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Summary record of the 36th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 12 September 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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

Consideration of reports (continued)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (continued)

Third periodic report of Honduras (continued) (E/C.12/HND/3; E/C.12/HND/Q/3; E/C.12/HND/RQ/3)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Honduras joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the delegation of Honduras to the meeting, explained that an additional member of the delegation would be participating via video link. She invited the delegation to reply to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **A representative of Honduras** said that, regarding the public debt, the Government had put forward a bill on taxation justice, one of whose main objectives was to eliminate tax loopholes and reduce tax evasion. It thus hoped to achieve a fairer, more transparent tax system allowing for a better distribution of resources. The trust funds set up with private banks had been eliminated, and finances had been centralized within the Ministry of Finance.
4. The Government had set up a special unit tasked with developing policies for the inclusion and equality of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as an inter-agency committee that would work jointly with civil society representatives from that community. Together with SOMOS-CDC, a non-governmental organization (NGO), it was working on an advocacy plan to ensure the effective implementation of the law on equality and equity in respect of the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. As part of the reparation measures ordered by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case *Vicky Hernández et al. v. Honduras*, a study grant with an annual value of 100,000 lempiras (L) would become available starting in 2025. The Government was committed to upholding the rights of trans persons, including the right to education.
5. A solid legal basis was needed for the continuous monitoring of the enforcement of climate change policy, hence the proposal of a bill on climate change. A number of workshops had recently been held to present a draft of the bill to various actors working on climate-related issues, whose inputs had been incorporated into a revised draft.
6. The Ministry of Defence had a budget of L 994 million, which was used mainly to defend the country's national sovereignty and to fund national security and environmental support systems.
7. **A representative of Honduras** said that the Government had introduced two major programmes to reduce inequality and extreme poverty. One was the Solidarity Action Programme, designed to protect and uphold the rights of vulnerable persons and groups. The other, the Presidential Solidarity Network Programme, was aimed at establishing programmes and projects for people living below the poverty line, covering such areas as health, education, social protection, infrastructure and income generation, and as part of which a number of grants had been created for small-scale producers. The Ministry of Social Development was responsible for carrying out the programme in coordination with a number of other ministries. A national housing programme had also been introduced to improve the housing situation for families living in extreme poverty. The budgets of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health had been increased to better enable them to support poverty reduction measures.
8. **A representative of Honduras** said that a major overhaul of the Act on Equity and Comprehensive Development for Persons with Disabilities had begun in July 2022, with the establishment of an expert committee composed of representatives primarily from civil society but also from international organizations and from the Ministry of Social Development and the Directorate General for Persons with Disabilities. The revised draft of the Act provided for the participation of the Honduran Social Investment Fund and of the Ministry of Education in the building and renovating of schools to make them more accessible to children with disabilities. The revised draft also stressed compliance with the target rate of 4 per cent inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workplace, which was a

significant challenge, including for public institutions. The Government had risen to the challenge, however, and the percentage of employees with disabilities working at the Ministry of Social Development, for example, now stood at 10 per cent. A subsidy had been introduced to support the access of persons with disabilities to the labour market. In that connection, a database had been created to gather in one place the names of persons with disabilities who were available for work. One of the issues sometimes raised was that such persons did not fulfil all the requirements of employers but, in reality, jobs were available in a wide range of sectors and persons with disabilities had many skills to offer. The involvement of the private sector in such initiatives was especially important in improving the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

9. **A representative of Honduras** said that the National Coordination Office for Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Hondurans was drafting a new comprehensive public policy on racism and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Hondurans. The Solidarity Action Programme had been introduced to address the most difficult issues that minority groups, including the different ethnic groups living in Honduras, faced in terms of discrimination and marginalization and that prevented them from fully exercising their rights. Lastly, the Ministry of Social Development was working on a proposal to amend the Constitution so as to declare Honduras as a multilingual and multicultural country.

10. **A representative of Honduras** said that the public prosecutor's office had run training programmes for public servants, the police and justice workers on issues including gender perspective, human rights and the prevention of violence and discrimination against women and gender-diverse persons. The training taught participants how to identify discriminatory behaviour and prevent revictimization and how to apply the law correctly in cases of gender-based violence. Several special prosecutors' offices had been created for vulnerable groups, for example, the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Ethnic Groups and Cultural Heritage had developed protocols for the comprehensive care of victims of discrimination and gender-based violence, including legal assistance and psychological support. The three levels of government together provided a coordinated response, and steps had been taken to make investigative processes more agile. For the first time, the high-level committee had referred cases of violent killings of trans women in Honduras to the Public Prosecution Service.

