

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

**Esteemed Mr. Chairman
Distinguished Committee members
Ladies and gentlemen**

It is a great honor for me to speak, on behalf of the Government of Turkmenistan, about implementation of the provisions of the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in our country at the CEDAW Committee session.

Please, let me express our gratitude for your sincere interest in the political, socioeconomic and cultural development of Turkmenistan, and express our confidence that the constructive dialogue between the Committee and the Government delegation will contribute to further progress towards consistent fulfillment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls which are contained in the Convention.

Today, the Report will be presented by the Turkmen delegation comprised of the following members:

Ms. Yazdursun Gurbannazarova – Director of the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan

Ms. Araztuvak Mammetgurbanova – Member of Parliament of Turkmenistan

Ms. Leili Shamyradova – Deputy Minister of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan

Mr. Geldymammet Geldymammedov – Deputy Minister of Education of Turkmenistan

Mr. Seyitmammed Akmammedov – Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Protection of Turkmenistan

Ms. Maisa Yazmuhammedova – Chairperson of the Women's Union of Turkmenistan

Mr. Esen Mukhammedovich Aidogdyev – Permanent Representative of Turkmenistan to the UN Office in Geneva.

Mr. Chair:

In my introductory statement, I will describe main policies of the Turkmen Government aimed at implementation of Turkmenistan's commitments and obligations and provide information about the changes which have made progress possible in addressing a number of issues set forth in the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Turkmenistan ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1996, and submitted its combined initial and second report on 3 November 2004. The report was considered at the 35th CEDAW Committee session on 17 May 2006. In December 2010, Turkmenistan submitted its combined third and fourth periodic report for the period 2007 to 2010. Responses to the Committee's List of Issues were submitted in July 2012.

From its 1991 independence, Turkmenistan has headed for systemic reforms in many areas of societal life aimed to create standards of decent living for all citizens, without exceptions.

Under the leadership of the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov, fundamental changes in all spheres of political, economic and social life of the country are carried out today. The reforms under direct supervision from the Head of the State facilitate progressive renovations of the entire public and political system.

Focus on women and improvement of the women's status in the Turkmen society is one of the State policy priorities of President Berdymuhamedov. High social status of a Turkmen woman is tied to the democratic fundamentals which have historically been built in the Turkmen society.

The Head of the State declared: "We value the moral image, intellectual capacities and abilities of our women very high. Protection of their legitimate rights and interests and favourable provisions from the government are among crucial pre-conditions for the sustainable development of the Turkmen society. In this context, the Government creates all conditions required for the free life and productive work of our women-compatriots so that they can receive education and master their professions, and rear their children at the level required today."

The country's gender policy is aimed to develop institutional and legislative measures which would ensure equal participation of women in all spheres of social life and empower women to exercise the constitutional principle of gender equality, as well as to establish equal opportunities for women and men.

Having ratified a number of the fundamental international human rights instruments and steadily implementing its international commitments, Turkmenistan continues its reforms in the national system of human rights

protection and consistently implements its obligations before the global community.

Within the period from 2006 to 2012, the number of the ratified conventions increased with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (4 September 2008), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (25 September 2010), ILO Convention No. 182 “Concerning Prohibition and Immediate Actions to Eliminate the Worst Forms of the Child Labor” (1 June 1999), UN Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons (14 September 2011), Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (4 August 2012), etc.

The Government of Turkmenistan confirmed again its strong aspiration to ensure that women should fully and equally exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and ratified, following the Committee’s recommendations, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 18 April 2009.

Special commissions have been established by the Presidential Decrees, including those on the improvement of the Turkmen legislation, and on the complaints from the citizens about actions of the law enforcement authorities.

The Government took into account the constructive dialogue with the Committee held in May 2006 and the Committee’s recommendation to establish a consultative mechanism which would ensure broad participation of all ministries and voluntary organizations in the preparation of the report.

