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Summary record of the 43rd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 3 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Saran (Vice-Chair)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Ms. Saran (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Fifth periodic report of France (continued) (E/C.12/FRA/5; E/C.12/FRA/QPR/5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of France joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation to reply to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **Ms. Borione** (France) said that, in 2022, official development assistance had been equal to 0.56 per cent of gross national income, in line with targets for that year, making France the fourth largest donor of official development assistance. Data for 2023 was not yet available. International cooperation and development efforts centred on combating extreme poverty and preserving global public goods and would continue to increase, particularly for the most vulnerable countries, in line with her country's targets for official development assistance.
4. **A representative of France** said that public policy on combating trafficking in persons, with a particular focus on protecting minors, had been in place for over a decade. In 2022, the ministerial statistics service for internal security had published a report on all administrative data related to trafficking and exploitation. Order No. 2016-413 of 7 April 2016 on the monitoring of the application of labour law had expanded the mandate of labour inspectors to include official reporting of trafficking offences. Within the judiciary, there was a network of around 100 specialists serving as focal points on human trafficking and sex trafficking. Steps taken by the Central Office for the Repression of Human Trafficking included ensuring that victims of trafficking for prostitution could only be contacted through specialized means, such as under a pseudonym. Police inquiries sought to identify victims, as well as perpetrators, of forced prostitution, and an application had been developed to analyse all websites advertising sexual services. Police authorities contacted specialized associations that could provide victims with support before, during and after legal proceedings against perpetrators. Investigators received training on interviewing victims of trafficking, and special interview rooms were used to provide a safe environment. A third national action plan to combat trafficking in persons had been launched in May 2023 and would soon be published.
5. **Ms. Borione** (France) said that the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs provided expertise on organized crime to combat trafficking in persons at the international level and as part of multilateral and bilateral cooperation with countries in South-East Europe and West Africa. In 2021, France had become a pathfinder country under the Alliance 8.7 system and had launched a national acceleration strategy to eliminate child labour, forced labour, human trafficking and modern slavery by 2030.
6. Following protests by the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vest) movement, measures aimed at urban peripheries and rural areas had been adopted, including financial support for rural businesses, mobile health services and a €90 million mobility fund. The Government had limited increases in electricity prices to 4 per cent between February 2022 and January 2023 and to 15 per cent since February 2023, with similar limits for accommodation with shared electricity and heating systems. A total of 4.3 million low-income French workers who used private vehicles to travel to work received fuel subsidies worth 20 cents per litre for six months.
7. **A representative of France** said that the Government supported Human Rights Council resolution 48/13 and General Assembly resolution 76/300 on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. A zero-pollution action plan for air, water and soil had been adopted in 2021 under the European Green Deal. Following a case brought before the Paris Administrative Court, the Government had been ordered to repair the ecological damage, equivalent to a surplus of 15 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, it had

caused by not meeting its carbon emissions objectives during the period 2015–2018. However, as it had exceeded its emissions-reduction targets between 2019 and 2022, a large part of those 15 million tonnes had already been compensated for by January 2023. On 25 September 2023, an ecological planning project had been announced with specific measures in the areas of energy, transport, building renovation and heating. France had adopted its first climate adaptation plan in 2011 and its second in 2018. Following public consultations, a new plan would be published in late 2023 to prepare metropolitan France for a 4°C temperature increase by the end of the century.

8. **A representative of France** said that measures announced after the meeting of the Interministerial Committee for the Overseas Territories on 18 July 2023 included the introduction of a climate mitigation and adaption strategy for each territory. They would build on pre-existing strategies on carbon footprint, biodiversity and invasive species and would also anticipate future climate impacts. Local climate simulations would be used to establish methods to remunerate the overseas territories for the natural resources they provided and would be adapted to future climate challenges. A seminar on agriculture and climate change would be held in Guadeloupe in October 2023 to restructure the current inadequate insurance mechanisms in order to help small-scale farmers cope with the loss of their produce and equipment following natural disasters. The Interministerial Committee had approved a food sovereignty programme, to ensure that food needs could be met through local production and to reduce reliance on imported goods, with crop protection measures for farmers in the overseas territories and the establishment of a task force on pesticides.

