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CZECH REPUBLIC

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Introduction

1. The Czech Republic was established on 1 January 1993 after the division of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic into two independent and sovereign States - the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Constitutional Law No. 542/1992 Coll. on the dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic governed this division. The Constitution of the Czech Republic was adopted on 16 December 1992 with effect from 1 January 1993 and promulgated as Law No. 1/1993 Coll., Constitution of the Czech Republic. The Constitution was the first constitutional law of the sovereign Czech Republic.

2. By virtue of Constitutional Law No. 4/1993 Coll. on measures associated with the dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, the Czech Republic assumed all obligations arising from international law in respect of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic on the date of its dissolution, except for the obligations of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic associated with the territory to which the sovereignty of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic extended but to which the sovereignty of the Czech Republic does not extend. The law took effect on 31 December 1992.

3. On 19 January 1993 the Czech Republic became a member of the United Nations and succeeded to all human rights instruments binding on the former Czechoslovak State. On 16 February 1993 the Czech Republic as a successor State to the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations of its intention to be bound by the international multilateral treaties to which the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic was a party on the day of its dissolution.

4. The Czech Republic is a State party to most of the core international human rights treaties, namely the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Czech Republic also signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty. The Czech Republic is taking the necessary steps to ratify both Protocols.

I. LAND AND PEOPLE

5. The Czech Republic is a landlocked country in the centre of Europe, neighbouring on Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Austria. The capital of the Czech Republic is Prague. The currency unit is the Czech crown.

6. The State emblem is a red shield which contains a silver split-tailed rampant lion wearing a golden crown and with golden claws. The national flag consists of a lower red strip and an upper white strip between which a flagstaff blue wedge is inserted.

7. The national holidays are:
- 1 January - Independent Czech State;
 - 8 May - Liberation Day;
 - 5 July - Slavic Apostles St. Cyril and St. Methodius;
 - 6 July - Jan Hus Day;
 - 28 September - Czech Statehood Day;
 - 28 October - Independent Czechoslovakia Day;
 - 17 November - Fight for Freedom and Democracy.

8. The territory of the Czech Republic is divided into 14 larger territorial self-governing areas (regions), subdivided into more than 6,200 primary self-governing areas (municipalities).

9. The following table provides data on the Czech Republic based on the results of the 2001 population and housing census and other statistical sources.

Area:	78,866 sq. km	
Population density:	130 inhabitants per sq. km	
Total population:	10,230,060 of which:	
	Females:	5,247,989
	single:	1,725,980
	married:	2,373,082
	divorced:	459,512
	widowed:	662,558
	Males:	4,982,071
	single:	2,107,595
	married:	2,370,573
	divorced:	352,080
	widowed:	122,066
Age:	under 14 years	1,672,593 (16.2 per cent)
	14 to 64 years	7,206,488 (70.0 per cent)
	over 65 years	1,416,236 (13.8 per cent)
Life expectancy:	75.3 years	(72.1 years for males and 78.5 years for females)
Births:	90,978	

Deaths: 107,755

Population increase: -1.7 (per 1,000 inhabitants)

Abortions: 45,057, of which: 32,528 induced abortions
1,116 spontaneous abortions

Infant mortality: 4.0 (deaths under 1 year of age per 1,000 live births)

Neonatal mortality 2.3 (deaths under 28 days of age per 1,000 live births)

Marriages: 5.1 (per 1,000 inhabitants)

Divorces: 60.3 (per 100 marriages)

Population by nationality:

Czech:	9,249,777 inhabitants	(90.4 per cent)
Moravian:	380,474	(3.7 per cent)
Slovak:	193,190	(1.9 per cent)
Polish:	51,968	(0.5 per cent)
German:	39,106	(0.4 per cent)
Ukrainian:	22,112	(0.2 per cent)
Vietnamese:	17,462	(0.2 per cent)
Hungarian:	14,672	(0.1 per cent)
Russian:	12,369	(0.1 per cent)
Romany:	11,746	(0.1 per cent)
Silesian:	10,878	(0.1 per cent)