With a view to effective implementation and embedment of international human rights standards in the Turkmen legislation, and preparation of the national State Party reports to the relevant UN human rights treaty bodies, an Inter-Agency Commission on Implementation of Turkmenistan’s international human rights obligations was established by the Presidential Decree on 24 August 2007. On 12 August 2012, the Commission’s mandate, title and membership were amended to entrust it also with the regulation of the issues related to incorporation of the standards of the international humanitarian law in the national legislation.

The Inter-Agency Commission on Implementation of Turkmenistan’s international human rights obligations and incorporation of the standards of the international humanitarian law is an advisory cross-sectoral body established to coordinate efforts of the ministries, state committees, agencies and local executive authorities, as well as enterprises, institutions, organizations, and voluntary associations, to implement Turkmenistan’s international human rights commitments.

The Inter-Agency Commission's responsibilities include: monitoring of the national laws of Turkmenistan for compliance with the international human rights standards and preparation of proposals to improve the national legislation to bring it in line with the provisions of the international human rights treaties, including women's rights, and preparation of the national reports on the progress in implementation of the international human rights treaties.

The work of the Commission is coordinated by the Turkmen National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan.

The country has intensified its work to prepare and submit its national reports to the UN human rights treaty bodies. Recommendations from the international organizations are taken into account when international law standards are incorporated in the national legal framework.

In compliance with the recommendations from the UN CEDAW Committee and the UN CERD Committee, the constitutional provision which guarantees equality of persons was amended to add new features, namely: **sex and race**.

The revised Article 19 of the Constitution of Turkmenistan guarantees equality of the human and civil rights and freedoms of a person before the law, irrespective of his or her nationality (ethnicity), **race, sex**, origin, property or official status, residence, language, religion, political aspirations, any or no party affiliation.

Article 20 of the Constitution of Turkmenistan recognizes equality of civil rights of men and women. Any gender-based violation of equality entails prosecution in accordance with the law.

Conceptual norms which guarantee human rights and freedoms and the precedence of the women's rights contained in the Constitution of Turkmenistan have been further developed in the national legislation. These issues are regulated by the Family Code, Labor Code, Social Welfare Code, Civil and Civil Procedure Codes, Penal Code, Criminal Procedure and o Penal Execution Codes, and the Laws (Acts) of Turkmenistan: "On the State Guarantees of the Equality of Women", "On Health Care of Citizens", "On the Education", "On Culture", "On the Employment", "On Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings", "On the Courts", "On the Prosecution", "On the Legal Profession and Lawyer Activities in Turkmenistan", "On Migration", "On the Refugees", etc.

Recommendations from the UN treaty bodies are scrupulously studied and taken into account whenever new laws are drafted.

It is important to note that the country not only adopts legislative acts but also enforces them progressively.

On 14 December 2007, the Parliament of Turkmenistan passed its special Act “On the State Guarantees of the Equality of Women” in order to implement the provisions of the relevant international conventions.

In accordance with this Act (Law), the legal guarantees of the equality, design and implementation of the targeted state programmes, support and protection of motherhood and childhood are the integral elements of the Government policies for women. The Law establishes, in compliance with the Turkmen Constitution and international law standards, state guarantees for women to exercise their human rights and freedoms on the equal basis with men in the political, economic, social, cultural, and any other fields.

In Turkmenistan, there is a guaranteed legal protection in case of gender-based violations of rights, as well as an effective complaints system.

All citizens of Turkmenistan, irrespective of their sex and gender, are guaranteed legal protection, including judiciary remedies, against any discrimination against them, in accordance with the Constitution and other laws of the country.

Turkmen legislation contains state guarantees to safeguard and protect women against any infringements of their rights, freedoms or legitimate interests.

Citizens, both men and women, without any gender-based differentiation, have the right to go to court and demand for material and moral redress for the damage made to them through unlawful actions by the government authorities or other organizations, or their employees, or private individuals.

