

**STATEMENT**

**by H.E. Mr. Artak Apitonian, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs  
at the 35<sup>th</sup> session of the Working Group on Universal Periodic Review of  
Armenia**

***Geneva, 23 January 2019***

Mme. President, Excellences,  
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to present the national report of Armenia in the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review.

Armenia supports the UPR process as an effective tool for improvement of the human rights situation on the international and national levels. We continue the practice of submission of mid-term reports covering the implementation of recommendations.

As a newly elected member of the Human Rights Council, Armenia reaffirms its unwavering commitment to enhance protection and promotion of human rights according to its voluntary pledges, in particular by building peaceful and inclusive societies, addressing the issues of prevention of genocide and mass atrocities, countering hate crimes targeting ethnic and religious groups, protecting the rights of women and refugees.

Before I turn to the main part of my report, I would like to address the dramatic changes, occurred in the political life of my country since our second UPR cycle.

In spring 2018, a popular peaceful non-violent Velvet revolution took place in Armenia. It was a bold manifestation of exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms, and marked a major step in Armenian history towards building a more democratic society. The Revolution gave a new impetus to legal, judicial, economic and social reforms in the country and to radical transformations in the fields of good governance, rule of law and human rights.

In December 2018, early parliamentary elections were held in the country, the results of which, for the first time in the history of independent Armenia, were not disputed either

through extra-judicial or judicial procedure, and were overwhelmingly accepted by both voters and political forces. The OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission emphasized that these elections were held with full respect for fundamental freedoms of expression, association, assembly and movement and enjoyed broad public trust. Armenia will continue its cooperation with international partners to ensure implementation of recommendations and to review legal framework, through an inclusive process.

The new Government is empowered by the very strong mandate and public support of the people. On numerous occasions the Government and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan emphasized that the revolution has created an environment where a human being is truly a supreme value, and the protection of his/her rights is a key priority for the state.

Accordingly, a major part of the Government Programme is devoted to human rights protection, justice and provision of equality before the law. The Government works in an open and transparent manner, the Prime-Minister and cabinet members constantly report on their activities to the public, inter alia, through frequent and full use of social media and digital technologies.

As another significant development, I would like to mention the constitutional reform of the country, which led to a transition from semi-presidential to parliamentary republic. The constitutional changes targeted at shaping a more democratic system of governance with clear separation and balance between its branches.

Madame President,

The new National Strategy for Human Rights Protection and its Action Plan for next three years has been adopted last December. These strategic documents have been drafted with the full engagement and active participation of all stakeholders – government institutions, civil society and international partners. They set specific actions and long-term goals for various actors to improve the promotion and protection of human rights.

The Armenian vibrant civil society has been playing very active and crucial role in upholding democratic processes during all periods of the country's development, and particularly during the political transformations of 2018. We strongly count on their unremitting participation in promotion of democracy, good governance, prosperity and equality.

Last November we celebrated the 15th anniversary of the Human Rights Defender's office which was re-accredited with "A" status last year. This status it has been receiving since 2006, which comes to prove independence, credibility and effective operation of

the Defender of Armenia. The Defender has permanent representatives in the Constitutional Court and Parliament to maintain strong institutional interaction.

Madame President,

Armenia is implementing a wide range of reforms to ensure full and unimpeded realization of civil and political rights.

One of the pillars of the package is the judicial reform aimed at ensuring independence of judiciary and restoring public trust towards the system. Its key elements are the introduction of balanced mechanism for evaluation of the integrity of judges as well as the establishment of functional, structural, material and social guarantees of their independence.

Unwavering fight and campaign against corruption is another important priority of the Government. The Anti-corruption Strategy introduces institutional framework focused upon prevention, examination and education. It includes issues related to the establishment of the anti-corruption institutional body, anti-corruption court, penalization of illegal assets, verification of property status of public persons and enlargement of the asset and property declaration system. Recently, number of corruption-related criminal cases, including against high-ranking officials, were instituted and examined.

The ongoing reform in the Police, apart from its strong anti-corruption component, aims also at transforming it to more prevention-oriented body. A new specialized unit would be created for the protection of witnesses. It is remarkable that according to Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International released yesterday, Armenia has improved its rank by 28 points from 105<sup>th</sup> place to 77<sup>th</sup>.

