



ARMENIA

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Statement by Mrs. Lena Terzikian, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia

Honorable Madame Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,

Let me extend my sincere congratulation to you Madame Chairperson and other Bureau members on your election and wish you very success in your work. The delegation of the Republic of Armenia stands ready to assist you in the successful dispatch of your mission.

The most alarming and threatening challenges in the modern world remain those of poverty and inequality among people.

By signing the Millennium Declaration the world leaders decided to combine responsibilities to confront the social ills facing our societies and to achieve successful social and economic development. One of the main goals is to achieve and sustain a “society for all” and to ensure that each member of the society enjoys his or her rights and responsibilities on equal basis.

The world is in the midst of the financial crisis. The vulnerable groups of the society such as unemployed, people living in poor conditions, elderly and disabled people, youth and children are likely to be among the most affected. We believe that it is urgent to take appropriate measures to diminish the impact of the current financial and economic crisis.

In Armenia we face the same challenges and aim to foster a stable and integrated society, where all human rights are respected and all residents including vulnerable groups that are under special protection of the Government benefit from equality of opportunities provided by the national legislation.

Poverty is a hindrance to economic, social and human development and progress in our country. In the fall of 2008 The Government of Armenia revised the existing Poverty Reduction Strategic Program, which was adopted in 2003 and renamed into Program for Sustainable Development. The rapid economic growth with the average of 12.9% for the last five years compelled Government to devise more stringent indicators to be achieved by 2015.

Madam Chairperson,

By taking important measures such as improving the legal system, implementing state programs on enhancing the social protection sphere and increasing the state benefits, ensuring educational opportunities and decent employment, the Armenian Government endeavors to give special help to the vulnerable groups, enable them to participate in the social life of the country on an equal footing and share material and cultural achievements of the society.

In 2005 the Government adopted “2006-2015 strategy for social protection of the disabled people”, which aims to improve the rehabilitation service system, free of charge specialized medical care, improve the accessibility of basic social services, implement the key rehabilitation projects and help disabled people to improve their physical functions and self-reliance in daily life.

There are 7 government sponsored welfare homes for the elderly people. Around 2000 elderly and disabled lonely persons, in the framework of the state “At home care” program receive special care, food, clothing, medical care and benefits at their homes.

The Government has included education for handicapped children in the state compulsory education system and assists students with disabilities to get admitted to higher educational institutions or receive vocational training.

Madame Chairperson,

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which is an institutional focal point tasked with promoting and monitoring social integration, focuses on ensuring the social protection of the disabled and elderly people, extending protection to families in need, children and women, as the most vulnerable groups of the society. The department for handicapped people undertakes training courses and provides people with disabilities with decent jobs, as a result of which the rate of unemployment for the disabled has gradually decreased over the time.

Although the social security system provides elders with social, medical and psychological assistance, they are insufficient in terms of both quality and quantity. The Government of Armenia declared the 2009 budget a socially oriented one with the aim of achieving better social and economic conditions for the population through more and increased budget allocations. In 2008 the budget allocated for the social sphere amounted to \$11mln, in comparison to the \$7mln for the previous year.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia undertook the Program on the Population and Development Strategies, aimed at strengthening national capacities in the demographic field and providing that the population dynamics,

such as low birth rate, migration, and aging are taken into consideration and included in the national policy and different sector policies.

The recent figures show significant increase in child birth, as well as positive tendencies for the demographic situation: child mortality rate decreased from 18.5 per 1000 births in 1990's reaching 10.9 in 2008.

Certain actions and measures have been undertaken to ensure the welfare of the families in need. The Government introduced a system of privileged marriage loans, privileged apartment loans for newly married couples and a revised system of child benefits. During the last year the child support grants have significantly increased, comprising 1000 USD for the 3 and 4 child born into the family.

The Government approved National Plan of Action on "Improving the Status of Women and enhancing their role in the Society 2004-2010" defines the principles, priorities and key targets for public policies to address women's issues, achieve advancement of women proportionate to their education and professional levels and increase their participation in public decision-making.

The sufficient social conditions, engagement in the country's daily cultural and political life are the basis for the social integration of vulnerable groups.

The Armenian Government undertook appropriate steps to achieve tangible progress in the country and to ensure factual enjoyment of equal opportunities for all the members of the society. Yet much needs to be done: it is important to introduce efficient socio-economic complex measures to improve the social security system, to ensure financial security of the retired population, to expand and reform the system of elderly healthcare and social services, to ease the access for the handicapped people to the public services, museums, theatres, restaurants and public transportation means.

In the time of unprecedented global crisis, which has already affected Armenia, the valuable assistance of donor organizations such as EBRD, World Bank, which recently granted financial support to Armenia in the amount of 525 mln, Asian Bank and others, as well as combined efforts from the state and civil society, international organizations and NGO's will not only facilitate to overcome the current economic crisis, but also to secure a bright future for the country.

We are encouraged and rewarded by our extensive reforms. These reforms are irreversible and already showing results. The Government of Armenia will continue to do its utmost to ensure equal opportunities for all its citizens and pursue policies aimed at combating exclusion in whatever form it occurs.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.

