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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Thirty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 42nd MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,

on Tuesday, 18 November 2003, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BONOAN-DANDAN

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(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (continued)

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS (continued)

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (continued)

Fourth periodic report of the Russian Federation (continued) (E/C.12/4/Add.10; E/C.12/Q/RUS/2; HR/CESCR/NONE/5 and Add.1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.52/Rev.1)

At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Parshikov, Mr. Pochinok and Ms. Samarina (Russian Federation) took places at the Committee table.

Issues relating to the general provisions of the Covenant (continued)

Articles 1-5 of the Covenant (continued)

Mr. POCHINOK (Russian Federation) said that there were different categories of homeless people in the Russian Federation. There were, for example, a large number of people who earned reasonable incomes, who moved around the country and simply did not feel it necessary to buy a home. The Government did not feel that protective measures in the social and economic spheres should be applied to the hundreds of thousands such people.

There were others, however, who had lost their homes through eviction, or had been cheated of their homes through financial pyramid schemes, as was the case for many elderly homeless people. The Government had taken measures to prevent such situations from arising in future. In the early 1990s, the Government had ensured that almost all children who came out of orphanages and other institutions were immediately placed in housing. However, in reassessing the situation a number of years later, it had been discovered that many of them were now homeless. Almost every housing deal in the country was now under strict surveillance, and it was not possible to sell or exchange an apartment where a child was registered without special authorization from the competent body overseeing the child's welfare; the same applied to the elderly.

In the past four years special homes had been set up for elderly people all over the country. Previously, many elderly people had been in distressing circumstances, as homes for the elderly had not been easily accessible to all. However, in recent years significant resources had been invested in new facilities which provided comfortable accommodation and medical and leisure facilities.

Responsibility for the homeless was now being transferred to the Ministry for Social Affairs. Contrary to what many human rights activists might believe, that transfer would not result in accommodation that was tantamount to prison. New centres had been constructed for the homeless. The Government was aware that a lot remained to be done, and was working to provide acceptable accommodation for homeless people.

The problem was most serious in Moscow, which had the highest concentration of homeless people. All the centres for homeless people in Moscow had been refurbished and there was sufficient capacity to cater for the city's homeless. There had been considerable debate as to whether such expenditure was justifiable given budgetary constraints, and concerns regarding inflation, but the Government saw it as a priority.

The Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter providing for a system of collective complaints was a major instrument to which the Government intended to accede. Under the Protocol, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and national associations of trade unions could lodge collective complaints with the Council of Europe. The Government would first consider the experiences of the 11 countries that had ratified the Protocol before deciding how best to proceed. Pending ratification of the Protocol, the Government intended to put in place an internal mechanism to respond promptly to such collective complaints. Once the Charter was ratified, a government monitoring body would be established. The Government's first report on the implementation of the European Social Charter would go before a tripartite commission for approval before being submitted to the Council of Europe.

Regarding the hazing of military recruits, the worst aspect of the situation was the resulting decrease in the number of people joining the army. It was clear that reforms were needed, particularly in the light of the abuse by officers of their privileges. The Government's aim was to establish a professional army, but that would involve major outlays. A trial project had been conducted with one regiment to ascertain what would be involved. Adequate wages, comfortable conditions and leisure facilities would be provided under a three to five year programme of reform.

In 2004 alternative service would be introduced for conscientious objectors. It would, however, be longer than the normal military service, as the work involved was of a different nature and was not considered equal. As part of the military reform, it was intended to halve the length of time conscripts would have to serve. Conscripts with higher education, or those who planned to sit university entrance exams, served considerably less time; all secondary school graduates had access to higher education.

Regarding reconstruction in Chechnya, a budget of 8.5 billion rubles, 3.5 billion earmarked for economic recovery, was pending approval. One billion rubles would be allocated to the Grozny reconstruction programme. A number of factories had already been rebuilt and intensive efforts were being made to provide housing. For example, in 2002 new flats had been constructed providing accommodation for 1,900 households, and some 610 additional buildings were nearing completion. Postal services had been restored in most districts, and electricity, gas and oil supply had been restored throughout the region. Most of the oil now being produced was exported, as it was no longer required to meet the immediate needs of the local population. Realistically, the process of reconstruction was expected to take a decade. The most challenging aspect of the reconstruction process was that some new facilities had already been destroyed by terrorists. The Government's chief concern was ensuring the safety of the local population and that meant restricting access to certain areas, as many terrorist acts had been the result of poor border security. The strict controls in place, which had been the subject of some reproach, were therefore necessary. Once the threat of terrorism was over those controls would be relaxed.

