

Czech Prime Minister's Speech at the Opening of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Preparatory Meeting

March 26, 2018, Prague

Dear President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council Chatardová,
Dear President of the United Nations General Assembly Lajčák,
Dear Minister Mejía [mechíja],
Dear Deputy Secretary General Mohammed,
Dear Minister Stropnický,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

- It is an honour and pleasure to welcome you all in Prague for this meeting of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. It is the **first time that ECOSOC meets in the Czech Republic**.
- It is very symbolic that we are meeting here just this year. As you may know, 2018 is a year of special importance for my country. We are celebrating **100 years since the foundation of the independent Czechoslovak state**.
- The principles of democracy, freedom, peace and justice on which Czechoslovakia was founded are as needed today as they were in 1918. **Young Czechoslovakia** understood the importance of **multilateralism** and diplomacy for a peaceful world.
- Ján Papánek, who worked for the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry in this very building, was among the 14 people who wrote the United Nations Charter. Mr. Papánek was also our first ambassador to the United Nations in 1945 and the vice-president of the first Bureau of ECOSOC in 1947.
- **Multilateralism**, as embodied in the United Nations and its Charter, has been a firm foundation of shared progress and development over more than 70 years. Most likely, it saved us from another world war.
- Yet the **world today** is shaped by **major trends** such as globalization, migration, demographic shifts, terrorism, climate change, digitalization. Too many people still suffer from armed conflict, political oppression, inequalities and violations of their human rights.
- So there is no denying that we must do much more to meet new challenges across all areas of the UN's work: peace and security, sustainable development and human rights.
- Finding the right answers at the time of profound change and global insecurity is not easy. But giving up is not an option.

- On the global level, the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** offers a sound roadmap to a peaceful **future** without poverty, hunger and environmental degradation where **everybody benefits from economic and social progress**.
- But finding solutions to global challenges also requires the **rule of law, and strong, transparent and accountable institutions**.
- In my view, one of the **biggest obstacles** to more effective institutions both globally and locally is **lack of trust**. Without trust there are no credible visions. But how can we rebuild trust?
- Let me offer an example from **our experience**. Before the totalitarian regime collapsed in 1989, the **distrust** within the Czech and Slovak society was enormous. After the Velvet Revolution, the newborn political elites had a **crucial task** ahead – to **rebuild confidence** between them and the citizens they represented.
- **Participation** in public affairs and **civic discussion** proved among the most **effective tools** to achieve this goal. After many years people were given the chance to express their views on a number of issues and to actively change their neighbourhoods and their communities.
- This participation led to many **positive results in our society**, and the focus on civil society was transmitted to the development projects we allocate our resources to within our Official Development Assistance. By the way, it reached over 260 million USD in 2016.
- Success **stories** can be found across all sectors and across all continents. They often bring together a number of players from different levels.
- A **project proposal** to build social housing in **Southern Colombia** by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with the local authorities in Colombia and a Mexican construction company financed by the European Union Trust Fund for Colombia **is an excellent example**.
- Naturally, it is not easy. **But the participatory process is valuable in itself**. Participation enhances the **sense of ownership of the decision-making** process and its outcomes. It provides a necessary feedback. **It teaches that trust pays off**.
- In other words, **participation is beneficial both for the quality of policies and for society as a whole**. And participation is essential also to delivering the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

- That is why the **priority of the Czech ECOSOC Presidency**, supported by Colombia, is **“Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all”**.
- Let me wish you 2 days of inspiring debate here in Prague.