UNITED NATIONS **E**

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2005/G/28
24 March 2005

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sixty-first session
Agenda item 9

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD

Note verbale dated 24 March 2005 from the Permanent Mission of Belarus to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations at Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and, referring to the report on the situation of human rights in Belarus submitted by Adrian Severin, Special Rapporteur, in accordance with resolution 2004/14, has the honour to submit information on social and economic developments in Belarus, based on the reports of international organizations.

The Mission requests the Office to distribute this information* as an official document of the sixty-first session of the Commission of Human Rights.

* Reproduced in the annex as received, in the language of submission only.

Annex

Information on social and economic development in Belarus based on the reports of international organizations

According to the **UNDP Human Development Report 2004**, published on July 15, 2004, Belarus:

- has the lowest among CIS countries total debt service as percent of GDP (1.4 percent only);
- takes the lead of all CIS countries over adult literacy (99.7 percent);
- passes all CIS countries, as well as such EU countries as Latvia, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Portugal, Greece, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, Luxemburg, Austria, Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium, and the Netherlands in public expenditure on education (6 percent of GDP);
- is the first among CIS countries on such socially meaningful index as health expenditure per capita (464 dollars);
- has the lowest among CIS countries under-five mortality rate;
- 100 percent of the population of Belarus have sustainable access to an improved water source, so far this figure has not been achieved by any other CIS country;
- leads among CIS countries and some EU member states (Lithuania and Poland) by the amount of telephone mainlines (299 per 1000 people);
- has twice as many Internet users compared with Russia, and 4 times more than Ukraine
- has no absolute poverty: only 1 percent of the nation's entire population had an income that was less than 2 US$ per day.
- leads CIS countries in accommodation commissioned per one resident: each resident had 22.3 square meters of total dwelling area as compared to 22 square meters in the Ukraine and 20 square meters in Russia.

According to the **UNICEF Report "The State of the World's Children 2004"**, Belarus occupies a well-deserved place in the world in protecting and strengthening children's health.

In particular, as per the integrated under-5 mortality rate (the coefficient covers such indices as nutrition, immunization, school education and medical services, and security of the child's environment) Belarus, along with Ukraine, ranks 125th among 193 countries of the world, ahead of Russia, Latvia and Romania (rank 121st), Georgia (101st), Moldova (96th), Armenia (94th), Kyrgyzstan (71st), Tajikistan (62nd), Kazakhstan (51st), Turkmenistan (49th) and Azerbaijan (64th).

According to **World Bank Report** "**Belarus: Poverty Assessment. Can Poverty Reduction and Access to Services Be Sustained?"** Belarus recovered GDP growth relatively rapidly after the initial economic shock associated with independence, reduced poverty levels significantly, maintained wide coverage of basic education and health services, and achieved this without gross exacerbation of

inequality. The policy framework in place has been successful in maintaining living standards and reducing poverty better than in several transition economies. (p.xv)

The performance-enhancing reforms in education, health and social protection, which Belarus has embarked on, are in the right direction. The aim of these reforms is to enhance the effectiveness and quality of these services. (p.iii)

The poverty reduction and inequality performance of Belarus is impressive. Belarus has already embarked on a number of reforms to support these objectives, especially in the last 2-3 years and especially in terms of institutional reforms to its education, health and social protection service delivery and financing systems, and the reduction in the generalized, untargeted utility subsidy for households. (p.ix)

In 2001, among managers of organizations or their deputies, 40.7% were females. This is a very high indicator of female representation among the top layer of management, compared to most other countries in the world. (p.9)

Belarus' poverty monitoring and analysis system has potential to be a "good practice" for the region. (p.iii)

Belarus can be justly proud of the elaborate system of social services it provides to its population. The ability of households to access quality education, health and social protection services makes a large difference to their living standards in the present, and their prospects for the future. (p.76)

Poverty reduction.

Sustained growth, coupled with a relatively stable income distribution, succeeded in reducing poverty headcount from 39.4% in 1997 to 18.5% in 2002. (p.19)

Compared to other transition economies, Belarus has one of the lowest poverty rates at the lower regional line of $2.15 per capita per day.