Another important issue was monetary compensation for those whose homes had been destroyed in the conflict. Some 48,000 homes had been affected to varying degrees, and thousands of people had applied for rehousing. At least 300,000 rubles would be required, but it was hoped that within a year sufficient funds would be available. New housing must be built more quickly, which would also provide employment.

Issues relating to specific provisions of the Covenant

Articles 6-9 of the Covenant

Mr. TEXIER asked whether the current unemployment rate of 7.9 per cent reflected undeclared work in the underground economy. He would welcome information on how unemployment was distributed throughout the Russian Federation, particularly the differences between urban and rural areas.

He wondered what provisions were made for redundancy under the new Labour Code. For example, did it provide for compensation for being laid off, negotiations in the case of mass redundancies, or plans for re-employment in the same sector?

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Russian Federation had reduced its minimum age for work from 16 to 15, a regressive measure. ILO had called for it to be re-established at 16 - what was the current situation?

He would welcome more information on the minimum wage, which apparently did not guarantee workers an adequate standard of living. The Labour Code provided that the minimum wage should not fall below the minimum subsistence level. However, in fact the minimum wage was approximately \$20 a month, below the average minimum subsistence level of some \$70 a quarter. Given the fact that 11 million people were on the minimum wage, it was a worrying situation.

Regarding equality between men and women in the workplace, he wondered what the difference in their wages was.

According to ILO, the right to strike was subject to serious restrictions in the Russian Federation: for example, the rule that two thirds of the workforce must be present at the meeting held to decide on strike action, and the stipulation that the duration of the strike must be announced in advance. He asked the delegation to comment, taking into account article 8 of the Covenant and ILO Convention No. 87.

Mr. MARTYNOV said that in 2001 the minimum wage had amounted to only 15.3 per cent of the minimum subsistence level; he

would be interested to hear what the current ratio was. Were there any proposals before the Duma on the minimum wage? There seemed to be considerable fluctuations in the average wage across the country, ranging from 700 rubles in some rural areas to 8,000 rubles in oil regions. Was there any intent to standardize wage levels?

Mr. CEASU, referring to the Government's budget surplus, said that, under the Covenant, States were obliged to take steps to the maximum of their available resources with a view to achieving the realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

Given the fact that the minimum wage was below the minimum subsistence level, how did the Government encourage the unemployed to take minimum-wage jobs rather than resorting to begging or prostitution?

Under the new Labour Code individual labour contracts would become the principal means of defining working conditions and remuneration. In his view, the move away from collective labour contracts would be to the detriment of workers, as collective bargaining strengthened trade unions and ensured the protection of workers. The weakness of the trade unions in the Russian Federation was perhaps one of the causes of the violations of the right to work mentioned in the report. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions had noted anti-union discrimination in the Russian Federation; for example, some union leaders were pursued by the security services, arrested by the police and subjected to heavy fines; others lost benefits or were made redundant. The right to collective bargaining was also often ignored by employers, who refused to negotiate or provide the information requested by the unions.

He asked what the Government's definition of a disabled person was, what disabilities were taken into account when deciding whether to issue a disability certificate, and whether disabled children whose parents were not retired or had died received financial assistance. Was any assistance given to disabled persons living on their own? Did seriously ill disabled persons receive ongoing care?

Ms. BRAS GOMES wished to know what measures the Government was taking to promote employment of the disabled. She expressed concern that in 2002 the funding of programmes designed to encourage employers to offer jobs to vulnerable groups, including disabled persons, had been reduced.

She also wished to know whether the Government envisaged adopting a law to guarantee equal employment opportunities for men and women and prohibit discrimination with regard to wages, labour conditions and layoffs. It would be useful to know to what extent unemployment benefits allowed people to maintain a decent standard of living while looking for work.

Over 10 per cent of pensioners received the minimum pension, the purchasing power of which was very low. She asked whether any measures to increase pension benefits, in particular for the poorest pensioners, were envisaged?

Mr. GRISSA said that, according to the report (E/C.12/4/Add.10, para. 119), in 11 branches of the economy 1,585,000 people had suffered from injuries and temporary incapacity for work in 1998, a very high figure. Labour safety seemed to have deteriorated owing to failure to invest in the protection of workers. What was the Government doing to improve the situation?

Mr. SADI said that, under article 65 of the Labour Code, people had to provide a series of documents before they could work legally or join a trade union. Perhaps those requirements induced people to work illegally.

Despite the number of industrial accidents in the country, ILO Convention No. 174 concerning the Prevention of Major Industrial Accidents had not been ratified.

He wished to know what factors the Government had taken into account when setting the minimum wage and whether it was trying to control inflation by keeping wages low. In the light of such phenomena as homelessness, poverty and trafficking in women, he enquired whether the Government believed that there was a need to review its social and economic policies.