11. **A representative of Honduras** said that, in 2022, shortly after the current Administration had assumed office, a formal complaint had been lodged against a public figure for making statements that were discriminatory in respect of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran peoples and, in 2023, charges had been brought against that person by the prosecution service.

12. The fact that the poverty rate had fallen considerably in 2024 was a sign of the country's continuing economic recovery since the end of the lockdowns that had been imposed during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. While government actions were not solely responsible for such positive results, they nevertheless had had a major impact, especially through the Presidential Solidarity Network Programme, whose cash transfers had benefitted more than 250,000 families.

13. *Vicky Hernández et al. v. Honduras* was truly a landmark case in that it upheld the rights of a member of one of the most vulnerable groups in Honduras – the LGBTIQ+ community. The President's recognition before the international community of the Honduran State's responsibility for the death of Ms. Hernández had been crucial to the eventual creation of a unit dedicated to achieving the inclusion and equality of the LGBTIQ+ community.

14. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, said that she would appreciate an update on the steps taken to bring the Labour Code and the regulations on child labour adopted in 2001 into line with the Code for Children and Adolescents of 1996, to ensure that no child under 14 years of age was authorized to work. It would be useful to learn about any measures adopted to provide assistance to children and young people who had been victims of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, especially given the low number of convictions for offences of that kind. She would be grateful for an update on the measures taken by the Government internationally and regionally to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children and the trafficking of children for that purpose.

15. It would be interesting to have a full account of how the poverty reduction measures adopted by the Government had contributed to the decrease in poverty rates and to learn what results those measures were expected to have over the next five years. She would also like to know how the State party planned to address the persistently high rates of poverty in rural areas.

16. Regarding the right to adequate housing, she would like to know how forced evictions, including preventive evictions, were carried out and what steps were taken to ensure that the human rights of those concerned were observed. She would also like to know what steps the Government was taking to improve access to water and sanitation services, especially in rural regions and small-scale fishing communities.

17. In the light of reports that recent legislative proposals did not take account of the human rights implications of gas-production methods based on fracking and that their approach to loss and damage focused solely on risk management, she would appreciate additional information on the content of and adoption process for both the forthcoming update to the national adaptation plan and the draft bill on climate change. It would be useful to learn how the potentially affected communities were involved or consulted and how the instruments could contribute to preventing or addressing territorial conflicts and human rights violations.

18. She would like to know how the State party was addressing the problem of food insecurity, which she understood was a major challenge owing in part to the country's vulnerability to climate change. It would also be useful to learn what steps had been taken to introduce local food production programmes and to prevent malnutrition, undernutrition and obesity.

19. She would welcome a report on the current status of the bill on the establishment of a national health system, including universal health coverage. With reference to the abortion care guideline adopted by the World Health Organization in 2022 and in the light of the constitutional ban on abortion introduced in the State party in 2021, she said she wished to remind the delegation that restrictions on access to abortions did not reduce the number of abortions, but forced women to seek unsafe abortions. That was compounded by the fact that only 58 per cent of women in the country had access to sexual and reproductive health services, generally only in the private sector, and by the lack of access to, and thus very low level of use of, emergency contraceptives in the public sector. It would be interesting to learn what the Government was doing to improve access to such services in the public sector and what measures it was taking to address the high rate of teenage pregnancy, which stood at 24 per cent, and even higher in rural areas.

20. The Committee would like to receive comprehensive data on the use of illegal drugs in the country, related policies and programmes and any harm reduction and rehabilitation programmes. It would also be interesting, given that national legislation criminalized the possession and use of drugs, to hear what was being done to raise public awareness of the programmes.

21. **A representative of Honduras** said that the overall health sector budget had been increased by 60 per cent since 2021, reaching an unprecedented 3.8 per cent of gross domestic product, with a further rise to come in 2024 in relation to planned investment in hospital infrastructure for the provision of neonatal and maternal care, including in underserved rural communities. There had also been substantial budget increases for other parts of the health sector: 44 per cent for social security and 107 per cent for pharmaceuticals. The combined sector thus accounted for over 10 per cent of the State budget.