9. **A representative of France** said that persons with disabilities made up 3.5 per cent of the workforce, falling short of the country's target of 6 per cent, although the exact figure varied according to sector. Following a national conference on disabilities held in April 2022, France Travail, the new government employment agency, now supported all persons with disabilities in search of work to find employment. All persons with disabilities would have the right to pursue a career in mainstream employment, and medical and social experts would assist the public employment service in meeting the individual needs of each jobseeker. Provisions of the Labour Code which currently required official recognition of a disability would be extended to apply to all persons benefiting from the obligation to employ workers with disabilities. Another measure would allow persons with disabilities to transfer the accommodations made for them by an employer when moving to a new job. Efforts were also being made to change societal attitudes towards disabilities.

10. **A representative of France** said that the Government aimed to ensure equality in all public policy through the national plan for equality and against hatred and anti-LGBTIQ+ discrimination 2023–2026 and the national plan to combat racism, antisemitism and origin-related discrimination 2023–2026. The latter also contained provisions on evaluating the current situation with regard to all forms of discrimination, providing training for key actors, increasing sanctions for perpetrators and effectively supporting victims. Access to employment would be regularly checked by assessing the situation of individuals and conducting tests, for example, by submitting to the same company job applications that were identical except for the applicant's name. If the results were negative, the company would be obliged to establish an action plan within six months, failing which the test results would be made public. A bill on combating discrimination through testing and statistics had been submitted to Parliament in July 2023 and would soon be debated.

11. **A representative of France** said that the monthly pay for health-care professionals had increased by €183 in the public and non-profit sectors, and salary scales had been overhauled for public employees and home-care workers. The reforms had been mostly funded by social security, totalling €12.5 billion between 2020 and 2023. In the social security budget for 2024, €1.1 billion were allocated for further improvements to conditions for hospital staff, including increased pay for night work and weekend work, resulting in, for example, monthly pay increases of between €200 and €500 for hospital nurses. There were plans to support social partners by unifying agreements with the non-profit sector. Work was also underway to make the workplace safer for health-care professionals and to tackle social isolation for those workers.

12. **A representative of France** said that, to incentivize employers to offer permanent or long-term work contracts, businesses' unemployment insurance contributions were now

determined based on the number of their workers signing up to the Pôle emploi government employment centre after the end of short-term contracts. The method of calculating the benchmark daily wage which determined unemployment benefits had been modified to discourage alternating periods of work and unemployment. Small businesses could also receive support in developing human resources policy to help avoid precarious work.

13. Women's pensions were, on average, worth 40 per cent less than those of men, largely due to differences in the impact of parenthood on women's careers compared to men's. The Government therefore took steps to encourage the participation of women in a range of different professions, to combat gender stereotypes and to support parents. A European Union pay transparency directive would also soon come into effect. As of 2022, the average number of three-month periods contributing to pension eligibility that women worked had increased by 13. Reforms to the State pensions system announced in January 2023 would benefit women more than men; the Government intended to address the issue further in 2024. Persons in a regular situation who were not citizens of France or another country in the European Union did not have to work for longer to be eligible for the same pension rights. However, under bilateral social security agreements, pension calculations that took into account periods spent working in each of the countries concerned could result in differing pension eligibility.