Mr. POCHINOK (Russian Federation) said that, officially, there were between 5.4 and 6 million unemployed people in the country, making up 7.9 per cent of the population. Those figures included people working in the informal economy. In reality, only 2 per cent of the able-bodied population did not have work. Each year only around 1.4 million people received unemployment benefits and some 1.6 million contacted employment services, of whom two thirds found work. Hundreds of thousands of people were retrained annually. Unemployment was unequally distributed across the country, with the situation being particularly severe in nine regions, including the Republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya. The Government was directing more resources to those regions, creating new jobs and retraining workers. It had also significantly increased unemployment benefits, which sometimes exceeded not only the minimum wage but also the average wage in the region concerned.

The Government believed that the procedure set out in the Labour Code with regard to lay-offs was reasonable. For example, workers had to receive a warning in advance; mass layoffs were prohibited; and employers could not refuse to negotiate with their workers. Although employees could be laid off if the organization they worked for was liquidated, staff cuts were made in consultation with trade unions. Employees could also be dismissed for flagrant violations of employment obligations, including failure to report to work, coming to work drunk, theft, and failure to comply with labour protection requirements. Employees who had been laid off were paid compensation.

The Government had taken steps to prevent lay-offs in a number of companies. The current restructuring of the energy sector could have led to the dismissal of hundreds of thousands of workers had the Government not taken action. In fact new jobs had been created in the energy sector.

The Government was not planning to change the retirement age of 55 for women and 60 for men. In practice people retired at about 53 years of age as many workers had the right to early retirement.

The minimum working age was 18. However, young people under the age of 18 who wished to undertake summer work could do so. Every year the Government provided work for around 1.2 million young people. Child labour was closely monitored and subject

to numerous limitations. For example, work must not have an adverse effect on the child's education, health or development. The Government had signed the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and spared no effort to ensure that child labour regulations were complied with.

Although the minimum salary was fixed at 600 rubles a month, around US\$ 20, in practice the Government multiplied that amount by a coefficient of 2.3. In 2003 the minimum wage in the public sector had been increased by one third; salaries in the industrial sector had increased steadily over the past few years. The percentage of gross national product accounted for by wages was very low and the Government was trying to increase it. In many sectors of the economy, the minimum wage needed to be substantially higher than the minimum subsistence level. Serious problems in that regard existed in the agricultural, forestry and public sectors. The Government intended to take steps to raise salaries in the public sector.

Ms. SAMARINA (Russian Federation) said that, on average, women received one third of the amount received by men. However, gender discrimination was not the cause of the problem. The Constitution and the new Labour Code established the principle of equal payment for equal work and there had been no cases where women and men were paid differently for the same work. The difference in salaries was explained by the fact that women were underrepresented in decision-making posts and jobs with higher remuneration.

The Duma was currently considering a bill which guaranteed equal rights and freedoms for men and women and equal opportunities for their realization. The law defined such concepts as gender discrimination and equality and contained a set of measures to ensure gender equality with regard to labour conditions, promotion and occupational training.

Mr. POCHINOK (Russian Federation) said that a strike could be held if half of the employees of an organization had agreed and had signed a petition to that effect. Only a court could determine that a strike was illegal, and only in cases where the strike endangered people's lives or State security. Under the Labour Code, if a strike could not be held, it was the responsibility of the Government to settle the dispute. In 2002 no trade union had complained of having been prevented from holding a strike. Discussions with trade unions had resulted in a decrease in the number of strikes in the country.

The Government calculated the minimum subsistence level for each region, taking regional characteristics into account, as the cost of living differed substantially from region to region. As a result, discrepancies between wages in the public sector in the various regions would continue to exist. The Government had adopted a law under which wages of public sector workers could be increased provided the region in question had the necessary resources to finance the increase.

With regard to the question of national reserves, he said that in 1998 the Russian national bank had not had any reserves. External debt had exceeded the country's GDP. Interest rates for loans had been very high. Thus, the money spent on debt servicing had not been available for public spending programmes. Russia's credit rating had, however, been improving, making it possible to obtain lower interest rates. The Government had also refrained from further borrowing, and its external debt had been reduced considerably, to just one third of GDP and a much lower percentage of the national budget.

Although unemployment benefits were low, they were sometimes considerably higher than the minimum wage or even the average wage in some parts of the country. In more than 80 per cent of cases persons who applied for unemployment benefit received it and continued to do so until they found a new job. The time that elapsed between the loss of a job and the payment of benefits was kept to a minimum.

The number of collective wage agreements had been on the increase. He had not heard of any complaints by trade unions of interference in their work. The Labour Code contained strict regulations protecting labour union representatives from reprisals or harassment by employers, and there had never been any complaints of such. Any such violations were subject to severe sanctions.

