution to a more efficient implementation of all the recommendations which we have endorsed through the UPR mechanism regarding media freedom and protection of journalists. Activities have been taken in this area, which have contributed considerably to the creation of a more favourable environment for the exercise of

this right. International standards have been elaborated and implemented through legislation. As for solving previous cases of violence against journalists, competent state authorities will continue their work to identify the perpetrators of violence against journalists, pursue efficient, effective and impartial investigations with a view to ensuring full freedom of expression.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Montenegro will continue intensive reforms of judiciary aimed at strengthening independence and impartiality. Amendments to the legislation on judiciary provided more objective criteria for the election and promotion of judges and public prosecutors both through the system of their appraisal and improvement of election procedures. In addition, constitutional amendments will enable further amendments to judiciary-related legislation, enabling thereby a more detailed and comprehensive reform of election and appointment of judges and prosecutors, and their deputies, as well as other issues relevant to creating an independent and autonomous judiciary.

In addition, the Government developed the Proposal for the Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code, which certainly contributes to an increasing legal security of citizens and protection of human rights, the proposal being harmonised to the highest possible extent with the relevant *acquis communautaire*, conventions of the Council of Europe and United Nations, as sources of international criminal law.

Amendments to the Criminal Code have introduced a number of novelties regarding protection of the rights of a child. Apart from this, a provision was introduced referring to a mandatory aggravated circumstance for criminal offences committed out of hatred, while two new security measures have been introduced: prohibition of approaching the victim, and removal from apartment or other dwelling. The criminal offence 'violation of equality' was amended by its extension to two additional grounds for discrimination, which is aimed at strengthening criminal-law protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens.

Montenegro has completed legislation related to combating corruption, while the institutional framework is in the phase of enhancing efficiency and integrity. A new two-year Action Plan for Combating Corruption and Organised Crime was adopted in mid-May this year. In December 2012, GRECO noted that all five recommendations given to Montenegro by that body of the Council of Europe, with regard to incrimination, had been implemented.

The Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings has resulted in a number of activities towards strengthening professional capacities of the authorities competent in combating human trafficking in Montenegro, aiming at a higher-quality identification of trafficked persons, as well as their adequate protection and (re)integration.

Having regard to the obligation of finding a durable and sustainable solution to the matter of displaced and internally displaced persons, a task which the Government of Montenegro is absolutely committed to tackle successfully, a legal deadline for submitting applications to regulate the legal status of those persons in Montenegro has been extended till the end of this year. At present, about 7,300 of those persons have already settled their status, in line with relevant national regulations.

The Proposal for the Law on Ratification of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness has been drafted, and will enter the government procedure for its ratification this June already, after which it will be submitted for the parliamentary procedure.

Government keeps on providing support to displaced and internally displaced persons in obtaining documents to regulate their legal status, thus continuing to organise travels to their respective countries of origin. According to the records of the Refugee Care and Support Office, it is necessary to provide assistance in obtaining documents to another 200 persons approximately.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Amendments are underway to the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination and the Law on the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms, with a view to a full harmonisation with European standards and full protection of all victims of discrimination. To that extent, Montenegro will continue to implement all necessary measures and activities in order to ensure full implementation of ratified international instruments and national legislation, especially in relation to the protection of vulnerable groups.

Montenegro will work further towards increasing capacities of the Ombudsman to secure full implementation of the normative framework related to protection against discrimination and prevention of torture.

The Government of Montenegro adopted this May the Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life of LGBT Persons 2013-2018, aimed at eliminating any direct or indirect discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. Having adopted this Strategy, the Government is committed to work actively to secure that legal and other measures are promoted and effectively implemented; the Government is decisive to stand against stereotypes and prejudice faced by LGBT persons; it is dedicated to activities such as awareness campaigns, trainings of the employed in the authorities competent in protecting LGBT rights, especially in police and prosecutor's office, as well as to ongoing cooperation with LGBT community, which will significantly contribute to the process of achieving LGBT equality.

We remain committed to preserving multi-ethnic harmony in Montenegro and to upgrading the respect for minority rights. With regard thereto, we have created new legal prerequisites and initiated processes of electing members of the second compositions of minority councils, as very important and representative minority bodies.

As for Roma and Egyptian population, we actively work on implementing the Strategy for Improving the Status of Roma and Egyptian Population. We work very intensively on preparing Roma children for school and monitoring their regular attendance at lectures, aimed at desegregation of those children within the Montenegrin education system. Montenegro is to take over the presidency of the regional initiative - the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. We will use our presidency of the Decade to interconnect major stakeholders in discussions on the existing practices of the Decade and opportunities available through other international initiatives, especially the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies 2020, and to thereby continue and enhance efforts and activities which will newly encourage the existing international initiatives for the Roma inclusion. Our basic priorities will focus on issues such as legal status resolution, anti-discrimination with a special focus on violence against women, involvement of young Roma in the Decade processes, and the protection of cultural and linguistic identity.

In the field of promoting women's rights and achieving gender equality, we are committed to working on implementing the law and strategic documents related thereto, while we will pay special attention to economic empowerment of women, increasing the participation of women in public and political life, and combating violence against women. We remain dedicated to combating violence against women and domestic violence through strengthening inter-ministry cooperation, in

order for all victims of violence to get adequate and coordinated protection and assistance. In addition, we provide ongoing education of persons employed in the institutions, and awareness-raising campaigns.

As for the social and child protection, I would like to emphasise that public debate has been underway with regard to the Draft Strategy for the Development of Social and Child Care System, Strategy for the Development of Elderly Social Care, which will enable the implementation of the new Law on Social and Child Care adopted in May 2013. The Law introduces new social and child care services in the community and provides for minimum standards in the provision of such services. It also introduces a novelty regarding the foundation of the Office for Social and Child Care, to perform developmental, advisory, research, and other specialised affairs within social and child care.

As for children with disabilities, day care centres have been set up as public institutions of social and child care in six municipalities. Establishment of such centres in another four municipalities is planned for this year, with the objective to eventually open them in all municipalities in Montenegro.

As for the position of religious communities, the next step will be to adopt the Law on Legal Status of Religious Communities and the law which will regulate other matters important to religious communities, in line with new social and political circumstances. The significance and current nature of this issue were the reasons for us to propose the adoption of the law by the end of this year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Government of Montenegro confirms its commitment to the policy of continuous upgrade of human rights and freedoms, but also its determination to actively contribute, along with other society stakeholders, to a sustainable building of a society which fosters a culture of respect for human rights.

The commitment by Member States to support the Human Rights Council and implement its full mandate in all respects is crucial. As a Member State of the Council, Montenegro will put in its maximum efforts to enhance credibility and efficiency of this human rights protection system. We will work on the efficiency of the UPR mechanism to contribute to its becoming an efficient instrument for a transparent and objective evaluation of human rights in each and any UN Member State. To that extent, the cooperation of all relevant entities is extremely important

- namely, of the Human Rights Council, special procedures, NGOs, and other observers.

Finally, I would like to highlight that the Government, in cooperation with the NGOs and all parties involved in drafting the UPR report, will launch the next phase, undoubtedly the most important one, and that is the application and monitoring of implementation of the Second Cycle recommendations. I believe that we will work efficiently and in the spirit of successful cooperation on applying legislation and strategic documents related to human rights, to the well-being of every citizen of Montenegro. To achieve that, we will develop a plan of implementation of the recommendations, on which we will work in cooperation with civil society. We also plan a more active involvement by the Parliament in the UPR process.

Thank you for your attention!