14. **A representative of France** said that studies from between 1994 and 2004 had shown high levels of methylmercury contamination in Amerindian populations in French Guiana, originating in equal measure from natural sources and from past or current gold mining. The highest levels of contamination, at about 10 micrograms per gram, had been found in the villages upstream of Maripasoula, Trois Sauts and Camopi. Since 2006, reduced consumption of fish from contaminated rivers had been advised for young children and pregnant or breastfeeding women and measures had been taken to combat illegal gold mining. In 2017, the thresholds for medical attention had been lowered to 2.5 micrograms per gram for pregnant women and to 1.5 micrograms per gram for children; the World Health Organization-recommended threshold for hair mercury levels was 10 micrograms per gram. A 2021 epidemiological study by the Regional Health Agency of French Guiana had detailed the adverse impacts of mercury and lead poisoning and had helped to identify affected populations and geographic areas, increase knowledge of the problem and examine how mercury contamination in the region had developed. A strategy had been implemented by the Regional Health Agency and the prefecture of French Guiana to prevent mercury contamination; to raise awareness of environmental pollution by lead and mercury so as to inform the eating habits of the population; to improve detection of cases of poisoning; to provide comprehensive and adapted care and reparations to affected populations; to monitor the adverse effects of contamination; and to develop analytical epidemiological techniques that were adapted to the territory. Initial results from the strategy had been positive.

15. **A representative of France** said that the Government respected international agreements on the rights of unaccompanied children, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Departmental authorities provided such children with accommodation and a medical check-up while evaluating their needs. Pursuant to legislation adopted on 7 February 2022, unaccompanied children could no longer be housed in unauthorized facilities, particularly hotels, and received assistance up to the age of 21 years, to ensure continuity in their situation. He was not aware of any deterioration in the living conditions of unaccompanied children, even though the first eight months of 2023 had witnessed an increase in their number in some parts of France by up to 40 per cent compared to the same period in 2022.

16. Central government provided financial assistance to the departments for those activities: €500 per evaluation and €90 per day for 14 days to help finance the provision of accommodation, plus supplementary support in case of increases in the number of unaccompanied children.

17. In Mayotte, 1,900 children received assistance from the department's social services, which received €4.7 million in support from central government funds. An audit was underway to ensure the sustainability of that policy.

18. The inquiries into the ORPEA residential care institutions for older persons had revealed outstanding debts of €56 million, which were being recovered. The public prosecutor was conducting an investigation, having received individual complaints concerning ill treatment and embezzlement. An audit of all 7,500 nursing homes in France, for which 120 inspectors had been recruited, would be conducted over the coming two years.

19. Recent data from the National Institute of Health and Medical Research had shown a major increase in the share of the population that was obese, which currently stood at 17 per cent. To combat its causes, including nutrition and lifestyle, the Government had deployed a five-year National Nutritional Health Programme, which incorporated awareness-raising, nutritional value scores on food packaging and regulation of marketing aimed at children. A sport-focused initiative had been launched, as well as a therapeutic programme targeting 3- to 12-year-olds at risk of becoming obese. Another initiative aimed to ensure that, by 2027, food aid provided by assistance networks complied with the National Nutritional Health Programme recommendations.

20. Health-care access issues were not due to financial shortfalls, but to problems such as an ageing population, an increase in chronic illness prevalence and demographic changes in the health-care professions. The social security budget was set to increase by 3.2 per cent between 2023 and 2024.

21. Steps had been taken to improve the image of medical professions, and the Regional Health Agencies were addressing the problem of low medical services coverage in certain areas. Measures included subsidies to encourage professionals to set up practices in such areas, permission for retirees to continue work and new organizational methods aimed at reducing isolation and improving continuity in services provided. Digital technology was also being leveraged, including by expanding remote consultation services.

22. Thanks to a recent reform, France provided 100 per cent free health-care coverage for irregular migrants who had been living in the country for at least three months and had minimum resources. To date, over 400,000 people had benefited from that service. The budget allocated to State medical aid – €1.2 billion in 2022 – had increased by 12.4 per cent in 2023.

23. **A representative of France** said that 3,000 people living in slums had been rehoused since 2018, bringing an 18 per cent reduction in the number of people living in such conditions. Thanks to a school mediation service conducted simultaneously, 3,000 children from the slums had been enrolled in education. People were only ever removed from slums subsequent to a judicial ruling, and evictions remained just one aspect of a broader reintegration strategy.

