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Chair: Mr. Soh

Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 40 of the Covenant
(continued)

Third periodic report of Albania (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

**Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 40 of the Covenant
(continued)**

*Third periodic report of Albania (continued) (CCPR/C/ALB/3;
CCPR/C/ALB/QPR/3)*

1. *At the request of the Chair, the delegation of Albania joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation to continue replying to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **A representative of Albania** said that, in 2024, the People's Advocate had sent the General Directorate of Prisons 231 recommendations relating to prison conditions, of which 159 had been fully addressed and 23 had been partially addressed. The Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights and the Internal Control Service of the Ministry of Interior also conducted inspections in prisons. The Supervisory Commission for the Execution of Imprisonment Sentences was tasked with investigating prisoners' complaints and recommending interim measures to restore violated law or rights. Convicted and pretrial detainees could submit complaints anonymously through complaints boxes and toll-free complaints lines. The Data Protection Commissioner protected prisoners' personal data and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination dealt with prisoners' claims of discrimination.
4. **A representative of Albania** said that legal aid was completely free and covered both legal representation fees and all other legal expenditure, including the cost of medical tests carried out for the purposes of the proceedings. It was available to indigent defendants and was automatically provided for certain categories of victims, including the victims of domestic violence, sexual abuse and trafficking in persons, migrants and stateless persons.
5. The Criminal Code did not require mediation between the victim and the perpetrator in cases involving sexual offences. Mediation and conciliation were available only in the context of private prosecution proceedings and cases involving libel and defamation or misdemeanours, such as simple physical harm or threats. In any case, mediation must be requested by the parties themselves. In 2020, the General Prosecutor had issued an instruction to public prosecutors not to refer victims of domestic violence to mediation.
6. The Government planned to finalize amendments to the Family Code by 2028 in order to recognize civil cohabitation and same-sex marriage and ensure the cross-border recognition of same-sex unions. The timeline extended to 2028 owing to technical aspects related to the implementation of the amendments and political considerations, as the approval of the amendments would require a three-fifths majority in the parliament.
7. **A representative of Albania** said that the reaccreditation of the People's Advocate by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions had been delayed to 2026 for reasons outside of the Government's control.
8. **A representative of Albania** said that data were being collected to assess the impact of the National Action Plan for LGBTI+ Persons. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection had actively participated in organizing activities to celebrate the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, including a diversity festival, in collaboration with civil society and international partners. Awareness-raising campaigns and round tables on hate crimes had been organized and an online platform for reporting hate speech and hate crimes had been developed.
9. National strategies and action plans on gender equality included measures to address gender disparities. The Institute of Statistics monitored the sex ratio at birth to detect potential imbalances, and public campaigns promoting gender equality and emphasizing the value of daughters had been implemented to challenge cultural preferences favouring sons. Gender-sensitive counselling was promoted to discourage sex-selective abortion and healthcare providers were bound by strict ethical codes to prevent the misuse of prenatal sex determination. Her Government cooperated with international organizations in the implementation of regional initiatives to address demographic imbalances. The sex ratio at

birth had evolved in recent years, dropping to 107 males per 100 females in 2023 from 111 males per 100 females recorded several years prior.

10. Albania had a specialized medical institution for forensic psychiatric patients and a new facility specifically for female forensic patients was under construction in Shkodër, with a planned capacity of 35 beds. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection provided diagnostic services and specialized medical treatments, and a psychiatrist was appointed to transitional care institutions to deliver psychiatric care. Treatment protocols and a comprehensive treatment plan for forensic patients had been approved to ensure a standardized approach to their care and rehabilitation.

11. **A representative of Albania** said that police officers carried letters of rights in a variety of languages, including English, Italian and Arabic, to ensure that persons detained were provided with clear oral and written information on their rights. There were different such letters for different situations, including those involving minors or victims of domestic violence. The prosecution service had conducted an internal investigation into the death of Klodian Rasha and had determined that Mr. Rasha had been unarmed when he had been shot dead by the police. The police officer who had shot Mr. Rasha had been convicted in criminal court and sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment.