Population by citizenship:

Czech Republic:	10,080,507 inhabitants	(98.5 per cent)
Slovakia:	24,201	(0.2 per cent)
Ukraine:	20,628	(0.2 per cent)
Vietnam:	18,210	(0.2 per cent)
Poland:	13,350	(0.1 per cent)
Russia:	7,696	(0.1 per cent)

Population by religion:

Undenominational:	5,999,047 inhabitants	(58.3 per cent)
Roman Catholic:	2,709,953	(26.3 per cent)
Evangelical Church of the Czechoslovak Bretheren:	137,070	(1.3 per cent)
Czechoslovak Hussite Church:	96,352	(0.9 per cent)
Religious Society of Jehovah's witnesses:	23,162	(0.2 per cent)
Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands:	22,968	(0.2 per cent)

Economically active persons:	4,633,280 inhabitants (45.0 per cent of total population)
	of which:
	females: 44.7 per cent
	males: 55.3 per cent
Gross domestic product:	US\$ 51 billion (for 2000)
Gross domestic product per capita:	US\$ 5,007 (for 2000)
Inflation rate:	4.7 per cent (as an increase in average annual consumer price indices for 2002)
Unemployment rate:	oscillated around 9 per cent in 2002

II. GENERAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE

10. Pursuant to Law No. 1/1993 Coll., Constitution of the Czech Republic (hereafter “the Constitution”), the Czech Republic is a sovereign, unified and democratic State governed by the rule of law and founded on respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual and citizen. No changes to the essential elements of a democratic State of law are permissible. Laws and regulations may not be interpreted so as to authorize anyone to remove or jeopardize the democratic foundations of the State. All State authority stems from the people who exercise it through the legislative, executive and judicial bodies. Every citizen may do whatever is not forbidden by law and no one may be forced to do what the law does not enjoin.

11. The Constitutional Order of the Czech Republic consists of the Constitution, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, constitutional laws adopted in accordance with the Constitution and constitutional laws adopted by the National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Federal Assembly of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Czech National Council regulating borders of the Czech Republic as well as constitutional law of the Czech National Council adopted after 6 June 1992.

A. Legislative powers

12. Legislative powers in the Czech Republic are vested in Parliament. The Parliament is composed of two chambers - the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The Chamber of Deputies comprises 200 deputies elected for a four-year term. The Senate comprises 81 senators elected for a six-year term. Elections to the Chamber of Deputies and to the Senate are held by secret ballot on the basis of general, equal and direct suffrage. Elections to the Chamber of Deputies are based on the principle of proportional representation, whereas elections to the Senate are based on the principle of majority representation. Every citizen of the Czech Republic who has reached the age of 18 years has the right to vote. Every citizen of the Czech Republic who has the right to vote and has reached the age of 21 years may be elected to the Chamber of Deputies. Every citizen of the Czech Republic who has the right to vote and has reached the age of 40 years may be elected to the Senate.

13. A deputy, a group of deputies, the Senate, the Government or a regional council may introduce bills in the Chamber of Deputies. The Government has the right to comment on all bills. A bill passed by the Chamber of Deputies is referred to the Senate. A law passed by the Parliament is presented to the President of the Republic who may return it to the Chamber of Deputies. In such cases the Chamber of Deputies once again votes on the rejected law. The Chairman of the Chamber of Deputies, the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister sign the passed law. The passed law takes effect upon promulgation.

14. A draft law on State budget and a draft State final account are submitted to the Chamber of Deputies by the Government. Only the Chamber of Deputies has the authority to decide on these bills.

15. The Chamber of Deputies may establish fact-finding commissions to investigate cases of public interest.

B. Executive power

1. The President

16. The head of State is the President of the Republic, elected by Parliament at a joint session of both Chambers. The term of office of the President of the Republic is five years and no one can be elected for more than two consecutive terms. Any citizen who has the right to vote and has reached the age of 40 years may be elected as President of the Republic.

