

STATEMENT for UPR Pre-session on Latvia, March 2021

Delivered by: Latvian Human Rights Committee

This is a statement from the Latvian Human Rights Committee, an NGO which took part in both previous UPR cycles. It comprises economic, social and cultural rights, right to nationality and freedom of expression.

On **economic, social and cultural rights**, our first, general set of recommendations is:

- *To ratify the protocol to the Convention against Discrimination in Education and optional protocol to the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; to allow collective complaints under the European Social Charter.*

On the Covenant, our suggestion is in line with second cycle recommendations from South Africa and France.

On social rights, our recommendation is

- *To enlarge the minimum pension annually, at the rate of three times the inflation at least, until it reaches the subsistence minimum.*

Now, the minimum pension is EUR 150 a month.

On economic rights, our recommendation is

- *To reduce the minimum numbers of founders for trade unions.*

This is in line with the European Committee of Social Rights.

A particular issue of concern in the area is education for minorities: besides closures of minority schools, in 2018, a series of legislative acts have reduced the opportunities to learn in minorities' native languages, both in private and in public education, from kindergarten to universities, despite both consistent international criticism and acceptance by Latvia of a relevant recommendation from Russia during the first cycle.

Our recommendations are:

- *To abolish language restrictions for private education. For public minority education programmes, to establish the minimum share of instruction in one's mother tongue instead of the maximum limits. To maintain the network of minority schools and pre-schools.*

On **right to nationality**:

As at January 2021, over 200,000, or 10 per cent of residents, remain stateless, according to the Population Register. These are so-called non-citizens, denied the right to vote even in local elections. Less than a thousand of people were naturalised last year.

Recommendations are:

- *To grant citizenship to those so-called "non-citizens" born in Latvia, and.*
- *To abolish naturalisation exams for "non-citizens" over retirement age.*

On freedom of expression:

Those protesting against mass statelessness, language policy or whitewashing of Nazi collaborators get smeared in public annual reports of the State Security Service. Many activists and some critical journalists have also been put under criminal investigations, mostly ending with termination of cases or acquittals.

Our recommendation is:

To refrain from using criminal justice and state PR machinery against journalists and activists critical of government.

Thank you.