12. **A representative of Albania** said that, following a 2023 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Nika v. Albania* regarding investigations into the killing of four people during demonstrations in January 2011, the case had been returned to the Special Anti-Corruption and Organized Crime Structure for further investigation. The investigation continued, focusing on the chain of command in the incident. The Ministry of Justice was involved in certifying the status of families of victims from the communist period and was working with the International Commission on Missing Persons to develop legal and other mechanisms to help the families of disappeared persons receive reparations and to locate missing individuals.

13. **Mr. Yigezu** said that he would welcome information on the measures the State Party planned to take to ensure that all police officers granted prompt access to a lawyer and a medical examination from the outset of a person's deprivation of liberty, and to ensure the effectiveness of the system of free legal representation throughout criminal proceedings. It would also be useful to learn what further steps the State Party planned to take to ensure a more restrictive approach to the use of pretrial detention.

14. He wondered whether the State Party planned to adopt a specific law for the protection of victims of trafficking, take more proactive measures to investigate and prosecute the perpetrators in human trafficking cases, promote a gender-responsive approach to access to justice for victims of human trafficking, make further efforts to facilitate and guarantee access to compensation and restitution for victims of human trafficking, both from the perpetrators and from the State, and promote awareness among and appropriate training for law enforcement officials, prosecutors and judges.

15. He would be grateful for information on the steps taken or planned to ensure that using, procuring and offering persons under the age of 18 for illicit activities and commercial sexual exploitation were explicitly prohibited by law. He would also welcome information on any measures the State Party planned to take to provide sufficient resources to labour inspectors to enable them to inspect the informal sector in which child labour occurred, including in private homes and farms and unregistered businesses.

16. He would appreciate clarification on how the State Party planned to address challenges in the judicial system, including a backlog in the vetting of cases at the appeal level, and concerns about the independence of non-magistrate members of the High Judicial Council and the High Prosecution Council, in order to further strengthen the ongoing judicial reform, thereby ensuring the independence, impartiality and competence of members in the judicial system. He also wished to know what measures the State Party would take to increase efficiency in the judicial system.

17. **Ms. Bassim** said that she wished to know what steps the State Party planned to take to ensure that children in conflict with the law were treated in a way that promoted their integration into society, that the detention of children, including pretrial detention, was used

as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible time, and that specialized juvenile divisions comprising trained judges were established. She would welcome information on the types and lengths of sentences applied to children in conflict with the law.

18. She would also be grateful for information on measures to address overcrowding and poor material conditions in places of detention, to ensure access to potable water, proper food, clothing and healthcare, including mental healthcare, for all detainees and to ensure that detainees had access to legal assistance, independent medical examinations and family visits. It would be useful to learn whether training was given to law enforcement and prison staff on issues related to prison management and the prevention of cruelty and ill-treatment.

19. She would be interested to learn about the steps taken by the State Party to effectively prevent and prohibit child abuse, including sexual and online abuse, and to bring the perpetrators to justice, to enforce the law on the minimum age of marriage, without any exceptions, and to provide all social, psychological and medical workers with appropriate professional training and improve their working conditions. It would also be useful to learn what measures the State Party had taken to promote birth registration among Roma and Balkan Egyptian communities, including in remote areas, and to facilitate the registration of the birth of children born to Albanian parents in Syrian refugee camps.

20. **Ms. Tigroudja** said that the Committee continued to be concerned about the potential discrepancies between the 2023 protocol with Italy on migration and asylum-related matters and the international obligations undertaken by Albania. To date, a communication from the special procedures of the Human Rights Council sent to Albania in June 2024 expressing their concerns over the agreement had gone unanswered. She therefore wished to reiterate the questions put by the special procedures, namely she wished to know how such an agreement was compatible with fundamental rights, such as the right to life, the prohibition of ill-treatment and the rights of the child; what procedural safeguards were offered to those who disembarked and what recourse did they have to the Albanian courts in the event of violations of their rights; and what role the Albanian authorities played in asylum applications and refugee status determination procedures.

21. The Committee would appreciate further information on the concrete effects of the new law on asylum in addressing the problems linked to the use of violence at the borders. It had received information that there were still cases of refoulement and collective expulsions at the borders before people could even apply for asylum. She wondered what measures were in place to remedy the lack of access to asylum and refugee status determination procedures with suspensive effect. She would appreciate information on access to free legal aid and interpreters, the detention of children and unaccompanied minors and non-compliance with the principle of non-refoulement.