Implementation of the basic principles of the human rights policy ensures comprehensive development and promotion of women and establishes state guarantees for women to exercise their rights and freedoms on the equal basis with men in the political, economic, social, cultural and other spheres of life in Turkmenistan. Today, Turkmen women are full-pledged, harmoniously developed and socially active members of society who are well-represented in all sectors of economy, and political and social life of the country.

Various forms of social protection allow women to combine family duties and job responsibilities, successfully care for their children and participate in the industrial and societal life of the country.

Integration of women in the public and political life of the society is one of the critical elements of democratization.

In the population structure of Turkmenistan, women make 50.2% and are well represented in the elective bodies of the government and public administration. Of 125 Parliament (*Mejlis*) members, women are at 18.3%. Both the Parliament Chairperson and the Vice-Chairperson are women.

At present, more than 25 highest leadership positions in the country are held by women, including the vice-premier, ministers and deputy ministers, diplomatic officials, deputy-heads of provincial, municipal and district administrations, top media managers, directors of the higher educational and research institutions, and senior staff of the election commissions at the central and local levels.

Women are also represented in the staff of the representative and executive authorities of the government at all levels.

As a result of the elections which took place on 5 December 2010, women of different occupations became members of the representative bodies of the people's power – People's Councils (*Halk Maslahaty*). Of the total number of members of the People's Councils in provinces and the city of Ashgabat, women account for 16.67 percent, men – for 83.33 percent; in the district and municipal People's Councils women are at more than 20.21% and men – at 79.79%.

Gengeshes are representative bodies of the people's power in towns, districts, settlements and groups of villages.

Contested elections of the *Gengesh* members were held on 20 August 2012. Of the total elected members, women made 18.68% and men made 81.32%. (In 2009, women were at 16.84% and men - at 83.16%, respectively).

The majority of the elected people's representatives are government officials, officials in the education and health sectors, agricultural workers, experienced specialists in various sectors of economy and activists from the voluntary (non-governmental) organizations and associations.

The Turkmen legislation does not contain any restrictions or barriers for women to be lawyers or judges, to testify in courts as witnesses, and to be engaged in any other activities which are not in conflict with the law.

Thus, the staff of the judiciary system in Turkmenistan includes 805 persons; of them, 373 are men and 432 are women.

Of 432 women in the judiciary system, 283 work in the cities and towns and 149 – in the districts (*etrap*s). Thirty-six women are judges in the district (*etrap*), city, province (*velayat*) courts and the Supreme Court; 7 women hold senior positions in the judiciary administration; and 31 women work as heads of departments in the

judiciary system.

In Turkmenistan, there are 74 courts of justice; of them, one Supreme Court, one Arbitration Court, 5 province courts plus the Ashgabat city court, and 66 district and town courts.

The total staff of the prosecutor's offices is 1238 employees; of them, 831 are operatives. Of the total number of the staff, 367 are female employees and 158 of them are operatives.

Women preside over 5 out of 6 Presidiums of the Bar Associations/Colleges of Advocates in Turkmenistan.

In Turkmenistan, there are 201 members of the Bar Associations/Colleges of Advocates; of them, 119 are women and 82 are men; including by provinces (*velayats*).

In Turkmenistan, there are also 50 legal advice offices which provide legal assistance to people. Among the directors of the offices, 24 are women and 26 are men.

The Government of Turkmenistan makes appropriate efforts to ensure that women should have opportunities to represent, at the equal basis with men and without any discrimination, the country at the international level and participate in the work of international organizations.

Both Turkmen women and men represent the country at the international level and take part in the work of various international organizations. Thus, of 170 diplomats, 18 are women (10%).

High level of education and economic activity of women shows high percentage of women in all spheres of economy, especially in the education system, culture and arts, health, physical fitness and social protection sectors.

In 2011, the percentage of women working at the large and medium size Turkmen enterprises was 41.4%. In some economy sectors, such as health, physical fitness and social protection it reached 75.2%; education – 68.3%; hotels and restaurants – 57.1%; finances - 53%, communal, social and personal services – 47.6%, and in manufacturing – 45.8%.