22. Various strategies had been adopted towards expanding health coverage and improving access to services, with the aim of achieving, *inter alia*, a reduction in maternal mortality through improved primary health care networks and increases in human resources. Over 6,000 health professionals and technicians had been recruited on permanent contracts since 2021, with a further 3,000 given temporary contracts in 2024. The recent epidemic of dengue fever in the region had presented an additional challenge, causing child and maternal deaths. Two thirds of the eight new hospitals being built were in areas that currently had inadequate access. In addition, 68 emergency centres were being built and the same number of general health centres were to be refurbished. Approximately US\$ 26 million was being

invested in five new maternal and neonatal units that were expected to benefit 1.6 million persons. Around 20 other new health facilities had been opened over the previous year and postgraduate specialist training provision had been expanded by 100 per cent, including a new programme at international level. The procurement system for pharmaceuticals, which had previously been purchased through trusts, had been changed for purposes of transparency, and the supply systems had improved.

23. The sexual and reproductive health strategy had led to the emergency contraceptive pill being approved for use in March 2023 and registered to ensure its availability throughout the country. The family planning manual had been updated to include a plan aimed at reducing the teenage pregnancy rate. However, despite the inauguration of more than 40 adolescent-friendly services with trained health staff, the rate had come down only a few points, from 97 to 89 per 1,000 births, and was still recognized as a significant challenge.

24. **A representative of Honduras** said that the conditional cash transfer programme was being used as a way to combat poverty in rural areas; a total of 138,000 households had participated in the first phase. Rural savings banks provided seed money for cooperative action in rural communities. Currently, 2007 villages participated in the Solidarity Network, which worked to address historic inequalities in areas of extreme poverty. In that context, a number of health units had been set up: 700 primary care units, with a further 700 general units; and training in early childhood development had been provided to help address the problems of malnutrition, lack of access to education and lack of access to basic services.

25. **A representative of Honduras** said that the National Statistics Institute was currently conducting a census in the six most populated cities in the country, targeting in particular the 200 poorest areas. It was planned by the end of 2024 to replicate in those urban areas the action taken to combat extreme poverty in rural areas. The projects would include conditional cash transfers, early childhood support, the construction of primary healthcare units, sustainable vegetable gardens and urban soup kitchens, in addition to the provision of basic support for livelihoods, housing and sanitation. The National Service for Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses would provide support for small family businesses.

26. **A representative of Honduras** said that the level of food insecurity had come down by 10 per cent since 2022, as confirmed by the World Food Programme. Priority had been given to the most vulnerable population groups, especially in the regions of the Dry Corridor.

27. Over the previous three years, the Ministry for Human Rights had examined various key legislative initiatives, including the introduction of the purple alert system for missing women, the regulations of the National Council for the Prevention of Violence, the reform of the legislation on trafficking in persons, the approval of the emergency contraceptive pill and the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure. Legislation was also being promoted on the prevention and punishment of violence against women in political life and the creation of women's refuges. Progress had been made with reforms to the Family Code and the Code of Civil Procedure to bring them into line with human rights in respect of the age of majority, parental rights and divorce.

28. The budget for the commission working with victims of human trafficking had been doubled. Many of the cases taken up by the Public Prosecution Service had been brought to court, and the Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit, in collaboration with international agencies, had managed to dismantle criminal networks involved in human trafficking, notably in the Bay Islands region. Legislative reforms had introduced increased penalties; a new national information system had helped identify over 200 child victims, both boys and girls, between 2020 and 2023; and nearly 5,000 children had received support in the first half of 2024. The directorate responsible for land management had set up 16 local offices throughout the country, providing assistance with the protection of rights.