17. The President of the Republic:

- (a) Represents the State at the international level;
- (b) Negotiates and ratifies international treaties;
- (c) Is the supreme commander of the armed forces;
- (d) Appoints and dismisses the Prime Minister and other members of the Government and accepts their resignation; dissolves the Government and accepts its resignation;
- (e) Appoints Constitutional Court judges;
- (f) Appoints the President and Vice-Presidents of the Supreme Audit Office;
- (g) Appoints members of the Board of the Czech National Bank.

2. The Government

18. The supreme executive body is the Government, which is composed of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers. The Government is accountable to the Chamber of Deputies. The President of the Republic appoints the Prime Minister and, at his suggestion, other members of the Government. The Government may submit to the Chamber of Deputies a request for a vote of confidence.

19. The current Government of the Czech Republic includes four Deputy Prime Ministers:

- Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior;
- Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Justice and Chairman of the Government Legislative Council;
- Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs;
- Deputy Prime Minister for research and development, human rights and human resources.

20. The Prime Minister offers his resignation to the President of the Republic; other members of the Government offer their resignations to the President of the Republic through the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister organizes the work of the Government, chairs its meetings and represents it.

21. The Government takes decisions as a body. Adoption of a government resolution requires the consent of an absolute majority of all its members. For the implementation of a law and within its limits, the Government has the right to issue decrees. Ministries and other administrative bodies as well as the bodies of territorial self-administration may issue regulations on the basis of and within the limits of law, if they are authorized to do so by law.

C. Judicial powers

1. The courts

22. Independent courts exercise judicial powers on behalf of the Republic. Judges are independent in the exercise of their functions, and no one may jeopardize their impartiality. The primary function of the courts is to protect rights in the way stipulated by law. Only a court may determine guilt and impose penalties for criminal acts.

23. The judicial system consists of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Administrative Court, High Courts, Regional Courts and District Courts. The Supreme Court is the supreme judicial authority in matters falling within the jurisdiction of courts except for cases adjudicated by the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Administrative Court.

24. The President of the Republic appoints judges for an unlimited term from among Czech citizens of high moral character who have completed legal studies at a university. In passing judgements, a judge is bound by the law and international treaties forming part of the national legal order. He is entitled to consider the consistency of any legal regulation with the law or with any international treaty to which the Czech Republic is a party. All parties to the proceedings have equal rights before the court. The proceedings are oral and public; the law may lay down exceptions. Judgements are always pronounced in open court.

2. The Constitutional Court

25. The Constitutional Court is a judicial authority responsible for the protection of constitutionality. It consists of 15 judges appointed for a 10-year term. The President of the

Republic appoints the Constitutional Court judges with the consent of the Senate. Only a Czech citizen of high moral character who has completed university education and has practised law for at least 10 years may be appointed as a Constitutional Court judge.

26. The Constitutional Court decides, inter alia, on:

- (a) Annulment of acts or provisions thereof if they conflict with the constitutional order;
- (b) Annulment of other laws and regulations or provisions thereof if they conflict with the constitutional order or law;
- (c) Constitutional complaints lodged by representatives of local self-government against unlawful actions of the State;
- (d) Constitutional complaints against a final decision or other action by public authorities infringing upon the fundamental rights and freedoms safeguarded by the Constitution;
- (e) Measures necessary to implement a decision of an international court binding on the Czech Republic, if such decisions cannot be implemented otherwise;
- (f) Consistency of a decision to dissolve a political party or other decisions concerning the activities of a political party with constitutional laws and other acts;
- (g) Controversies on the scope of powers of State authorities and authorities of territorial self-administration, if, according to law, these do not fall under the jurisdiction of another body;
- (h) Consistency of an international treaty with the constitutional order; the decision must precede the ratification of the international treaty. The treaty may not be ratified until the Constitutional Court has made its decision.