The Velvet Revolution contributed to the strengthening of freedom of media and freedom of expression in Armenia. The success of political transformation was not only based on strong will and unity of population, but also due to the wide use of online communications. This change brought Armenia to a new level of democracy. In the 2019 Index of the Reporters Without Borders, Armenia was ranked the 61st making a remarkable improvement of 19 notches in comparison to the previous year. Armenia is among the countries who last year have recorded the biggest progress on internet freedom and is ranked in the top 10 free countries along with Australia, United Kingdom, United States, France, Italy and Georgia.

Nevertheless, there are several issues and challenges that Armenia faces vis-à-vis the freedom of media. One of them is the issue of transparency of media outlets ownership, which Armenia intends to address through development of legislation on beneficial

ownership. The dissemination of misinformation, fake news and hate speech, the proliferation of the anonymous social media accounts are also among the major threats to ensuring the realization of the constitutional rights of persons to have access to information. While the Government is determined to counter those challenges, it is adamant in maintaining and unequivocally guaranteeing strong grounds for people to exercise their right of expression and freedom of speech.

The unhindered exercise of the right to freedom of assembly is also of crucial significance for the Government, which took major steps in bringing law-enforcement agencies to the best international standards. The historical low number of complaints during last year is indicative of the tendency.

Mme. President,

This year, the global community will mark two very important anniversaries – the 25th anniversary of adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security. 2020 is a crucial year for making progress towards gender equality, empowerment of women and strengthening their contribution to international peace and security. Armenia as a chair of the Commission on the Status of Women will encourage and promote internationally CSW agenda through assessment of current challenges and full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Last year the Government approved the Strategy on the gender policy implementation for next four years which provides an opportunity to identify priorities, determine responsibilities, allocate resources and initiate actions within the defined time frame. The Women Affairs Council was reorganized under the Prime Minister. It will focus particularly on the elimination of violence against women and girls, their economic empowerment, implementation of gender mainstreaming laws and policies, etc.

Armenia highly values the involvement of women in building peace and security. Last February, Armenia adopted the first National Action Plan on implementation of the provisions of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Armenia attaches special importance to ensuring active participation of women in all stages of conflict cycle and protection of women affected by conflict and their human rights. I would like to recall in this regard that the “Women for Peace” campaign has been inaugurated in Armenia with an aim to provide an inclusive platform for women and mothers to promote peace and reconciliation in the conflict torn areas in our region and beyond.

The active role played by women in the Velvet revolution still remains to be translated into more tangible results in representation of women in the political and economic life

of the country, which was also rightfully noted by various partners. Some successes are recorded in the trendy spheres of economy. Par example, the information technologies sector of Armenia, one of the GDP growth key sources, has registered 32% of women participation against 20% of international average. However, the level of women representation in the parliament and senior-executive positions – about quarter of the mandates – remains low. And although additional efforts are needed with a view of achieving gender parity in all social realms, we are, however, convinced that its is doable with existing strong political will of the Armenian authorities.

In 2017, the Law on prevention of domestic violence was adopted. In January 2018, Armenia signed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and a public awareness campaign is currently underway. Starting from last year, Government co-funded centres in Yerevan and in all provinces have been providing support to victims of domestic violence.

Mme. President,

The principle of non-discrimination is the key element within the Government human rights policy. Promotion, protection and realization of the rights of the most vulnerable groups of population not to be discriminated against is a fundamental aspect of Government human right programming and is closely related to the other two core principles - participation and accountability. It is often the lack of participation of the rights holders and the lack of accountability of key duty-bearers that perpetuates and reinforces discrimination.

Armenia has already elaborated a comprehensive and standalone Law on Ensuring Equality envisaging efficient mechanisms for the defence of rights against all types of discrimination and creation of the specialized body within the Human Rights Defender's mandate, which will empower it to assist the victims of discrimination and to launch an examination in alleged cases.