22. **Mr. Carazo** said that he would appreciate information on the outcomes and challenges faced by the alliance against hate speech, established in 2019 on the initiative of the People's Advocate. Further information on the alliance's prerogatives, competencies and funding sources and the extent of its independence would be helpful. Notwithstanding the amendments to the law on protection from discrimination adopted in 2020, there had been reports that implementation of the law had been insufficient. He wondered whether any measures had been taken to criminalize hate speech and hate crimes against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.

23. Reports indicated that political pressure, corruption and a lack of funding limited the independence of the media and prompted journalists to exercise self-censorship. The State Party had reported a small number of cases of attacks on journalists. He would appreciate information on any investigations initiated, prosecutions brought and convictions secured in those cases. He would also like to know what concrete measures were in place to protect journalists from harassment, intimidation and physical attacks. He would welcome information on the measures taken to prevent the monopolization of media ownership and to guarantee diversity of views in the press and on the reported threats of defamation and libel suits against journalists. He wondered whether the State Party would consider amending the law on audiovisual media, which restricted physical attendance at meetings of the parliament.

24. It would be useful to receive statistics on cases of attacks on peaceful demonstrators and clashes between demonstrators and the police, as reported by the People's Advocate and

civil society organizations. The People’s Advocate had emphasized the need for amendments to be made to the Criminal Code, in particular article 262, which governed the organization of public meetings and required the approval of law enforcement authorities, and the 2001 law on demonstrations. Were there plans to introduce amendments to the provisions on freedom of assembly as recommended by the People’s Advocate, especially as demonstrators continued to be prosecuted thereunder?

25. **Ms. Donders** said that, regarding the restitution of properties belonging to religious groups, she wished to ascertain the number and status of requests for compensation that had been submitted to the State Party, in accordance with amendments to the law on property compensation, which provided for compensation of at least 10 per cent of the property’s value.

26. Noting that, in accordance with the law on non-profit organizations, certain religious organizations were recognized as “religious communities” while others were classified as “other religious associations”, she said that she would welcome an explanation of the agreements between recognized religious communities and the Council of Ministers that had been referred to in the State Party’s report (CCPR/C/ALB/3, para. 161). It was not clear whether all religious communities were entitled to sign such agreements. Clarification of the reasons for not recognizing the Jehovah’s Witnesses as a religious community would also be appreciated.

27. Notwithstanding the renewal of the National Strategy against Violent Extremism for the period 2021–2026, there had been reports of discrimination in the workplace, threats against life, defamation, hate speech and misinformation in the media with regard to certain religious groups. She therefore wished to know how the Strategy provided protection against such discrimination and what preventive measures had been taken to uphold the right to freedom of religion and belief.

28. She would welcome detailed information regarding the measures implemented to combat and prevent corruption in elections, such as vote buying and voter intimidation. She also wished to know how the State Party investigated allegations of fraud and whether it had obtained any convictions.

29. It would also be interesting to learn how the State Party promoted political participation in practice, particularly among young people, how it increased participation by members of ethnic minorities, such as Roma and Egyptians, in elections and how polling stations were made accessible to all people, including persons with physical, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.

The meeting was suspended at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11.30 a.m.

30. **A representative of Albania** said that, according to official data, the issue of prison overcrowding had been fully resolved. That achievement had been the result of the adoption of concrete measures, including investments in infrastructure, the process of amnesty and careful prison management. The current material conditions of prisoners were fully compliant with international standards. According to the official data, the occupancy rate had been 88 per cent in 2023 and 84 per cent in 2024 and stood at 79 per cent as of March 2025.

31. The development plan for the prison system addressed all the recommendations of the national preventive mechanism regarding the living conditions and treatment of prisoners and prison infrastructure. Thirteen of the country’s 20 prisons had been built after 2000 and were in full compliance with standards related to the security, rehabilitation and treatment of inmates. In 2021, the closure of four institutions had been deemed necessary due to ineffectiveness and substandard conditions. A new institution for women had been opened in July 2024.