27. In making their decisions the Constitutional Court judges are bound only by the constitutional order and by the Law on the Establishment of the Constitutional Court and on proceedings before the Constitutional Court. A Constitutional Court decision becomes enforceable as soon as it is promulgated in a manner laid down by the law, unless the Constitutional Court decides otherwise. Enforceable decisions of the Constitutional Court are binding on all authorities and persons. A Constitutional Court decision stating that an international treaty is inconsistent with the constitutional order has the effect of suspending the ratification of the treaty pending the removal of the inconsistency.

D. Other important State institutions

28. The Prosecuting Attorney represents the prosecution in criminal cases and fulfils other tasks determined by the law. The Government appoints the Supreme Prosecuting Attorney at the suggestion of the Minister of Justice.

29. The Supreme Audit Office is an independent body that supervises the management of State property and the utilization of the State budget by individual ministries, other administrative authorities and bodies as well as by natural and legal persons. The President and Vice-President of the Supreme Audit Office are appointed by the President of the Republic at the suggestion of the Chamber of Deputies.

30. The Czech National Bank is the central bank of the State. Its principal function is to protect price stability; no interference with its work is admissible except within the limits of the law.

III. GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED

31. Human rights and fundamental freedoms are protected at the highest (i.e. the constitutional) level in the Czech Republic. The protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms is stipulated in the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms (hereafter “the Charter”), promulgated as Law No. 2/1993 Coll., and in international treaties on fundamental human rights and freedoms to which the Czech Republic is a State party.

A. Charter of fundamental rights and freedoms

32. The Charter lays down the guiding principles for the protection of human rights. People are free and equal in dignity and rights. Fundamental rights and freedoms are inalienable, imprescriptible, not subject to the statute of limitations and irrevocable. The State is founded on democratic values and must not be tied to an exclusive ideology or religious profession. State authority may only be exercised in the cases and within the limits and in the manner specified by the law. Everyone may indulge in anything not prohibited by law, and no one may be forced to do what the law does not enjoin. Fundamental rights and freedoms are guaranteed for all, without distinction as to sex, race, colour, language, faith and religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, membership of a national or ethnic minority, property, birth or other status. Duties may only be imposed in accordance with and within the bounds of the law, and solely on condition that fundamental rights and freedoms are preserved.

33. Chapter II of the Charter lays down the scope of fundamental human rights and freedoms and political rights. It guarantees the right to life and prohibits the death penalty; it guarantees liberty of person and defines the possibilities of its restriction. It protects human dignity, privacy, honour, ownership, freedom of movement and residence, freedom of thought and religious beliefs. It prohibits forced labour and services and the interference with home and correspondence. Among the political rights, chapter II guarantees freedom of expression, the prohibition of censorship, the duty of State authorities to provide information on their activities, the right to petition, the right of assembly and association, the independence of political parties from the State and the right to vote.

34. Chapter III of the Charter safeguards the rights of national and ethnic minorities. Membership of any national or ethnic minority must not be injurious to any person. It guarantees every member of a minority the right to develop their own culture, the right to education in their own language, the right to use their own language in any official proceedings, and the right to take part in finding solutions to affairs that concern minorities.

35. Among the economic, social and cultural rights listed in chapter IV of the Charter are the right to work, the right to choose a profession, the right to engage in business, the right to form and join a trade union, the right to strike, the right to remuneration for work done and the right to decent working conditions. The Charter also protects the handicapped in employment relations and safeguards the right to tangible security in old age and in cases of incapacity to work and of the loss of a provider, the right to the protection of health and the right to free health care. Chapter IV provides for special protection of the family, children and young people, the right to education (free of charge at primary and secondary schools and, depending on the means of the citizen and the opportunities at the disposal of society, at universities), and the right to a favourable environment.

36. Chapter V of the Charter, devoted to the right to judicial and other legal protection, contains the following guiding principles regarding the right to judicial protection: anyone may seek the enforcement of their rights in an independent and impartial court of law and anyone who claims that his rights have been infringed upon by a public administration decision may petition a court to examine the legality of such a decision, unless the law provides otherwise. A court's jurisdiction must, however, include the examination of decisions concerning fundamental rights and freedoms as set down in the Charter; everyone has the right to compensation for damage caused to them by an illegal decision of a court, another State authority or public administration body, or by incorrect official procedure.