29. Under the national water programme, kits were distributed to small farmers to help them cope with challenges related to climate change; and 100,000 hectares of land would be irrigated under the irrigation plan. The Supreme Court had declared water to be part of the country's social and cultural heritage, and mining permits had been cancelled in favour of environmental development – anyone whose environmental, health or water rights would be affected was considered to be an active stakeholder in the process. In particular, the

application for the “las Golondrinas” mining concession was being checked for its environmental impact, especially on water resources, as it would involve opencast mining. Planned mitigation and adaptation measures included institutional coordination through a specialized ecosystems management support team and a forestry and protected resources monitoring system. The Armed Forces had helped to collect nearly 3 million samples to be used in work to restore the diversity of degraded zones. The President had launched a programme aimed at zero deforestation by 2029, to focus on comprehensive protection for the country’s forests; it included suspending the issuance of environmental permits for any type of exploitation.

30. Land conflicts were a continuing and historical problem in the country, notably in respect of the land of Indigenous and Garifuna communities. The high-level intersectoral commission had been set up to implement the rulings of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the return of ancestral lands to groups who had been evicted, often violently, in the past. The tripartite commission was investigating human rights violations committed over the previous three decades in the Bajo Aguán area. A bill was being drafted to amend legislation that criminalized persons who defended public or communal property in order to prevent evictions. The President of the Supreme Court had called a high-level meeting of various government sectors to work on a protocol to address the issue, as forced evictions continued to be carried out to the detriment of the human rights of persons living in vulnerable situations.

31. **A representative of Honduras** said that the shortcomings in health legislation were being addressed, including through an update of the Health Code and the adoption of specific laws on the diagnosis and treatment of cancer, of kidney disease and of blood disorders, as well as on persons living with tuberculosis. The legislation governing organ transplants was to be revised to increase the funding available. Discussions were ongoing on digital health services, and 14 previous programmes, such as those on mental health, on nutrition and for vulnerable groups, were being reactivated.

32. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he would be interested to hear how the Government intended to combat the scourge of the criminal gangs whose influence perpetuated extreme poverty, including through demands for so-called “protection tax” from owners of transport and other businesses, which reportedly had a huge impact on the local economy and living standards.

33. **Mr. Hennebel** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would welcome data and information on any measures the authorities were taking to address the internal population displacement resulting from the effects of climate change.

34. Recalling that the criminalization of abortion meant the criminalization of poverty and gender, authoritarian control over the sectors of society affected and hence incompatibility with respect for human rights, he said he would like to learn what the authorities were doing to address that situation.

35. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would be interested to hear what the Government, and particularly the Ministry of Health, was doing to comply with the recommendations on abortion rights made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its concluding observations on the State party’s ninth periodic report ([CEDAW/C/HND/CO/9](#)). She wished to learn about the current status of the Act on Comprehensive Education for the Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy and the level of implementation of various orders of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights enabling individuals to ensure that the information in their identity documents and on public registers reflected their gender identity.

36. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he would welcome an update on the development of a national framework and tools to support populations affected by the effects of climate change; what were the plans for the fishing communities who were not currently recognized as victims? Noting that studies conducted by local communities offered a useful source of information and case studies but, reportedly, were not being read by the authorities, he said he would like to hear how those communities were given a voice in the process.

37. **The Chair** said that she would appreciate the delegation's comments on the apparent lack of official statistics on drug abuse, the very limited rehabilitation programmes and the lack of public awareness of those programmes. She understood that possession of small amounts of drugs had recently been decriminalized: was that correct?

38. **A representative of Honduras** said that her Government recognized the historical debt owed to women in respect of sexual and reproductive rights, notably in relation to the constitutional ban on abortion. The subject was highly sensitive owing to the weight of tradition in a patriarchal culture, and initiatives to further women's rights in that regard had frequently aroused fierce opposition in conservative circles. Nevertheless, the new President had introduced several other measures.

39. **A representative of Honduras** said that the Guide on Providing Family Planning Services had been revised to allow women and men free choice of contraceptive methods by explicitly removing all preconditions. Medical personnel had previously had broad discretion to suggest, recommend or even refuse the use of particular forms of contraception. Furthermore, emergency contraception was now legally available and should, by 2025, be accessible nationwide. That too was highly significant given that Honduras had been the only country in Latin America without legislation on the provision of such services. The new pragmatism in the area of sexual and reproductive rights was further reflected in the fact that medical personnel were now being trained in post-abortion treatment, in recognition of the risks entailed in illegal abortion.

40. As part of efforts to prevent discrimination, the guide on countering stigmatization in health services was being updated and the rules on names were being revised in the interests of diversity and greater flexibility.