24. European Union Directive 020/2184, of 2020, on the right to water, had been transposed into national legislation in January 2023. Work was being conducted to raise awareness of the law, which provided for the right to at least 50 litres of water per person per day; a joint initiative with a non-governmental organization included the production of a multilingual informational video.

25. In the area of housing, interest-free loans, a State-guaranteed rental deposit service and a new plan for the homeless and inadequately housed persons had been established to improve access. Since 2008, 258,000 households had obtained accommodation thanks to Act No. 2007-290, adopted in 2007, instituting the right to housing.

26. **Mr. Abashidze**, noting recent reports of an infant having died due to an alleged absence of specialists, said he would be interested to learn whether French hospitals were fully staffed with the appropriate specialist care providers. He would also like to know why the March 2023 pension reforms had been forced through under article 49.3 of the Constitution, rather than being adopted by parliamentary vote, as recommended under the Covenant.

27. **Ms. Lee** asked what France was doing to assess the impact of its climate change mitigation and adaptation measures on the most vulnerable inhabitants, how it was ensuring that they were not disproportionately affected and what ecological transition frameworks and roadmaps had the Government prepared.

28. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said he would welcome information on concrete measures and plans to ensure equitable implementation of harm reduction measures for drug users. It would also be useful to know how prepared hospital care providers were to deal with people suffering from addictions.

29. **Mr. Amarti** (Country Task Force) asked what measures had been taken in Mayotte to rehouse irregular migrants who had been evicted from unsanitary accommodation in 2023 and how the State party ensured the respect of human rights, in particular for persons with disabilities, the elderly and children. He said he would also welcome information on how the State party was combating discrimination in access to housing due to prejudice based on surnames.

30. **Ms. Rossi** said she would like to know whether irregular migrants had access to the same range of health care as regularized migrants and French nationals. If only basic health care was provided, were there any plans to amend the situation? She also wondered if the State party was taking any measures to provide reparation and compensation to the communities affected by environmental degradation and pollution in French Guiana, beyond the plans mentioned previously.

31. More information would be welcome about the State party's position concerning a potential extension of the World Trade Organization's June 2022 decision to waive partial patents on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines, to include diagnostics and medical treatment for the disease.

32. **Mr. Windfuhr** (Country Task Force), noting reports of recent interruptions in the water supply in Guadeloupe, said he would like to hear what was being done to guarantee access to water on the island, especially for people who did not own a water storage tank. In the light of recent medical articles on the carcinogenic nature of chlordecone, he also wished to know more about contamination levels there. He would welcome information on the impact of the Housing First plan on other financing instruments for social housing and, specifically, whether it negatively affected funding for other policies.

33. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** (Country Rapporteur) said she wished to learn what measures had been taken to ensure Travellers' rights to housing and basic services. If caravans were not a recognized form of housing, how did the State party ensure access to basic rights as defined in the Covenant?

34. She also wished to know more about the scope and application of Act No. 2023-668, of July 2023, on the protection of property from illegal occupation, the severity of the penalties it provided for and the new offences attributable to tenants that it introduced. In the light of the concerns expressed by the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights regarding access to adequate housing, it would be interesting to know whether any human rights violations had occurred in the application of the Act.

35. **Ms. Borione** (France) said that article 49.3 of the Constitution had been invoked following a reading of the pension reform bill by both parliamentary assemblies. That action was legal and open to examination by both the French Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights.

36. **A representative of France** said that measures were being taken to improve equality of access to health care, including by promoting medical professions, offering more places on medical degree courses and encouraging health-care professionals to relocate to areas where coverage was limited.

37. France provided universal health-care protection for every person legally present on the national territory after three months of residency in the country. It was open to both asylum-seekers and unaccompanied children. For irregular migrants, there were limited but proportional restrictions; for example, most generic medicines were free, but thermal cures were not.