32. In addition to the recently approved road map for the rehabilitation and social integration of prisoners, life skills courses and rehabilitation modules had been introduced to address problems such as domestic violence, sexual violence, drug abuse and others. Participation in rehabilitative activities had increased considerably. As a result, the time prisoners spent outside their cells had also increased significantly, in line with the recommendations of the national preventive mechanism. All the necessary measures had been taken to safeguard the health and well-being of prisoners; medical examinations were

performed and medicines were provided free of charge. The Government collaborated with civil society and other organizations to deliver regular training on human rights and the prohibition of torture. Special emphasis was placed on the treatment of foreign nationals within the prison system.

33. **A representative of Albania** said that, despite the existence of a national action plan and strategy to combat trafficking in persons, Albania was exploring the possibility of introducing a specific law on the crime in collaboration with international partners. The action plan focused primarily on the protection of women and children. Awareness-raising activities were carried out in schools and other public places. In 2024, the School of Magistrates had conducted six training sessions on trafficking in persons. The sessions had been attended by 80 judges, 162 prosecutors and 119 police officers.

34. The protocol signed between Italy and Albania and the law of asylum were in keeping with the country's national laws. The facilities designated under the protocol were considered to fall within Italian jurisdiction for the purposes of carrying out asylum procedures. The provision of essential services such as clean drinking water, healthcare and mental healthcare was in accordance with the relevant human rights standards. Under articles 7 and 11 of the law on asylum, the principle of non-refoulement was upheld. The provisions stated that no persons were to be returned, expelled or extradited to a country where they faced a real risk of persecution or harm. Article 11 established additional procedural safeguards and clarified the responsibilities of the State authorities to ensure that asylum claims were processed in accordance with both national and international standards.

35. **A representative of Albania** said that every effort was made to ensure that children in conflict with the law who were taken into police custody were appropriately treated. From the outset of the judicial process, law enforcement officers specializing in juvenile justice ensured access to legal assistance, contact with family members and the safe transfer of minors to the young offender institution in Kavajë. Guarantees were also given that the children would receive short trials, appropriate judgments and proper conditions of detention. The administration of the institution was working closely with the judicial authorities and foreign organizations to document every individual case. A key objective of the government detention policy was to reduce the length of pretrial detention for children. The institution provided separate accommodation for children, who also had access to psychological counselling.

36. Judges had received training in the use of alternative non-custodial measures for minors. A specialized juvenile division had been established in the court system. The School of Magistrates collaborated closely with the young offender institution, the Council of Europe and the United Nations system to develop separate course curricula for children in conflict with the law. Courses on children in conflict with the law were also part of the School's general programmes and covered such topics as the standards of the European Court of Human Rights and methods for investigating online child sexual exploitation. The Government had also implemented programmes for the protection of children through restorative justice.

37. **A representative of Albania** said that judicial officials worked with officials in the municipalities, Shkodër in particular, to promote the rehabilitation of minors in conflict with the law. The resulting efforts involved not only the minors themselves but also their families.

38. In 2024, 47 potential victims of trafficking in children had been identified, up from 35 in 2022 and 37 in 2023. On average, some 200 children a year had been found begging or in street situations during the period 2022–2024. The relevant authorities, including the police and the country's 241 child protection officials, worked together to identify children at risk of being exploited in the streets. Considerable efforts had been made, particularly in the north of the country, to discourage parents from arranging marriages for their minor children. The courts had been a supportive ally in the fight against child marriage. The authorities were liaising with their counterparts elsewhere in a bid to secure assistance for the repatriation of children born to Albanian parents held in Syrian camps.

39. **A representative of Albania** said that in 2024 the Labour Inspectorate had found no evidence that children were employed in the mining sector. The one case of child labour involving suspected trafficking in children had been referred to the relevant authorities. The

labour inspectors' work was informed by a handbook, published in 2020, for the identification of and appropriate response to prohibited forms of child labour. A digital platform used by the Inspectorate had made it possible to modernize the inspection system, and there were plans to make it possible for the public to submit complaints on the Inspectorate's website. Within the framework of an agreement with the National Business Centre, every newly registered business would receive an email from the Inspectorate containing information on employers' rights and obligations.