41. The main forms of addiction in Honduras were alcoholism in men and nicotine dependency in the general population. Honduras was a transit rather than a destination country for synthetic and opioid drugs, which meant that, even though such substances were beginning to circulate more widely, they were as yet a comparatively minor problem. Even so, the Government recognized that the risks had to be addressed, and it favoured a comprehensive approach focused on mental health. A mental health programme was in place and work had begun on legislation to establish a national mental health policy in an effort, notably, to do away with the discrimination historically associated with dependency of any kind.

42. **A representative of Honduras** said that the new administration under President Xiomara Castro Sarmiento had made significant advances in the matter of land registration. Digitization and modernization of the registration system and its coordination with a geographical information system had made for greater transparency and efficiency, benefiting peasant communities and small-scale farmers in particular. The national property register had been updated to reduce informality in land ownership by ensuring that land title records were correct. The initiative would help counter corruption in the granting of land titles and help resolve disputes over land. In addition, the National Agrarian Institute was granting titles to Indigenous and peasant communities in various departments.

43. In 2022, Honduras had become one of the few countries in the region to adopt legislation to address internal displacement resulting from violence. The Ministry of Human Rights provided assistance to those displaced as a result of violence by gangs or organized criminal groups. A high-level committee was now considering proposals to be put before Congress to broaden the scope of the law to cover other causes of displacement, such as climate change. A protection mechanism had been set up to coordinate programmes and protocols on forced displacement and to implement protective measures and assistance for victims. Victims were involved in the development of protection measures, which could be adapted in accordance with their immediate needs. The implementing regulations were still under consideration by the high-level committee but, pending promulgation, various units and offices were already working together on a daily basis in providing protection in the field and devising durable solutions in both individual and collective cases. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Norwegian Refugee Council had assisted with some cases but, for those who did not wish to leave the country, other arrangements could be made, such as internal resettlement, the provision of food kits,

accommodation in shelters or transfer to other regions. As from 2025, L 150 million would be available for such purposes under a dedicated budget line in the national budget.

44. Between 2022 and 2024, support and humanitarian assistance had been provided to 865 displaced persons. Between 2023 and 2024, durable solutions had been found for 115 persons, most of them women victims of gender-based violence.

45. With regard to efforts to deal with criminal gangs, she wished to make clear that the state of emergency was a temporary measure made necessary by the high levels of insecurity and violence, a situation the current Government had inherited. The measure had had a major impact on crime and homicide rates, with certain local authorities reporting no recent killings and figures from the Violence Observatory showing that the homicide rate was the lowest it had been for 20 years.

46. A coordination network of 12 organizations had been set up to help prevent forced recruitment of children by organized criminal gangs. The network disseminated information, coordinated activities and identified priorities. The actions taken to protect children from recruitment and from gender violence perpetrated by criminals and gangs included awareness-raising campaigns in communities, the establishment and publicizing of hotlines, addressing the problems of children in street situations and of child labour, detecting children's presence in alcohol outlets at night and training parents, teachers and local councillors on rights and the violation of rights.

47. As to social conflict generally, the Ministry of Human Rights had a risk-prevention unit that had set up 18 conflict-resolution committees, one per department, to bring together the various stakeholders in the political, economic and social spheres to settle conflicts, particularly those arising from eviction. An inter-agency protocol had been drawn up to resolve conflict over land and the environment. Public officials, civil society organizations and members of the executive were being trained in democratic dialogue, the culture of peace and alternative conflict-resolution methods, activities carried out in cooperation with the University for Peace in Costa Rica and with the support of German Development Cooperation and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

48. The Act on Comprehensive Education for the Prevention of Teenage Pregnancy had been adopted in 2023 but had been vetoed by the Presidency and sent back to Congress on the grounds that it failed to properly benefit children and students. The Act was still under discussion and, as soon as an open dialogue with civil society had taken place and the various criteria had been met, would certainly be adopted. In the meantime, several ancillary pieces of legislation had been brought forward to support women and children, including a law on "crèche classrooms", to help teenage mothers, another on the establishment of clinics in public schools and another to provide a special benefit to single mothers who were heads of household. The Ministry of Education was also looking at the prevention and eradication of domestic violence, in part by covering the subject in the national curriculum.