Social protection, wages, pensions

The social protection system is almost universal, covering about 4 in 5 persons. Pensions are found to be the most adequate benefit, in part because of a strong policy of indexing pensions to real wages. Child allowances are also found to provide adequate protection. (p.61)

More than 14% of GDP or 31% of the consolidated budget expenditure in 2004 were channeled to social assistance and insurance programs. (p.61)

Real wages more than doubled in the last 7 years. (p.vi)

The level of wage inequality in Belarus is not very high by FSU and CEE standards. (p.28)

Belarus' coverage of the population with pensions is the same as in Poland, Hungary, Romania or Bulgaria. (p.63)

Education

In Belarus over the period of 1999-2001, the share of education expenditures relative to GDP increased from 6.4 to 6.8% with a concomitant increase in education's share of total public expenditures from 16.9 to 19.0%. By comparison, in 1999, OECD countries spent (on average) 5.2% of GDP and 12.7% of total public expenditures on education. Belarus' spending on education is high if compared to most of its neighboring countries as well: in 1999, public expenditures on education in Russia amounted to 3.2% of GDP, in Poland 5.1%, in Ukraine 3.7%. (p.41)

Health

Belarus shows some of the best health indicators in the region and an extensive coverage of health services. (p.49)

Belarus has one of the highest numbers of doctors per population in Europe and Central Asia Region. (p.55)

Belarus' health care resources are distributed in a way, which provides relatively god access to health care services across all socioeconomic groups. (p.57)

Total expenditures in health account for 5% of GDP, while this is below the government's target of 7.5%, it is much more than that spent in other transition countries. In fact, Belarus spends about US$ 83per capita and ranks among the highest in the ECA region. (p.56)

According to the **Vienna Institute of International Relations report** (Vienna Institut für Internationale Vergleiche), published in July 2004, divergence of income of different groups of population of Belarus is not substantial: Gini coefficient (index of differentiation of income level of different groups of population, which serves as a characteristic of social injustice) has remained practically unchanged since 1992 and made up 0.34 in 2001, which is much lower than in Russia (0.52) and Ukraine (0.45).

UN Food and Agriculture Organization in August 2004 placed Belarus on top of CIS countries by the possibility of the population to obtain valuable nutrition. In particular, the number of undernourished people in Belarus is 2 percent of the population, in Russia – 4 percent, in Ukraine and Turkmenistan – 6 percent, in Kyrgyzstan – 8 percent, in Moldova – 11 percent, in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan – 21 percent, in Uzbekistan – 25 percent, in Georgia – 26 percent, in Armenia and Tajikistan – 70 percent.

According to **UNCTAD Trade and Development Reports 2002, 2003 and 2004**, Belarus succeeded in achieving, between 1997 and 2003, annual export growth of 9.1 percent, whereas this index is 7.7 percent in the countries with economies in transition, 4.1 percent in developed countries, and 5.3 percent in the world.

According to **UNCTAD World Investment Report 2004**, by Inward Foreign Direct Investment Potential Index Belarus ranks 56th in the world, up 22 points compared to 1994-1996, and leaves behind all CIS countries except Russia, which is 33rd.

According to the **WTO World Trade Statistics 2003**, by the volume of exports of goods Belarus is 9th among 22 countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the share of Belarusian exports being 2.5 percent.

According to **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development Transition Report 2003** Belarus has the lowest level of corruption among CIS countries; foreign debt of Belarus in 2002 made up 5.7 percent of GDP - the lowest level among CIS countries.

According to the **International Telecommunications Union** data, published before the World Summit on the Information Society, Belarus is 66th in the world by the digital access index in the world chart of the development of information technologies, surpassing almost all CIS countries (except Russia)

According to the **UN Economic Comission for Europe Economic Survey of Europe 2004 ? 1** all CIS countries except Belarus have rising income divide. Level of the income divide in that countries exceeded the highest value of that index in advanced developed countries (US – index GINI 0,37).

Among Central and Eastern European states Belarus has lowest percent poor people except Slovenia and Croatia.

In this regard, very logical to suppose that the government of the Republic of Belarus realizing very rational social-oriented policy.

According to the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Global Report 2003** the Belarusian newly revised national Refugee Law meets international standards in this area. 79 per cent of recognized refugees have access to the state welfare, education and health systems.

In recognition of Belarus' contribution to development of migration management and asylum system in Eastern Europe and Central Asia Belarus was honored with right to host in May 2004 the High-Level Review Meeting on "Refugees, Migration and Protection" organized by UNHCR, IOM, OSCE and the Council of Europe as the Follow-up to the 1996 Geneva Conference on the Problems of Refugees, Displaced Persons, Migration and Asylum Issues in the Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

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