40. **A representative of Albania** said that statistical analyses of data on the well-being of children and young people were published annually. The focus of the analyses was on areas such as health, poverty, material deprivation, education, alternative care, justice, employment and training and digital literacy. Data from the 2023 census would be used to update a dashboard on which indicators related to children and young people were displayed.

41. **A representative of Albania** said that the State police administered 15 child-friendly interviewing units, 3 of which were located in Tirana. Every department of the State police had a specialist or, as in Tirana, an entire section responsible for handling cases involving domestic abuse and minors. Seventy-nine police officers had participated in training on juvenile justice in 2023; several dozen others had learned about restorative justice and mediation as they pertained to conflicts in school settings. The training programmes approved by the police academy for the 2023/24 academic year had included a two-week course, which had been attended by 25 criminal investigation officers, on techniques for interviewing minors.

42. **A representative of Albania** said that 147 reports of child pornography had been made to the police in 2024. The reports had been made by social workers, school counsellors and members of the public. The authorities also collaborated with their counterparts abroad to combat child pornography. In one recent instance, cooperation with the United States authorities had led to the arrest of an American citizen residing in Albania on suspicion of producing child pornography. The Government also worked with social media firms in a bid to prevent cybercrime, especially with regard to minors.

43. **A representative of Albania** said that civil status offices were required by law to register all the births that took place in the country. Parents had to be present to register a birth; registration could not be done online. The registration of births to Albanian nationals living abroad was facilitated by Albanian embassies or consulates. In addition, civil status offices in Albania could register births to Albanian nationals abroad on submission of notarized and translated birth documentation from the issuing country.

44. **A representative of Albania** said that the Prosecutor General had recently instructed prosecutors to consider alternatives to pretrial detention. The length of pretrial detention was also to be monitored more closely.

45. In 2022, in an attempt to increase the effectiveness of efforts to eliminate slavery and trafficking in persons, a handbook on trafficking designed for judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals had been published with the support of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. A general instruction on the effective investigation and prosecution of the criminal offence of human trafficking had been adopted in 2024. In addition, informational material had been posted on the website of the Office of the General Prosecutor to encourage trafficking victims to come forward, and coordinators with educational backgrounds in psychology, sociology and other relevant fields had been designated to assist victims. Training programmes had familiarized hundreds of judges, prosecutors and coordinators with the means of combating trafficking in persons. The number of criminal proceedings instituted against suspected traffickers had increased as a result of those and other efforts.

46. **A representative of Albania** said that amendments to her country's law on audiovisual media had been made to enhance transparency – to make it clear who the owners of media outlets were, for example – protect human dignity, encourage media outlets to regulate themselves and ensure that persons with disabilities had increased access to audiovisual content. A broadcast media code adopted in 2023 contained a section on combating sexism and gender stereotypes.

47. In 2024, the country's lawmakers had recommended that the Office of the General Prosecutor should continue taking measures, including by cooperating with other public institutions, to protect children who were victims of crime and the victims of domestic violence. The Office had also been recommended to continue ensuring that standards of investigation and prosecution were applied consistently.

48. The electronic voting system that would be used in the parliamentary elections to be held in May 2025 met international information security standards. What was more, measures had been taken to facilitate voting by all population groups, including persons with disabilities. Albanian nationals residing abroad would, for the first time, have the right to vote in the parliamentary elections, pursuant to recent amendments to the Electoral Code.

49. A group of 49 lawmakers took a particular interest in legislative developments of relevance to children. It had, for instance, pushed for the adoption of a law to establish a national register of sex crimes against children and organized events to discuss the protection of children and other young people from online violence. It had also led discussions on a draft juvenile justice strategy for the period 2022–2026. The People's Advocate, too, played a significant role in protecting and promoting the rights of the child.

50. **A representative of Albania** said that the parliament had set aside the funds that would enable the Appeals Chamber of the Constitutional Court to clear the backlog of cases related to the vetting of judicial appointees by June 2026. In the meantime, other efforts were being made, including the promotion of alternative forms of dispute resolution, to help prevent backlogs and ensure that proceedings were conducted more expeditiously; under the leadership of the new President of the High Court, the number of outstanding cases had fallen from 36,000 to 16,000 in a period of three years.