These statistics are the evidence of the progressive process of integration of women in the social and political life of the country.

Turkmenistan gives serious attention to dissemination of information about international and national human rights instruments, including women's rights.

Long-term public awareness raising programmes on human rights and women's rights instruments are implemented jointly with the international organizations and foreign embassies accredited in Turkmenistan.

Turkmen National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan organized and conducted, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan and UN Population Fund in Turkmenistan, international conferences (13-14 April 2009 and 19-20 June 2012) on experience sharing of approaches to the government regulation of the gender equality issues, establishment and performance of the gender equality national machinery, exchange of knowledge, information and best practices of women empowerment in order to implement the provisions of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development.

In collaboration with the UNFPA country office and EU/UNDP/OHCHR Joint Project, a collection book of international and domestic legal and regulative instruments on women's rights was compiled and published.

On 18 June 2012, the book was launched at the presentation ceremony held at the Human Rights Resource Center in the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights under the President of Turkmenistan.

The collection includes international treaties for women's rights protection which have been ratified by Turkmenistan and legal instruments of the current Turkmen legislation pertaining to this issue. This collection of the international legal standards and national laws will serve as a practical reference book for the public awareness raising activities in the field of women's rights.

Presentations of the book are held in all the regions of the country.

Education

Distinguished Committee members:

Among the first steps made by Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov, the President of Turkmenistan, in 2007, was his statement that the system of education and science had been identified as one of the priorities of the country development.

To address the challenges of educating and training of qualified specialists for the country economy, the country implements its strategy of reforming the entire education system, including academic and higher education levels, secondary vocational and general secondary schools.

The Head of the State declared that extension of the general secondary schooling up to 11-12 years is among the next important and radical steps in the education sector.

Within the historically short period of 5 years, enormous work has been done to develop the educational sector in Turkmenistan. Dozens of new, super-modern, educational institutions equipped with the latest educating technologies have been opened in the country. They are built throughout the whole country; new educational institutions are commissioned into operation every year.

They include kindergartens and general secondary schools both in the administrative centers and far-flung villages. In the recent years, the number of the state-of-art campuses of the secondary vocational and higher educational institutions has grown significantly.

Thirty new pre-schools and secondary general schools were opened in the current year in Ashgabat and other regions of the country.

All newly-built facilities are supermodern educational centers equipped with the latest computer equipment with the Internet connections and latest technologies, including multi-media ones, which are widely used today at all levels of learning by the young generations.

Along with the construction of new education centers, the infrastructure of the existing ones is also strengthened and renovated. At present, educational process in the country's education institutions is based on the use of the latest learning and teaching techniques aimed at harmonious and comprehensive development of the young generations.

In the recent years, other major changes have been made in the secondary education section. Secondary school curricula and education plans have been revised, and new subjects have been added to the teaching schedules, in order to meet modern educational requirements.

In the current year, the higher educational institutions have introduced 20 new specialities and admitted 5,766 new students (of them, girls are 41.52%), which exceeds last year admission by 711 persons. Secondary vocational schools admitted 5,775 students, including girls (at 50.63%).

Serious work was done to improve teaching methodologies of the education institutions, including preparation and publishing of new textbooks and learning aids, which involved both school teachers and leading specialists from the Ministry

of Education, and professors and lecturers from the secondary professional and higher educational institutions.

Significant work has been done to improve provision of the educational institutions with the teaching and learning materials, including printing of new modern textbooks and learning aides.

Many of the Turkmen educational institutions established close, mutually beneficial, partnerships with the education centers both near and far abroad. Every year, on the basis of the intergovernmental and intersectoral educational agreements and special requests from the ministries and agencies of Turkmenistan, thousands of young people from our country go to study at prestigious secondary professional and higher educational institutions in other countries.