38. The new national Solidarity Pact contained a pillar on an equitable ecological transition. A national "Green Fund" for ecological transition was aimed in particular at low-income households, through initiatives such as social leasing schemes for electric vehicles

from 2024. Incentives were also in place for low-income families to renovate their housing, and platforms offering soft mobility solutions for vulnerable persons were being established.

39. **A representative of France** said that the 350,000 to 400,000 Travellers living in France were legally French citizens. Currently, 75 per cent of the transit sites planned had been completed. Sanitary conditions on the sites had been improved; each one was assessed and approved in partnership with the National Consultative Commission on Travellers.

40. While the Act on illegal occupation had introduced harsher penalties, the Government's intention had been to achieve a balance between squatters' rights and those of property owners. The Act was being applied in parallel with rehousing measures.

41. A programme for homeless and inadequately housed persons was being implemented with a substantial annual budget of €3 billion, even though 60 per cent of the population concerned did not enjoy full rights to stay in France.

42. The Government's commitment to addressing the complex issue of housing was illustrated by its proposal of an ambitious decentralized policy under which regional authorities would manage the construction of homes.

43. **A representative of France** said that persons who experienced discrimination based on their origin when seeking housing could request assistance from the Defender of Rights, which would liaise with the housing agency concerned. They could also, or alternatively, lodge a complaint with the police or gendarmerie or request the support of an anti-racism organization in legal proceedings, including legal testing to assess the existence of a discriminatory motive.

44. **A representative of France** said that the authorities in Mayotte had requested the Government's assistance in addressing serious security problems and health issues linked to poor housing. In response, the Government had taken steps to combat crime and had evicted the inhabitants of the housing in question, which had since been destroyed. That action had been taken while considering the occupants' situation and needs, with particular focus on older persons, persons with disabilities and children, whose right to education had been upheld. At the same time, a road map to ensure the provision of adequate housing included the construction of various types of homes, such as modular housing that could be constructed quickly to provide a temporary solution and social housing with low rents for very vulnerable persons.

45. Although water management was the responsibility of local authorities, the serious problems in Guadeloupe had prompted the Government to provide financial assistance and support to the local water board, which was facing significant internal management challenges. To that end, an additional €27 million had been allocated to the board in 2023, support had been provided in the areas of recruitment and engineering, and the Agence française de développement (French Development Agency) and the Overseas Territories Bank had lent more than €91 million to the territorial authorities. The Government had also adopted a plan to protect the health of the inhabitants of Guadeloupe from the risks of chlordecone exposure, eradicate chlordecone from food and address its impact on the population. The measures in place to address the long-term problem of chlordecone contamination included free soil analysis to reduce sources of exposure; advice from dieticians to encourage the population to avoid contaminated food, a step that had been demonstrated to halve the amount of chlordecone present in the body within six months; the establishment of a compensation fund for victims of pesticide – including chlordecone – contamination; assistance for fishers and farmers; research; and government funding for the treatment of contaminated water.

46. **Ms. Borione** (France) said that discussions on intellectual property, public assets and vaccines, in which the European Union was playing a leading role, were under way at the World Trade Organization.

47. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to know how new regulations on bullying in schools would enhance the provisions already in place and whether they were sufficient to deal with the problem. He would also like to know what specific measures had been adopted to assist immigrant and Roma pupils and whether support was given in meeting the additional costs of attending school, such as for supplies, transport

and food. It would be interesting to hear the delegation's comments on the shortcomings in education for children with disabilities that had been identified by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2021. It was also important to know how the restrictions on home schooling introduced in 2021 aligned with the right of parents and legal guardians to choose for their children schools other than those established by the public authorities, as enshrined in the Covenant. The delegation was invited to comment on the high number of children not in school and the measures planned to address the problem; and on reports of very high inequality in educational attainment linked to socioeconomic background and the steps taken reduce that gap. He would also like to know what initiatives had been taken to guarantee access to higher education for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and improve the distribution of quality higher education opportunities across the State party.