51. In view of the large number of applications, the deadline for decisions on applications for the restitution of property to religious communities had been extended to December 2027. A strategy had been developed to ensure that the new deadline would be met. Work to amend the Criminal Code and the Family Code, including in respect of gun crime and sexual exploitation of children, was ongoing.

52. **A representative of Albania** said that a national action plan to prevent violence in pre-university education, developed in consultation with parents, had been adopted in December 2024. The plan was a detailed document laying out measures to strengthen reporting mechanisms, raise awareness of risks, including digital risks, and ensure that schools were safe.

53. **A representative of Albania** said that a number of subsidies were available to the families of children living in poverty. Financial assistance included monthly payments, in particular for households headed by single mothers, large families and orphans. Subsidies helped defray the costs of vaccination, education and electricity. Other benefits included access to preschool education at no cost, free textbooks and special scholarships for children from low-income families. Children with disabilities were entitled to special payments and other forms of social support.

54. The child protection authorities provided counselling services to victims of violence and operated an emergency shelter. An action plan to help ensure that children without parental care or with disabilities could transition out of institutions had been incorporated into the National Social Protection Strategy. According to data from the State social services, the majority of the 40 children with disabilities who had been living in development centres in 2023 had been placed in those centres for socioeconomic reasons. A moratorium on placing children under the age of 2 in institutions had been introduced, and funds had been set aside for a pilot project as part of which two municipalities would take further measures to develop alternatives to institutional care. Countrywide, deinstitutionalization was expected to be complete by December 2027.

55. **A representative of Albania** said that voter rolls including all Albanian nationals eligible to vote had been drawn up. Municipalities were required to give all eligible voters the information they needed – the location of polling stations, for instance – to exercise their voting rights. A campaign had been launched to raise awareness of the importance of

renewing identity documents, although in some cases even an expired document would be accepted by poll workers.

56. **A representative of Albania** said that there were plans to amend the legislation regulating the nomination of candidates who were not judges or prosecutors for election to the High Judicial Council and the High Prosecutorial Council, to ensure compliance with the Constitution, the highest standards of integrity and the principle of merit-based selection. Under the amended provisions, candidates who were not judges or prosecutors would be subject to the same background checks and asset declaration requirements as those who were. In the meantime, two temporary subcommittees had been set up to select candidates through a transparent process involving public hearings.

57. **A representative of Albania** said that 50 cases of electoral crime had been investigated in 2023. Of those, eight had been referred to the courts for trial, six had been referred to the courts for dismissal and two had been referred to the public prosecutor's office. One investigation had been suspended and some cases had been joined. There were currently 32 cases of electoral crime under investigation. Ahead of the parliamentary elections in May 2025, measures for the prevention of electoral crime had been approved, cooperation agreements had been signed by the relevant authorities and a complaint mechanism had been established.

58. **A representative of Albania** said that the incident in which a prisoner had been shot dead by a fellow prisoner in a high security prison in December 2023 was being investigated. The prison director and several members of security staff had been suspended. Prison security was ensured through standard operating procedures and an internal monitoring system.

59. In each prison, there was a multidisciplinary committee responsible for informing new prisoners, in a language that they understood, of their rights and obligations, the prison regulations and the procedures for submitting requests and complaints. Immediately upon admission, prisoners were given the opportunity to contact their family, their lawyer and, where appropriate, a consular representative or a human rights organization. Their physical and mental health was assessed by the prison doctor to prevent the spread of infectious diseases and to record signs of any physical injuries that had occurred prior to admission.

60. A total of 135 psychologists and social workers, 47 medical professionals, 8 psychiatrists and 154 nurses had recently been recruited to work in prisons.

61. **Mr. Carazo** invited the State Party to comment on the support that it had received from the United Nations over the reporting period in its efforts to strengthen human rights protection and to describe how that support could be improved.

62. **Mr. Yigezu** said that he would like to know whether any cases of enforced disappearance had been recorded.

63. **Mr. Korkelia** said that, in March 2020, Albania had declared a state of emergency and had notified the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe that it was derogating from its obligations under several articles of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights). Since the rights covered by the articles in question were also enshrined in the Covenant, he wondered why the State Party had not notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations of its derogation from the Covenant at that time.