49. **A representative of Honduras**, referring to the *Vicky Hernández* case, which related to gender identity, said that the civil registry had announced that it would institute an administrative procedure allowing individuals to change their name and legal status in the population register. A round table bringing together various bodies such as the Counsel General's Office, the Ministry of Social Development, the unit for the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, the civil registry itself and a civil society organization representing lesbians, had presented views on how to improve the mechanism. Attempts to discuss the issue in Congress had, like the discussions on abortion, ended in complete failure, which was why the civil registry had decided to put in place an administrative procedure for a change of name. It was not the ideal way to address the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, in part because the name chosen could not be too dissimilar to the original name, but for a procedure involving a complete change of gender the Congress would need to give its approval. Some progress had been made, with agreements being reached with the petitioning organization and with a broad coalition of more than 30 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender organizations; discussions were chaired by the Ministry of Social Development.

50. **A representative of Honduras** said that, while it was true that abortion was penalized as a criminal offence, the number of women who had been prosecuted for or who had died

as a result of illegal abortion was extremely low. The issue was not something that affected the population as a whole.

51. Honduras was highly vulnerable to global warming despite the fact that it was not a significant producer of greenhouse gases. The President was committed to mitigating the impact of climate change. Having inherited a highly privatized country that had granted more than 400 concessions for mining, hydroelectric and wind power projects, which had been a source of social conflict as people had tried to defend their land, the current Government had granted no licences to exploit natural resources and in one region had created a national park as protection against such exploitation.

52. **A representative of Honduras** said that women's participation rate in employment in Honduras was around 42 per cent, while that for men was around 58 per cent. Women were in the majority in the public sector, accounting for 60 per cent of the workforce, whereas the majority in the private sector were men, at 73 per cent. In the public sector, women worked mainly in teaching and education, but also in public administration, defence, social security and health, while men tended to gravitate towards defence and education.

53. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security had been working to improve women's job security and close the gender pay gap. A programme had been put in place in 2022 to protect women's rights in sectors such as the maquila industry and, in a major policy shift, efforts were under way to transform insecure employment into permanent, well-paid jobs, in partnership with the National Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses Service and the Ibero-American Social Security Organization (OISS). Improved access to credit for women had created an enabling environment for entrepreneurial undertakings while, under the "Sí empleo" (Yes employment) programme, the Ministry had strengthened the formal labour market, creating dignified jobs and impacting thousands of women in various sectors just in the current year. Under the foreign employment programme, more than 700 women had obtained work in countries such as Canada, the United States, Spain and Colombia.

54. Thanks to the work of the Directorate General of Labour Inspections and technical advisers, certain informal sectors had been formalized, while, through a series of agreements and understandings, male and female employees' posts had been stabilized to enable them to access the national social security system on an equal footing. With a view to further shifts towards a formal economy in the future, the Ministry had devised policies to close gender gaps by means of technical labour inspections on the ground and, as part of the general overhaul of labour policy, was planning to improve access to decent and inclusive employment. Advances included the recently adopted Act on Domestic Work, for example, which guaranteed domestic workers' rights, a plan for access to dignified and productive work for persons with disabilities and a job-creation plan for women heads of households in various sectors such as tourism, automobile parts and electrical equipment.

55. Turning to guarantees for displaced persons and asylum seekers looking for employment in Honduras, he said that the Ministry of Labour was responsible for ensuring compliance with labour law, including the prevention of discrimination against displaced persons or refugees. Under the Labour Code, foreign workers could make up no more than 10 per cent of an employer's workforce. However, anyone who had regularized their status and could produce the correct identity documents or work permit had access to the labour market on an equal footing and with the same protection as any other worker in respect of working hours and all benefits. The recently adopted Act on the Prevention of Internal Displacement and Assistance and Protection for Internally Displaced Persons, which closely adhered to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, guaranteed the right to work of anyone prevented from reporting for work as a result of forced displacement, by ensuring that they could not be dismissed, provided they duly followed the procedures put in place by the Ministry.

56. The scale of the migration flows experienced by Honduras over the previous three years had prompted the Government to re-evaluate the State party's reservation to the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees as it applied to employment for members of those groups. Legal opinions in the matter had been sought from the Ministry of Human Rights, the National Institute for Migration and the Ministry of Labour.