48. The Committee would like to know how the lack of recognition of the collective rights of groups defined by a common origin, culture, language or belief was compatible with the principles set out in the Committee's general comment No. 21 (2009), in which it recognized that cultural rights could be exercised individually, as a group or within a community. In that connection, it would be interesting to hear whether the State party planned to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, what measures had been adopted to protect and promote the languages used in overseas territories and regions and whether those languages were used in schools and promoted as languages of participation in cultural, social and political life. He wondered whether the prohibition on the use of the diacritical marks of the country's regional languages in civil status documents meant that speakers of those languages, and of languages used in overseas territories and regions, were denied the basic right to self-identification through their names.

49. He would like to know what was being done to ensure that broadcasting services were accessible to persons with disabilities, including through the use of subtitles and sign language; whether the State party would consider including human rights principles in its science and technology plans and what steps had been taken to ensure that the public received accurate scientific information and was protected from disinformation that could hinder the enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights.

The meeting was suspended at 11.55 a.m. and resumed at 12.05 p.m.

50. **A representative of France** said that the measures to combat bullying in schools that had been adopted at the start of the 2023/24 academic year included regional intervention teams that worked with school staff and prioritized protection for victims. In particularly serious cases, bullies could be expelled, a provision that had recently been extended to primary schools. All cases of bullying were recorded and communicated to the public prosecutor, if necessary, via a platform that enabled the exchange of information between the education system and the judiciary. Coordinators were appointed in each school to implement a bullying prevention programme, and all teaching staff would receive training by 2027. Parents could volunteer for training on detecting the risk of bullying. The police and the gendarmerie led activities in schools to raise awareness of the risks of bullying – both in schools and elsewhere, including online – for bullies and their victims. The judiciary was assisting efforts to improve protection for victims, and criminal sanctions were imposed on perpetrators. The sanctions varied according to the severity of the bullying and included citizenship courses for bullies and their parents, restorative justice measures, punitive damages, exclusion from social media and, in extreme cases that led to a victim's suicide or attempted suicide, up to 10 years' imprisonment.

51. Newly arrived immigrant children whose first language was not French received adapted education, including French lessons, at special units. A school mediation programme targeted students in disadvantaged areas, such as slums, and their knowledge and language skills were assessed by psychologists in order to tailor their learning. The Government invested almost €800 million each year in assisting with the additional costs of education, including through social funds distributed by schools. Some school supplies were provided by local authorities, and almost half of all students received a grant of around €400 at the start of each school year. Transport costs were limited thanks to the high number of schools in France, which allowed most primary school pupils to attend a school very close to their homes. Older students, meanwhile, could receive assistance with transport costs. Similarly, means-tested financial assistance was provided to cover the cost of school meals, and each

year around 300,000 primary school pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds received free breakfasts.

52. Since September 2012, the number of children with disabilities who attended mainstream schools had more than doubled to around 478,000 thanks to the recruitment of the equivalent of 85,000 full-time support staff and the introduction of measures to allow children with disabilities to combine mainstream and specialized schooling. The number of measures in place to assist students with autism was five times higher than in 2017.

53. **A representative of France** said that the number of supported places in mainstream schools for children with disabilities had risen by 70 per cent between 2006 and 2018, an increase made possible by the creation of facilities that enabled children with disabilities to divide their time between specialized and mainstream schools and the deployment of mobile teams to assist teachers in supporting children with disabilities. At the 2023 National Disability Conference, the decision had been made to create school support centres for children with disabilities, at a cost of €400 million, along with 100 medical-educational units for children with intellectual disabilities, autism and behavioural issues; those units would be located in schools and allow children to combine mainstream and specialized education.