37. Chapter V contains a list of guiding principles for fair judicial proceedings. Everyone has the right to remain silent if making a statement might put the person concerned or those close to him at risk of prosecution. Everyone has the right to legal assistance in proceedings involving courts, other State authorities or public administration bodies, as of the date the proceedings were instituted. All parties are equal in proceedings. No one may be refused a statutory judge. Everyone has the right to have their case heard publicly, without undue delay, and in their presence, and to express their opinion on all the evidence produced.

38. A separate section of chapter V of the Charter covers the principles of penal law, which are further developed in the Criminal Code and the Rules of Criminal Procedure. Only the law may specify what conduct constitutes a crime and what penalty and other prejudice may be imposed in respect of rights or property of a person convicted of a crime. Only a court of law may decide on guilt and determine the penalty for a crime. Everyone against whom criminal proceedings are instituted is presumed innocent until proved guilty in court. The defendant has the right to be given the time and opportunity to conduct his own defence or to be defended by an attorney-at-law. Where the defendant fails to appoint an attorney-at-law, even though the law stipulates that he must have one, the court will make such appointment. The law specifies cases in which the defendant has the right to the free assistance of an attorney-at-law. The nature of a crime is assessed and the penalty is imposed in accordance with the legislation effective at the time the crime was committed. Subsequent legislation shall apply if it is more favourable to the defendant.

39. Article 43 of the Charter provides that the Czech Republic shall offer asylum to foreigners persecuted for exercising their political rights and freedoms. Asylum may be refused to anyone who has violated fundamental human rights and freedoms.

B. International human rights treaties

40. Article 10 of the Constitution provides that international treaties shall have precedence over domestic law in Czech legislation. Promulgated international treaties which have been ratified by Parliament and by which the Czech Republic is bound are part of national legislation. Should an international treaty conflict with a domestic law, that treaty is applied. Citizens of the Czech Republic therefore have the right to seek the enforcement of their rights which stem directly from ratified international treaties, and State authorities are obliged to respect and protect those rights. The approval of both Chambers of Parliament is required for the ratification of international treaties laying down the rights and duties of persons.

C. Authorities with powers related to the protection of human rights

1. International authorities

41. Any individual subject to the jurisdiction of the Czech Republic may lodge a complaint/communication on human rights violations with international bodies which have the mandate to consider such complaint/communication under the relevant treaty to which the Czech Republic is party. The complaint may be submitted only after the exhaustion of all domestic remedies. A complaint may be filed with the European Court of Human Rights and a communication may be submitted to the Human Rights Committee, the Committee against Torture, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination or the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

2. The Constitutional Court

42. The supreme judicial authority with the power to protect the observance of human rights in the Czech Republic is the Constitutional Court. The jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court is laid down in chapter IV of the Constitution and is developed further by Act No. 182/1993 Coll., on the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court makes decisions on the abstract supervision of constitutionality (repealing of laws and other legal regulations, or of individual provisions thereof), and on the specific supervision of constitutionality. This requires decisions on constitutional complaints by a body of a territorial self-governing unit against unlawful State intervention or concerning the constitutionality of decisions to dissolve political parties.

43. Everyone is entitled to submit a complaint if he or she claims that his or her constitutionally guaranteed basic right or freedom has been breached by a valid decision in proceedings to which he or she is party, or by a measure or intervention by a public authority. The power of the Constitutional Court to deliver verdicts is subject to the fulfilment of several conditions: the contested decision or intervention by a public authority must be valid and final; the decision must have been issued in judicial, administrative or other proceedings; an act of public authority is involved; and the invoked rights or freedoms are guaranteed by the Constitution. The Constitutional Court makes decisions on justified constitutional complaints by means of a finding published in the *Collection of Findings and Resolutions of the Constitutional Court*. The Constitutional Court may revoke a decision by a public authority or prohibit further intervention by that authority. Enforceable decisions of the Constitutional Court are binding.