64. **A representative of Albania** said that the Prosecutor General had issued a circular on the importance of protecting media freedom in October 2024. A focal point had been appointed within the public prosecution service to publish information on cases of attacks against journalists. Five cases of offences against journalists and media workers were under investigation and three cases had been sent for trial.

65. **A representative of Albania** said that State police personnel had received training on freedom of expression and the protection of journalists in 2023 and 2024 as part of a project run by the European Union and the Council of Europe.

66. **A representative of Albania** said that his country was very proud of its collaboration with the United Nations in the area of human rights and was working to share its positive experiences with other countries in the region. One achievement had been the establishment

of 20 legal aid centres throughout the country, many of which had initially been financed by the United Nations Development Programme.

67. **A representative of Albania** said that the judges and prosecutors who were members of the High Judicial Council and the High Prosecutorial Council were elected, respectively, by the General Assembly of Judges, under the supervision of the President of the Supreme Court, and the General Assembly of Prosecutors, under the supervision of the Prosecutor General. Candidates for election were required to meet very high standards of moral and professional integrity.

68. **A representative of Albania** said that, since August 2021, some 30 start-ups had been founded in northern Albania to support the integration of victims of trafficking. Victims had access to vocational training provided by the State through the National Employment and Skills Agency. A dedicated shelter for unaccompanied minors was being built.

69. **A representative of Albania** said that the Criminal Code and domestic violence legislation had been amended to increase the protection afforded to victims of crime. Various measures had been taken under a new strategy on victim protection, including the development of redress mechanisms.

70. **A representative of Albania** said that there were no data on enforced disappearance for the period 2021–2024.

71. **A representative of Albania** said that, over the reporting period, 87 prosecutors, 50 judicial police officers and 119 coordinators had received training on domestic violence, while 105 prosecutors, 66 judicial police officers and 49 coordinators had received training on juvenile justice. A total of 16 official documents, such as general instructions and circulars, on matters within the scope of the Covenant had been issued by the Prosecutor General.

72. **A representative of Albania** said that steps were being taken to transpose Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union of 11 April 2024 on Protecting Persons who Engage in Public Participation from Manifestly Unfounded Claims or Abusive Court Proceedings into domestic law by June 2027. There were also plans to amend the Criminal Code to decriminalize defamation.

73. **A representative of Albania** said that the inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as Roma, Egyptians and persons with disabilities, was a particular focus of the legislation on vocational education and training and the “Youth Guarantee” plan. Vocational schools provided Roma and Egyptian students with full scholarships, free books and a clothing allowance, while students with disabilities received scholarships, free books and support from a teaching assistant. Vocational school scholarships were also available to children deprived of their families. Public vocational training centres offered free short courses for jobseekers. In the 2023/24 academic year, there had been 639 Roma and Egyptian students and around 200 students with disabilities enrolled in vocational schools.

74. The National Employment and Skills Strategy was focused partly on women’s participation in the labour market. Measures had been taken to improve employment promotion programmes, and policies to promote flexible working and a healthy work-life balance had been adopted. In recent years, around 9,000 persons with disabilities had been registered by the National Employment and Skills Agency and around 400 persons with disabilities had found employment.

75. **A representative of Albania** said that measures to promote school attendance among Roma and Egyptian students included the provision of free textbooks, the provision of free transport for students travelling over 2 km to school and the recruitment of support staff and mediators. Roma and Egyptian students had access to afterschool support programmes. An initiative aimed at children who had missed out on basic education had been introduced. There were plans to incorporate modules on Roma and Egyptian history, culture and art into school curricula. Around 100 Roma and Egyptian teachers were currently employed in the pre-university education system and a member of the Roma community had recently been appointed to the National Council on Pre-University Education for the first time.

76. **A representative of Albania**, thanking the Committee for the constructive dialogue, said that her Government remained committed to protecting the fundamental rights and freedom of all citizens without discrimination and would continue working to strengthen the country's legal framework in line with the Covenant.

77. **The Chair**, thanking the delegation for its willingness to engage with the Committee and its detailed responses, said he hoped that the Committee's concluding observations would help the State Party to further improve its implementation of the Covenant.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.