Also, more than two thousand Turkmen boys and girls started their new 2012-2013 academic year as the students of various secondary professional and higher educational institutions in Turkey, China, Romania, Malaysia, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and other countries.

On the other hand, school teachers, professors and lecturers of domestic universities, as well as other educators, develop their capacities through regular trainings and study courses in the educational institutions in other countries.

Employment

Distinguished Committee members!

The level of women's participation in the labor force and their employment opportunities reflect the level of the economic activity of women in Turkmenistan.
Table 1

The figures of the economic activity of Turkmen women demonstrate an uptrend of the percentage of women in the economically active and employed population during the reporting period.

In Turkmenistan, the highest specific weight of working women is within the light and food industries and in the social service sector: health, education, culture, arts and social protection. In other sectors, women are mostly employed in the jobs related to servicing (clerks, clients' service, etc.)

Tables 2, 3

In 2011, 103.7 thousand persons were registered by the Labor and Employment Authorities. Employment shows an upward tendency: from 48.0% to 58.1% between 2005 and 2011; employed women at 34.3% and 50.0%, respectively.

Table 4

The sample size of the survey is more than 2.5 thousand households throughout Turkmenistan.

The 15-72 age population is interviewed in the survey. The main criteria of the labor force survey for classification of the population by its economic activity are the following: employed, seeking a job, and economically inactive ones.

In accordance with the 2011 survey data, of the total number of the working-age employed rural respondents, men are at 56.3% and women are at 43.7%.

An average level of employment in the **informal sector** was 8.5% of the total number of the employed population surveyed in 2011. For this category of workers, employment in the informal economy sector was the main (the only) job. In general, women prevail among the informal sector employees; at 52.8%. The highest percentage of the informal sector employees is in the rural areas; at 65.3%.

Turkmenistan creates, to improve its employment situation in general, new jobs, and maintains jobs in the existing prosperous enterprises, improving its vocational and professional education and training and re-training systems both for the new labor force and for the released one.

Health

Turkmenistan demonstrates responsible approach to well-being of its citizens, provision of international standards in health care, and improvement of epidemiological surveillance. Measures which are planned and taken by the country healthcare system make it possible to achieve high level of disease prevention and significantly reduce the burden of diseases.

International certificates of elimination of different communicable diseases in our country, such as dracontiasis (2000), poliomyelitis (2002), and malaria (2010), as well as WHO confirmation of no cases of measles and rubella in Turkmenistan (2012), are an evidence of international recognition of effectiveness of the national health system model established in Turkmenistan under the leadership of President Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov.

Transformation of the Turkmen State Medical Institute into the State Medical University was a new impetus for the development of human resources in the health sector and improvement of education and training of healthcare professionals. Updated system of the higher health education contributes to increase in the number of highly qualified health specialists with the level of modern professional knowledge required for the work in the primary health care, including in the rural areas.

This high international appraisal of the work of the Medical University is, at the same time, an acknowledgement of the effectiveness of the government health policy in general. Thus, the State Medical University of Turkmenistan was awarded the International “European Quality” Award (2011), and recorded in the Avicenna Catalogue – the worldwide health education database (2012).

In partnerships with the international organizations, a number of national health programmes have been developed and are successfully implemented, such as “Health Care Development in Turkmenistan for 2012-2016”, “Development of Pharmaceutical Manufacture in Turkmenistan for 2011-2015”, Strategy of Non-Communicable Disease and Injury Prevention in Turkmenistan for 2011-2015, National Programme for Sanatoria and Health Resort Service Development in Turkmenistan, National Programme for Early Childhood Development and School Preparedness for 2011-2015, Strategy of Female Reproductive Health in Turkmenistan for 2011-2015, Strategy for Cervical Cancer Prevention, HIV/AIDS Prevention, Tuberculosis Prevention and Control, National Strategy for TB Prevention and Control in Turkmenistan for 2008-2015, “Safe Motherhood”, “Breastfeeding Protection and Promotion”, “Neonatal Resuscitation and Newborn Care”, “Integrated Management of Childhood Diseases”, Anemia Prevention and Control, Expanded Programme of Immunization, etc. In 2007, Turkmenistan adopted WHO-recommended criteria of live birth and stillbirth registration.