44. A petition may be submitted, together with a constitutional complaint, to revoke a law or other legal regulation or individual provisions thereof if the application thereof has given rise to a situation which is the subject of the constitutional complaint, provided that the plaintiff claims that they violate the constitutional law or another law.

45. At the proposal of the Government, the Constitutional Court makes decisions on the revocation of a legal regulation if an international court, based on a complaint submitted to it, states that a constitutionally guaranteed right or freedom has been breached and provided that the breach is due to the legal regulation in question.

46. The Constitutional Court makes decisions in accordance with the generally recognized principles of democratic judicial proceedings (their public nature, the impartiality and independence of judges, the equality of the parties, etc.).

3. Courts

47. The guiding principles for the democratic enforcement of judicial authority are laid down in chapter V of the Constitution, which also stipulates the structure of courts in the Czech Republic. Chapter V of the Charter contains further principles. Act No. 335/1991 Coll., on Courts and Judges, and Act No. 412/1991 Coll., on the Disciplinary Responsibility of Judges, regulate this issue in details (see paragraphs 22-24, 38 and 39).

4. Public protector of rights - the ombudsman

48. The competence of the public protector of rights (ombudsman) and his office is regulated by Act No. 349/1999 Coll., on the Ombudsman. The ombudsman mandate includes the protection of persons from the conduct of authorities and other institutions where such conduct violates the law, fails to comply with the principles of a democratic rule of law or of good administration, and from their lack of activity, and thus contributes to the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms.

49. The competence of the ombudsman covers ministries and other administrative authorities with national powers, the administrative authorities which are subordinate to them, the Czech National Bank in cases where it acts as an administrative authority, municipalities and regions performing State administration, and, unless the law provides otherwise, the Police Force, the Armed Forces and the Prison Service, establishments used for detention, imprisonment, protective or institutional discipline, and protective treatment. The ombudsman's competence does not extend to Parliament, the President of the Republic, the Government, the Supreme Inspectorate, the Intelligence Service of the Czech Republic, the authorities involved in criminal proceedings, the Public Prosecutor's Office and courts.

50. The ombudsman is elected by the Chamber of Deputies for a six-year term and may only be elected for two consecutive terms of office. Anyone who is eligible to be elected to the Senate may be elected ombudsman.

51. The ombudsman acts at the instigation of a natural or legal person, on the basis of a petition addressed to a Deputy, Senator, or Parliament, which is forwarded to the ombudsman, or on his own initiative. The ombudsman is entitled, with the knowledge of the managerial

personnel of authorities, to enter all premises of authorities and conduct investigations without prior notice. Authorities are obliged to cooperate with the ombudsman at his request. If an investigation by the ombudsman reveals a breach of legal regulations and the authority fails to remedy the breach within 30 days, the ombudsman shall make his final opinion known to the authority and the plaintiff; part of this opinion is a proposed remedial measure. The authority is obliged to inform the ombudsman, within 30 days of delivery of the final opinion, which remedial measures it has taken. The ombudsman may inform a superior authority and the Government of the circumstances. The ombudsman is entitled to recommend the promulgation, amendment or revocation of a legal or internal regulation.

D. Other institutions with powers in the field of human rights

1. Council of the Government of the Czech Republic for human rights

52. This Council, established in 1998 by government resolution No. 809/98, is an advisory body of the Government on issues concerning the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons subject to the jurisdiction of the Czech Republic. The Council monitors the observance and application of the Constitution, the Charter, and other legal rules concerning the protection and respect of human rights. The Council also monitors the internal fulfilment of the Czech Republic's international obligations in the field of human rights, especially those stemming from the following international treaties:

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;

Convention on the Rights of the Child;

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

53. The Council sets up specialist sections and working groups to handle issues related to its activities. At present the following sections exist:

Section for Civil and Political Rights;

Section against Manifestations of Racism;

Section for Human Rights Education;

Section for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

Section for the Rights of the Child;

Section for Equal Opportunities of Men and Women;

Section for the Rights of Foreigners;

Section against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

2. Government Council for National Minorities

54. The Council was established by Act No. 273/2001 Coll., on the Rights of Members of National Minorities, and operates as an advisory body to the Government on issues concerning national minorities and their members. A member of the Government chairs the Council. The Council members are representatives of national minorities and of public authority bodies; at least half the members of the Council comprise representatives of national minorities nominated by associations of national minorities.

