**Briefing on the Voluntary National Review of the 2030Agenda Implementation
in the Czech Republic**

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Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

1. I’m honoured today to present the Czech Republic’s National Review on the 2030 Agenda implementation. Its key findings were presented at the High Level Political Forum in July of this year in New York by the deputy prime-minister Richard Brabec together with representatives of the non-governmental and private sector. Since the adoption of the Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, we have started a screening process of Czech development trends and we took the **Voluntary National Review** as a useful opportunity to scrutinize our own strengths and weaknesses, the risks and opportunities of our future development.
2. Let me start with the procedural side of our efforts – a boring but very important element. The main coordinating body for the sustainable development agenda is the **Government Council for Sustainable Development. Since 2015 it** has been chaired by the Prime Minister and its 9 expert committees provide vital insight into policy areas such as energy policy or education policy. The Council acts as a hub for consultation and participation and in the last two years we have managed to involve several hundred actors including all ministries, NGOs, representatives of the private sector, academia and other stakeholders in the preparation of our national development plan, the strategy called ‘**Czech Republic 2030**’. While covering all three sustainable development pillars, it specifically addresses six key areas. The most relevant principles, such as good governance and local, regional and global action for sustainable development have also been embedded there. **And so, what are the results of our analysis?**
3. Under the **social pillar**, we are very strong. We have the lowest score in the EU of people threatened by poverty and social exclusion. A remarkable fact if you consider that in the whole of Europe only Norway and Iceland are doing better! On the other hand, alcohol, tobacco and pollutants from transport and obsolete domestic heating systems are dragging us down. Another negative factor for our development is gender inequality. Low representation of women in decision-making positions and a big gender pay gap are still reality in spite of good policies already in place. We will need to change this.
4. Concerning **economic performance**, I am proud to say that we are a **hardworking nation**. Our economy – very open and heavily dependent on foreign trade – is growing steadily, reaching pre-crisis levels. In addition to very low unemployment, the Czech Republic has the lowest income inequalities in the OECD, making us a frontrunner in the implementation of SDG 10. The downside of the automotive industry playing a large part in our economy – employing a lot of people – is very demanding of energy and low in energy efficiency. It is clear that the transition to a low-carbon economy will be a challenging but inevitable task for us in order to achieve the SDG 7.
5. Looking at the **condition of our ecosystems**, our key challenge for the future will be to stop the degradation of soil and increase its retention capacity. This is especially important to tackle the “hot” issue of adaptation to climate change. We are already facing its impact such as soil degradation, drought, changes in rainfall distribution and also the possible future risk of extinction for some native species. For this, we will need to make sure that human activities together with invasive species stop being a threat for our native species.
6. In terms of division of responsibilities, next to central government, our 14 regions and over 6 200 municipalities are very influential. They have a big impact on the everyday lives of our citizens thus proving that **the subnational dimension** is extremely relevant for the SDGs. Take the water-management system, for example. Without efficient cooperation between the state and municipalities, it would not be possible to have
98% of them connected to the public water supply system. Also, we report good results in treating waste water. However, we are still grappling with the run-off of agricultural fertilizers in rivers and water reservoirs. In the area of participation, it is encouraging to see that people are getting increasingly more involved – the number of Local Action Groups is rising as well as the involvement of towns and cities in the Local Agenda 21. However, we need to do more to achieve SDG 11 and also to tackle regional inequalities in income and quality of the environment.
7. Moving from local to **global level**, I can assure you that in spite of being rather a small nation, we actively support global efforts to achieve sustainable development and in this sense have pledged to meet international development commitments and standards. Building on our own transition experience, we are strong advocates of human rights, gender equality and good governance. During the 2030 Agenda negotiations, we have consistently argued for the SDG 16 to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. In this spirit we have chosen ‘participation’ as a priority for our ECOSOC presidency. As it is important to lead by example, I am proud to inform that the Czech Republic is one of the countries with the most significant increase in official development assistance in 2016 – a rise of 29.3%. However, increased efforts are still needed in order to strengthen policy coherence for sustainable development and gradually increase ODA to meet our commitment of 0.33% GNI.
8. Last but not least, sustainable development cannot be successfully implemented without **good governance** and institutions that respond well to citizens’ needs. The Regulatory Impact Assessment which has been a formal part of the Czech legislative processes since 2007, could serve as an example of good practice in achieving this goal. Our results are, however, still far from the 2030 desirable targets levels of efficiency, accountability and transparency of public institutions. Especially worrying is the fact that confidence in national institutions index was only 51% in 2014, relatively low compared to the OECD average and far behind the best-scoring European countries.
9. We must not forget that one of the keys to successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda is **communication**. We need to focus on raising awareness about the principles of sustainable development among public institutions, the private sector, and civil society. Most importantly, we need to bring sustainable development closer to the people and share our best practices in doing so. To achieve that we have identified a number of SDGs ambassadors, mostly well-known professional from all possible sectors as well as artists and celebrities, who can have an immense impact on public awareness. Another example of our communication efforts are the Czech SDGs Awards that we first announced this years in May. The contest was organised by a consortium of public institutions and the Association for Social Responsibility and rewarded projects contributing to the SDGs’ implementation. The initial response was huge. In total, 215 projects applied proving that there is great appetite for action towards the global goals in the private sector and beyond.
10. To conclude our presentation, I would like to share with you a **short video which you will see in a while features Czech SDGs Ambassadors** and hope you will enjoy it.