With the grant from the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Turkmenistan implements measures to improve TB prevention and control.

Between 2005 and 2011, birth rate increased by 80%. Home deliveries decreased 4 times, and stand for less than 0.1% of the total number of births; therefore 99.9% of all deliveries take place in the health facilities and are attended by health workers. Percentage of Caesarian sections does not exceed WHO indicators; in 2011, it was at 5.9%.

Distinguished Committee members:

Turkmen law contains no norms or regulations which foresee different rights for urban or rural people. Women who live in the rural areas have equal rights with men.

The Government gives particular attention to the rural women. They have available access to the healthcare services, education, improvement of their technical knowledge, social security and improved housing conditions.

The Government provides significant support both to men and women who intend to engage in farming and agricultural production through special agricultural loans and certain advantages for the use of agricultural machines. There is a range of soft loans for the agricultural production. In accordance with the ruling of the President, these are 10-year maturity loans with the 5 percent annual interest. Turkmen women have equal with men access to agricultural loans and credits.

To encourage development of the market-based relations in the agrarian sector, the President and the Government of Turkmenistan decreed establishment of privileges for the farmers to exempt them from the taxes on land, water, livestock and some other taxes.

These measures encourage more women to start their businesses in the rural areas, which, in turn, contribute to rising of living standards of the rural communities. Thus, women made 49.1% of the total leaseholder farmers in 2011.

Altogether, 78,500 persons are engaged in individual entrepreneurship; of them, men are at 73.2% and women are at 26.8%.

Comprehensive approach to the multi-sided economy potentials of Turkmenistan and high living standards of its people are the basis of the National Programme for Socioeconomic Development of Turkmenistan for 2011-2030, Concept of Socioeconomic Development of Provinces (*Velayats*) and Ashgabat City for 2008-2011, Presidential Programme for Socioeconomic Development of Turkmenistan for 2012-2016, National Programme of the President of Turkmenistan for Transformation of Social and Living Conditions of People in Villages, Settlements, *Etrap* Towns and *Etrap* Centers for the Period up to 2020, and other programmes and projects which detail long-term strategic development goals of our country. Implementation of these programmes has made it possible for numerous new major industrial, social and infrastructural projects to appear on the map of the Turkmen economy.

The main objectives of the National Programme of the President of Turkmenistan for Transformation of Social and Living Conditions of People in Villages, Settlements, *Etrap* Towns and *Etrap* Centers for the Period up to 2020 are to provide rural population with the high living standards and good working conditions which are as close to those of the urban population's as possible. To achieve these objectives, the Government allocated 4 billion US dollars for implementation of the major projects in the rural areas, such as construction of

comfortable housing and services, including roads, water pipelines, and sewage, gas and electricity supply lines. The output of these investments are newly built comfortable residential houses, modern schools and health facilities with the latest equipment, 'culture palaces', stadiums and other rest and recreation centers in the provincial regions (*etraps*).

The programmes which are implemented are primarily aimed to equalize social and economic development of the provincial regions. Sustainable development of the provinces (*velayats*) will result in further industrialization of their economies in the future. In other words, industries, construction and services will dominate the structure of the gross regional production. Eventually, the regional economy structure will conform to the developed economy structure.

As it was already noted, the ultimate importance of the regional programmes under implementation is their social dimension. Accelerated economic development of the provincial regions results in higher employment rates, income growth, and creation of new jobs equipped with advanced techniques and technologies. All of this is very important for our country as the population grows quite dynamically - primarily, due to the high birth rates.

Further urbanization of the country, i.e. steady growth of the urban population size, is an important component of the regional development policy. Along with the rapid development of the capital city and provincial (*velayat*) centers, new urban and rural settlements which meet international quality living standards spring to life throughout the country. Small towns and district (*etrap*) centers are renovated. These measures are intended to equalize living standards of the urban and rural populations.