57. Similarly, legal opinions were being sought on ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health, 2006 (Convention No. 187) and the ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155), not only as a safeguard for workers' rights but also with a view to increasing socioeconomic productivity by reducing the financial impact on employers of work-related illness and accidents and maintaining a skilled, technically trained workforce.

58. The problem of wage inequalities in the maquila industry was being addressed by a special commission that had been set up to review minimum wages, including in the textile sector. The minimum wage in Honduras was still regulated by a decree dating back to 1971 but it had nevertheless been possible, under that same regulation, to set a new minimum wage in the maquila and other industries for three years as from 1 January 2024. The maquila sector was exceptional in that it operated in free trade zones under special regimes and had historically benefited certain powerful groups in the country, in part by virtue of tax arrangements that, in certain cases, violated national law and international treaties but had been agreed with employers in those sectors. Those arrangements had not brought any benefit to the working class and were now under review as part of the drafting of a new law on tax justice which sought to establish a more progressive, egalitarian mechanism and correct the excesses and abuses of the past.

59. In the area of domestic labour, his Government had been an active participant in discussions on domestic workers at the 112th session of the International Labour Conference and had voted in favour of the recommendations on domestic workers. The Ministry of Labour was working towards ratification of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), with strong support from civil society organizations, women's associations and representatives of maquila and domestic workers. The Honduran Economic and Social Council, which brought together the Government, workers and employers, had unanimously voted for ratification of that Convention, proposals for which would shortly be submitted to Congress. On the question of oversight of domestic labour conditions, inspection and complaints mechanisms were in place. However, current legislation did not permit labour inspectors to enter employers' private homes.

60. **A representative of Honduras** said that the Ministry of Education budget had increased by 13 per cent between 2022 and 2023 and by 6.9 per cent between 2023 and 2024, while, over the previous six years, the overall allocation to education had been around 4.5 per cent. The 2024 budget, of US\$ 1.6 billion, represented a rise of US\$ 436 million, or around 27 per cent, compared with 2019. Challenges in terms of coverage remained: currently only the third year of preschool was compulsory and the enrolment rate there was 70 per cent, but preschool and primary school enrolment overall stood at 35.9 per cent, lower secondary at 62.8 per cent and secondary at 37.3 per cent. The Government was working hard, in part through strategic alliances with national and international stakeholders, to achieve 100 per cent coverage at preschool level, including by making the second year compulsory. A virtual humanities programme for the early years of secondary education had been launched as means of increasing coverage and offering opportunities to the more disadvantaged, while efforts were also being made to make alternative remote learning facilities available more widely. In addition, the Cuban "Yo sí puedo" (Yes I can) literacy programme had been adopted, with the aim of reaching 500,000 Honduran schoolchildren.

61. Dropout rates before the COVID-19 pandemic had hovered at around 4 per cent and in 2022 and 2023 had not exceeded 3 per cent, reflecting the impact of government programmes such as school meals, free enrolment, school gardens and scholarships. According to school administrations, 67.5 per cent of students who dropped out did not give a reason, 23.5 per cent had left the country, 8.6 per cent had moved and 0.28 per cent cited reasons relating to violence.

62. In order to correct gender and other stereotyping in teaching materials, reviews were conducted systematically by the General Directorate of the Curriculum and Evaluation, in coordination with the gender and human rights committee of the Ministry of Education. Texts were then referred to the Directorate of Innovation and Education Technology, which ensured that the language used was inclusive and that the characters depicted did not perpetuate stereotypes or traditional roles. In addition, the reformed curriculum would cover gender and stereotyping.

63. The Directorate of Educational Modalities of the Ministry of Education was working on various projects to prevent violence in school. Physical education and sports programmes were an important component: the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Football for Schools programme was in place in all 18 departments and taekwondo and chess were also options. As part of the Art for Life project, the Subdirectorate of Arts Education had created a thousand-strong national choir and initiatives had been launched by local and municipal authorities, the private sector and national and international cooperation.

64. In order to prevent bullying at school, training courses had been put in place for municipal education authorities, teachers and parents as part of a national protocol on violence that addressed issues such as pregnancy, suicide, sexual abuse, forced displacement, substance abuse, human trafficking, irregular migration, cybercrime and child labour, and also included social rehabilitation and the reintegration of children into the education system.