The exclusion of existing stereotypes and prejudices against persons with disabilities, the protection of their fundamental rights and freedoms, inviolability of private and family life and social integration are among the main directions of the state social policy. The Government undertook a gradual approach in the process of transition to inclusive education system and relevant legislation has been developed to promote de-institutionalization programs. The number of children placed in care institutions has been reduced in recent years, following the policy of ensuring the right of the child to live in family.

As a country which has been receiving refugees since late 1980s, protection of rights of refugees has always been of utmost importance, and the Government strived to create decent life conditions for refugees and to ensure their full integration.

Dear Colleagues,

In Armenia we have a number of minority groups that do not have a kin state such as Yezidis, Assyrians and Kurds. Integration of these groups within the sophisticated fabric of our society while maintaining their strong ethnic and cultural identity is equally both an asset enriching our common culture and a measure of state's responsibility in implementing its international and national commitments.

The Constitutional amendments of 2015 guarantee seats to the representatives of four largest national minority groups in the National Assembly. Currently the seats are allocated to the Yezidi, Russian, Assyrian and Kurdish minorities.

Among the other significant developments in Armenia, I would like to mention the inauguration of the largest Yezidi temple in the world last September, attended by the Armenian high-ranking officials, as well as the leaders of the Yezidi communities from all over the world.

President,

The Government of Armenia considers the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals as one of the most important tools for implementing comprehensive internal reforms. Armenia was among the first countries to present its Voluntary National Review (VNR) summarizing the progress of implementation of the Agenda for Sustainable Development. Creative approaches, particularly the establishment of an innovative platform – the National SDG Innovation Lab of Armenia – are trademarks of Government's policy towards nationalisation and implementation of SDGs.

The "Leave no one behind" pledge is the main principle of the activities of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and should be universally applied. People living in conflict areas should not be deprived of the full enjoyment of their rights, including through the close cooperation with the international institutions. In this context it is of utmost importance to provide the access of humanitarian organizations to conflict areas which could assess the situation on the ground and facilitate provision of necessary assistance.

Mme. President,

Armenia still faces a number of challenges and obstacles in full enjoyment of wide range of human rights due to imposition on the country of unilateral coercive measures .... and

its adverse consequences that impede the full achievement of economic and social development and, as such, is detrimental to sustainable development.

Alarming tendencies in different parts of the world, including increase of number of international and interstate conflicts, unprecedented in recent years level of bellicose public discourse and hate speech, open glorification of mass-murderers and justification of international crimes, including the crimes against humanity, destruction of historical and cultural heritage, these are challenges for the human rights protection systems on national and global levels. In a more disturbing note, some of these actions are instigated or promoted by authorities of some states.

As rightfully noted by the UN Secretary-General in his 2019 report on the prevention of genocide, “alarmingly, most conflicts come hand in hand with allegations of serious violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law being committed”.

Armenia reiterates the necessity to protect national, racial, ethnic and religious minorities from the threats to their very existence, and continues its contribution to the fight against discrimination, racism, intolerance against these minorities, inter alia, by raising this problem internationally. Close attention to the risks of the recurrence of the crime of genocide and mobilization of the international community in the fight against this crime will remain of utmost priority for my Government in fulfilling its international obligations in the field of human rights.

Madame President,

This was a brief overview of the human rights situation and developments in Armenia since last UPR cycle. Please note that most of the issues will be more thoroughly addressed by my colleagues.

Before concluding my introductory statement, I want to address a technical detail regarding the UPR documentation, particularly I would like to draw your attention to serious inconsistencies in the Compilation on Armenia prepared by the OHCHR. It's striking to see an absence of any reference to huge transformations and positive changes in my country during last two years, which drew a strong public support and praise on the part of international officials and organizations, including a number of references by the UN Secretary General. Armenia was topping the success lists of almost all international human rights watchdogs, but it seems this news bypassed OHCHR team.

The brief study of UPR inputs from various UN country teams also reveals concerns on lack of unified approach and common criteria, which runs contrary to the main provisions and the spirit of the HRC Resolution 5/1, particularly against the principle of

universal coverage and equal treatment of states. Needless to say that UN country team inputs should be in full compliance with their mandates.

Now I would like to give the floor back to you, Mme President, for the first round of interventions.