55. The Council's powers include coordinating government measures concerning the rights of members of national minorities in the Czech Republic, giving opinions on bills, draft government decrees and measures concerning the rights of members of national minorities prior to their submission to the Government, preparing summary reports for the Government on the nationality situation in the Czech Republic, and formulating recommendations intended to meet the needs and requirements of members of national minorities, especially as regards education, the arts, the media and the use of their mother tongue.

3. Government Committee for persons with disabilities

56. The Committee is an advisory and coordinating body of the Government, which makes proposals to the Government on how to resolve the problems of persons with disabilities in the Czech Republic. The Committee's main task is to elaborate legislative measures concerning the needs and requirements of persons with disabilities.

IV. INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY

57. The *Collection of Laws and the Collection of International Treaties*, established by Act No. 309/1999 Coll., are the basic source of information on legal regulations in force in the Czech Republic. The following regulations are promulgated in the Collection of Laws by decree: constitutional laws; laws and legal measures of the Senate; government decrees; legal regulations promulgated by ministries, other central administrative authorities and the Czech National Bank; verdicts of the Constitutional Court; decisions of the President of the Republic; resolutions of the Chambers of Parliament; and resolutions of the Government, where specified by a separate law or if these bodies make decisions on the promulgation thereof. Legal regulations enter into force on the date of their promulgation in the *Collection of Laws*, which is published by the Ministry of the Interior.

58. The following documents are promulgated in the *Collection of International Treaties* by notification of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: valid international treaties by which the Czech Republic is bound; notifications of the termination of international treaties; and decisions adopted by international bodies and bodies of international organizations by which the Czech Republic is bound. International treaties are always published in the *Collection of International Treaties* in their original language(s) with translations into Czech. The *Collection of International Treaties* is published by the Ministry of the Interior.

59. Regional authorities and municipalities are under an obligation to allow anyone who so requests to peruse the *Collection of Laws and the Collection of International Treaties* during office hours.

60. Act No. 106/1999 Coll., on Free Access to Information, regulates the conditions regarding the right of free access to information and sets the basic requirements for the provision of information. Entities which, under this Act, are obliged to supply information relating to their activities, include State authorities, the bodies of territorial self-governing units and public institutions managing public finances. These entities provide information on request or through publishing information materials. If an entity refuses to provide the requested information, the duty to provide information can be enforced by means of a court order.

61. Since 1947, a United Nations Information Centre has been operating in Prague. It is part of the worldwide network of United Nations information centres. The centre's basic mission is to supply information on the activities of the whole United Nations system. The United Nations Information Centre also assumes the role of officially representing the United Nations in the Czech Republic. The Centre publishes bulletins and press releases, maintains direct contact with the media, non-governmental organizations and State and educational institutions by means of press conferences, seminars, and lectures on all aspects of United Nations activities, organizes exhibitions and film screenings, operates an audio and video library, provides information and technical support for projects related to international relations, education and the protection of minorities, and runs a public library with more than 12,000 United Nations publications, documents, and periodicals.

62. A European Information Centre operates within Charles University. It supports research, teaching and the study of European integration issues at Charles University and other universities by making documentation and information available on European Union and Council of Europe activities. It develops expert educational activities, primarily in the field of human rights, democracy and European identity. It organizes seminars, conferences and other events on these issues. The Centre has three units: European Union Department, Council of Europe Department and Human Rights Education Department.

63. Information about current events in the field of human rights can also be found on the web site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic or the Office of the Cabinet of the Czech Republic.