In Turkmenistan, special focus of the regional policies is placed on the social infrastructure development, such as education, health, culture, physical fitness and sports, and tourism. Achievements of the country in these areas are vast, and these trends will continue in the future.

Thus, the regional development policies which are implemented in the country are aimed to ensure high living standards of the people and well-balanced development of the Turkmen economy.

Creation of a modern socioeconomic and industrial infrastructure, including transports and communications, is another important aspect of the high-scale development programmes and projects which are implemented in Turkmenistan, which, in turn, has conditioned rapid growth of the construction/building sector.

At present, 2,447 construction projects worth of 35,400 billion US dollars are built in Turkmenistan. Building industry is one of the priority Turkmen economy sectors.

It may be said with a good reason that practically every day modern plants and factories, schools and kindergartens, universities, health and culture centers, motor roads and bridges are put into operation. Among such projects are the “Palace of Happiness” and the new Turkmenistan Broadcasting Center.

In 2012, the expenditure part of the Turkmen State Budget was increased to cover more expenses in the social and cultural spheres. Significant funds were allocated to education, health, culture, social welfare, housing and communal services. Thus, the 2012 State Budget allocates 76.7% to the development of the social sector.

Distinguished Committee members:

As it was already mentioned, the country is actively engaged in the process of improvement of its national legislation framework.

The Family Code of Turkmenistan was adopted on 10 January 2012. The main purpose of the Family Code is to build family relations which are based on a voluntary marriage union between a man and a woman and equal rights of both spouses in the family. The Code also determines that Turkmenistan only recognizes a marriage which is registered by the official registry authorities; any religious matrimony does not have any legal significance. The Code vests a right in a man and a woman to marry and establish a family, irrespective of their race, nationality (ethnicity) or religion, and determines their equal rights at the time of entering into marriage, in marriage and at dissolution of marriage.

Following the recommendation from the CEDAW Committee and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the minimum marriage age was changed. Now, the minimum marriage age is set at eighteen years of age.

In exceptional cases based on solid reasons, the Guardianship and Tutorship authorities may, at the request of the marrying persons, decrease the marital age but not more than for one year.

Distinguished Committee members:

All these measures are practical implementation of the international law standards which guarantee civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all citizens of the country, without exceptions, including women and girls. They are the true confirmation that Turkmenistan, on its steady way of socioeconomic reforms and democratic transformations, places special emphasis on provision and protection of

the social, economic and cultural rights of people, including human rights of women and girls.

This is the evidence of the efforts made by the country to implement the main provisions of the international human rights conventions ratified by Turkmenistan as well as the norms of the national legislation related to protection of human rights and freedoms, including women's rights.

During the dialogue, we shall make our best to answer the questions raised by the Committee members and provide additional information and comments on the articles of the Convention, which would allow us to identify further ways and forms of activities to achieve progress in this area.

Thank you for your attention!

Closing Speech

Esteemed Mr. Chairman:

Distinguished Committee members:

Please let me, on behalf of the Turkmenistan delegation, to thank you for the recommendations and criticisms and to express our deep appreciation of the fair and constructive dialogue.

In the course of the work, all the constructive suggestions and recommendations from the international experts for further improvement of the situation in this field will be scrupulously analyzed and studied, and a follow-up system will be put in place for their implementation.

We would make maximum efforts to improve the legislation of Turkmenistan which is one of the fundamental pre-requisites for the dynamic development of the country and bring it in line with the universal standards of the international law for the successful implementation of the reform programmes and projects.

Strengthening of collaboration with the international organizations is the most important component of the policy pursued by the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov.

At present, the relations between Turkmenistan and the United Nations, based on the principles of mutual advantage and commitment to the international norms and

assumed obligations, allow to develop productive partnerships and enrich them with the new contents.

Thank you for your attention!