54. **A representative of France** said that, under the Constitution, collective rights could not take precedence over individual rights. However, individual rights could be exercised collectively. French law did not exclude the recognition of local practices, customs and knowledge of the population of its overseas territories from public policy, and a specific regulation and legal tools taking account of customary practices had been gradually established. Article 72-3 of the Constitution stated that the overseas populations were recognized as part of the French people, who shared a common ideal of liberty, equality and fraternity. Indigenous Peoples enjoyed the same individual rights as all other French citizens, and those rights could be exercised collectively, provided that public order and decency were respected. At the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, the French delegation had made a declaration recalling that Indigenous Peoples could be accorded special treatment on a territorial basis.

55. **A representative of France** said that, in addition to French, there were 82 recognized languages in France and, since 2008, regional languages had been considered part of the country's cultural heritage in accordance with the Constitution. Under the Act of 11 February 2005 on equality of rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of persons with disabilities, sign language was regarded as a language in its own right. The 2021 Act on the Promotion and Protection of the Heritage of Regional Languages had enhanced measures to protect the country's linguistic heritage, giving regional languages greater prominence in public schools and spaces, alongside French.

56. France had signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1999 but, on the advice of the Constitutional Council, had not yet ratified it. Nevertheless, the Government had applied 39 of the undertakings under the Charter in relation to education, culture, the media, economic and social life and public services. In 2022, the Prime Minister had established the National Council for Regional Languages and Cultures, which provided ongoing training and media and publishing services to give regional languages and cultures greater visibility. The Ministry of Culture had recently set up a department for the French language and the languages of France to work with the decentralized State services on promoting linguistic diversity throughout French territory. The Ministry provided support to numerous linguistic research projects and to the main public bodies and associations responsible for promoting regional languages, and had organized national consultations on multilingualism in the overseas territories in order to take the linguistic reality into account in its policies. A mobile laboratory had been built in cooperation with the National Centre for Scientific Research to record conversations in all languages spoken in France to monitor the evolution of those languages. In the second half of 2023, a digital portal would be launched to gather all information available on the Internet concerning the languages spoken in France in a single place. An international centre dedicated to the French language in Villers-Cotterêts, to be inaugurated by the President on 19 October 2023, would host permanent exhibitions dedicated to the languages of France. By 2025, the centre would also house a reference centre for language technologies.

57. **A representative of France** said that the legislative framework for homeschooling had changed and parents must now request permission from the education authorities to homeschool their children. Authorization was given if the children suffered health problems, had a disability, travelled frequently or lived far from a school. Approximately 90 per cent of applications were accepted.

58. In order to increase access to higher education for all students, a strategy had been introduced with the very simple yet ambitious objectives of raising the general level of education of all students and guaranteeing equal opportunities by reducing the impact of social, geographical and cultural factors on school performance. The age at which compulsory education began had been lowered to 3 years, and the Government had invested in building schools in French Guiana and Mayotte and had developed a teacher training plan to ensure that schools had the capacity to accommodate younger pupils. A government policy to boost preschool education for children from 2 years of age in disadvantaged areas was relatively advanced in Guadeloupe and Martinique, where almost a third of 2-year-old children attended preschool. Class sizes in the third year of preschool and the first two years of primary education had been limited to 12 for children in disadvantaged areas to enable teachers to dedicate more time to the pupils who needed the most assistance and to adapt their teaching styles to address the problems faced by pupils. Student assessments were conducted at various levels of schooling to identify any difficulties and adapt teaching methods accordingly.

59. In the overseas territories, the education authorities had implemented an initiative to support pupils with their homework outside of school hours, since many parents were unable to assist their children, which perpetuated social inequalities. Since 2017, secondary school students in disadvantaged areas were offered support in subjects including French and mathematics.

60. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that he was concerned by reports that athletes would be banned from wearing headscarves at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. He wished to know to what extent the Government had conducted human rights due diligence when organizing the Games.