65. An early warning and response system enabled children at risk of dropping out – for reasons including violence at school – to be identified and supported.

66. In the year to date, over L 45.6 million had been transferred to schools to enable them to cater for children with disabilities. The Ministry of Education had Olympiads committees and local branch offices that organized sporting and scientific festivals and ensured that hospitals provided classrooms for sick children. In 2024, over 500 teachers had attended training courses on supporting persons living with disability.

67. **Mr. Hennebel** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would appreciate further clarification of the status of the Covenant in the State party's legal order and its relationship to other legislation. Could the Covenant be directly cited in court, for example, and could penalties be imposed where its provisions were violated? Although the State party had ratified the Optional Protocol, few communications had reached the Committee, so he would like to know how individual complaints and communications were dealt with. In particular, he wished to know what legal force the Committee's concluding observations would have, how its recommendations would be implemented and what mechanisms were in place to monitor their implementation.

68. **Ms. Rossi** said that, according to information received, the State party's debt service payments amounted to 21 per cent of its total budget. While the Committee appreciated the financial efforts being made by the State party in implementing the Covenant and the quality of the policies the delegation had described, debt service nevertheless restricted the State party's ability to direct resources towards the reduction of inequality and poverty and compliance with its international human rights obligations. She wondered whether the Government could use that point as an argument to negotiate with the financial institutions to obtain debt relief or restructuring. She would also like to know whether the State party had carried out an evaluation of the impact of debt servicing on human rights, as the Committee had recommended in its 2016 statement on public debt, austerity measures and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

69. **A representative of Honduras** said that, under the Constitution, Honduras endorsed the principles and practices of international law and all international treaties ratified by Honduras formed part of domestic law. The courts and administrative authorities were therefore compelled to take due account of such instruments.

70. He wished to draw the Committee's attention to the work being done to improve the functioning of the judiciary, notably the recent election to the Supreme Court of eight women judges and seven men judges. Measures had also been taken to consolidate the independence and integrity of judicial officials, for example by appointing judges with national competence in specific areas such as organized crime, the environment and corruption, and by raising their salaries and enhancing their security. The legislation governing the judiciary was being revised in order to bring the institution into line with international standards and enable it to respond to modern-day demands.

71. The prosecution service was taking firm action to combat corruption and improve transparency. Specialist units had been created to that end: the Special Prosecutor for Transparency in Combating Corruption in Public Service, the National Fiscal Support Unit, the Special Prosecutor for Prosecution of judicial workers and the Unit to Combat Police

Corruption, each of which had its own investigation officers. The Technical Criminal Investigation Agency investigated and tried cases of corruption, the aim being to prosecute public officials involved in high-profile cases in order to send a clear message on the Government's commitment to fight corruption.

72. **A representative of Honduras** said that it was important to note that international treaties had to be approved by Congress, but that could not happen if they infringed on an existing provision of the Constitution. Once ratified and approved, they formed part of domestic legislation and took precedence over other laws. It was thus possible to invoke any such instrument as a source of law in the courts; indeed, in land rights cases and cases involving human rights defenders and other organizations whose rights had been violated, the Covenant was one of the most commonly invoked instruments.

73. **A representative of Honduras** said that, on the matter of the debt burden, in addition to the measures the delegation had outlined at the meeting the previous day, the State party had joined the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean as a means of diversifying its sources of financing and had negotiated an agreement with the International Monetary Fund with regard to monetary policy and funding for climate-change adaptation. It had also sought other options for financing and trade relations through bilateral and regional agreements with various countries.

74. **Mr. Hennebel** said that he wished to thank the members of the delegation for their constructive participation in the dialogue on the State party's report. The discussion had revealed how far the State party had come and the depth of its commitment to implementing the Covenant and to working with the Committee to that end. There were clearly still issues that remained to be resolved, not least the impact of the state of emergency, which the Committee would continue to monitor closely, and the prohibition of abortion, which was incompatible with international human rights law, but he commended the delegation on the specific answers it had given to the Committee's questions.

75. **A representative of Honduras** said that she wished to thank the Committee for the support it had offered, which would be of crucial importance in the transformation that Honduras was undertaking, as it reformed the energy infrastructure and overhauled the taxation system to benefit the most vulnerable sectors of society.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.