61. **Ms. Rossi** said that she wondered whether the State party had conducted an ex ante analysis of the impact of its investment in Bridge International Academies, in the light of reports that the company had violated education and labour rights when providing education services in East Africa. She would be interested to learn whether the Government had considered suspending funding when it had been informed of the negative impact of the company's activities and, if not, whether it was considering doing so at present. Had the State party adopted any due diligence mechanisms for its future foreign aid investments?

62. **Mr. Abashidze** said that he wished to know what proportion of children attended private schools, how much private schools cost on average and whether children from low-income families could attend such schools. It would be useful to hear what proportion of children were illiterate, to have information about the learning achievement of migrant children and to know what percentage of such children attended school.

63. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** said that, at a time when human rights were under increasing threat around the globe, diplomatic efforts by the State party to ensure respect for those rights were becoming increasingly important.

64. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** asked which of the specific undertakings in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages the State party was unable to implement.

65. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu** said that she would appreciate clarification of the State party's definition of "Traveller". She wondered whether persons evicted pursuant to the July 2023 Act on illegal occupation would be guaranteed adequate alternative housing.

66. **Ms. Borione** (France) said that, for the first time in history, the Olympic Games would be fully sustainable and egalitarian. The State respected the freedom of belief of all persons. Accordingly, it followed the principle of secularism, which meant that persons representing France in sporting events were banned from proselytizing and from displaying symbols

showing any religious affiliation, including the veil. That did not preclude them from practising their religion in private.

67. **A representative of France** said that government expenditure on its policy for the democratization of culture and transmission of knowledge had been steadily increasing over the previous six years, and had amounted to almost €800 million in 2023. Several interministerial protocols were in place for the implementation of the policy with respect to persons with disabilities. The department responsible for the democratization of culture had developed a road map to ensure access to cultural activities for persons with disabilities in partnership with organizations and representatives of such persons. The State had allocated a budget of €3 million to support more than 400 specific projects to enhance accessibility and, since 2021, assistance had been provided to around 20 organizations working on projects related to health and disability. Regional directorates of cultural affairs were responsible for implementing accessibility policies in cultural establishments.

68. **A representative of France** said that sustainability lay at the heart of the 2024 Olympic Games. The legacy and sustainability plan, which was available online, included a social charter and a set of environmental commitments. Human rights due diligence obligations for companies were set out in the government procurement policy and calls for tender.

69. **A representative of France** said that Travellers were a separate community from the Roma and migrant populations. In schools, Roma and migrant children participated in the school mediation programme in accordance with the principle of universality. Additional support was provided to vulnerable children on the basis of their needs rather than race or ethnicity.

70. The aim of the July 2023 Act on illegal occupation had been to strike a balance between the rights of property owners and occupants. It contained provisions on the unconditional right to accommodation of persons living in poor housing and homeless persons.

71. **A representative of France** said that the Interministerial Committee for the Overseas Territories had stepped up efforts to combat illiteracy, since almost a third of the overseas population had difficulties reading. A system would be introduced for detecting illiteracy, a training course would be developed and a resource centre would be established in each overseas territory. French courses would be improved for children whose mother tongue was not French and bilingual education would be offered. The number of recognized languages spoken in the overseas territories would soon increase to 56 with the recognition of the English-based Creole spoken in Saint Martin.

72. **A representative of France** said that 13 per cent of children attended private primary schools and 21 per cent went to private secondary schools. A system of grants and scholarships was available to allow pupils to attend private schools, with a view to increasing the number who came from disadvantaged backgrounds.

73. **Ms. Borione** (France) said that the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages had not been ratified because it established linguistic rights of groups rather than individuals and recognized the right to use a language other than French, which was the language spoken in public life.

74. She wished to thank the Committee for the productive dialogue. The Government would follow up on the Committee's recommendations as part of its efforts to guarantee economic, social and cultural rights, which were all the more important in the context of the challenges currently facing the world.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.