The redistribution of wealth was a matter of concern. Taxes in the petroleum and natural gas sector were being increased in order to reduce income disparities and help the underprivileged.

Concerning the number of disabled persons, he said that of 10.7 million disabled persons, 4.5 million qualified as having an employment disability. A person who experienced any limitation in any sphere of activity qualified as disabled.

Mr. PARSHIKOV (Russian Federation), replying to a question on benefits for families with a disabled child, said that when a parent retired the benefits for the disabled child were increased by 30 per cent; if there were two disabled children, the benefits were increased by 60 per cent. A disabled child under the age of 16 qualified for a special allowance covered by the federal budget. Such allowances were paid regardless of whether the disabled person was able to work, nor were they tied to any conditions, such as an obligation to take a training course.

Mr. POCHINOK (Russian Federation), referring to a comment concerning vulnerable groups, said that the assertion that funding for programmes to promote hiring of disabled persons had been cut was not correct. Rather, tax legislation had been amended. Under the old legislation, organizations of disabled persons had been eligible for extremely generous payments; often benefits had not been paid to disabled persons themselves, but had ended up in the pockets of criminal groups. That abuse had been rooted out. Today tax concessions went directly to the persons concerned. The President of the Russian Federation would soon meet with the head of the association of disabled persons to discuss possible improvements. Regional legislation had introduced hiring quotas for disabled persons; employers who did not meet them were subject to fines. Admittedly, more needed to be done to encourage the hiring of disabled persons.

On measures to combat poverty, he said that the main consideration was to increase wages and pensions. Average pensions were just above subsistence levels, and people with minimum pensions had a very difficult time. For that reason, minimum pensions were now automatically increased at a rate in excess of inflation. In 2003, a base rate for determining entitlement to welfare assistance had been set; welfare payments were also very low. Some 13 million persons had benefited from social welfare programmes over the past year, and the system was being expanded. There were some 300,000 social welfare centres throughout the country to which the

poor could turn. Sometimes the assistance was very basic, such as the distribution of food parcels, clothing or medicine. A special programme assisted persons unable to afford their own housing. Strict regulations had been imposed on rent, which must not exceed 23 per cent of household income.

There seemed to be some confusion with regard to safety at the workplace. The reference to 1,585,000 work injuries concerned persons who had already received compensation for loss of ability to work to varying degrees. The number of deaths and injuries in industrial accidents in the Russian Federation was lower than the international average. Moreover, the situation was improving. The Government paid compensation even if the employer had failed to pay into the disability fund; compensation, which was based on the wages which the disabled person had originally earned, had been considerably increased in recent years. Russia had strict regulations on industrial safety. Many factories were old and required special safety measures. There were labour inspectors for all branches of industry; they could stop any production process if they felt that lives were at risk. If a company failed to ensure safety at the workplace, it could be forced to make improvements.

As to the requirement under article 65 of the Labour Code for job applicants to produce a large number of documents, which was said to discourage people from seeking legal employment, he said that such papers were essential. An applicant must provide identification to prove that he was the person he claimed to be. A document containing the applicant's previous service record was in his own interest, as was some indication of insurance, because the employer must know the applicant's pension number and which retirement fund to pay into. The employer must have proof of whether an applicant had already performed military service or might still be drafted. Similarly, it was perfectly normal for an employer to ask for documents setting out the applicant's educational background and job qualifications. But employers were not permitted to ask for other documents and might even be subject for prosecution for doing so.

On the minimum wage, he fully agreed that wages were far too low, which was why the Government was doing its utmost to raise them as quickly as possible. But that could not be done overnight. If the Government was to raise the minimum wage to the minimum subsistence level, there would not be enough money in the federal and regional budgets to cover it. For that very reason the Duma was considering a bill, expected to pass in 2004, which would tackle the problem by introducing phased increases that would bring the minimum wage into line with the minimum subsistence level.

Articles 10-12 of the Covenant

Ms. BRAS GOMES, referring first to article 10, said that one matter of concern to the Committee had been the institutionalization of children, especially those with disabilities, who appeared to be in institutions for very long periods without any review of the placement measure. She asked the delegation about social support services to help parents of disabled children bring up their children at home as an alternative to institutionalization and to enable young people to live their lives as normally as possible. For example, were alternative occupational activities open to persons who could not enter the labour market?

Turning to the question of domestic violence, which was reportedly widespread, the police appeared to regard it as a dispute of a private nature. One reason for that was the lack of a legal definition of domestic violence and another was the lack of training for the police and court officials. She sought the delegation's view.

The living conditions of displaced families, and children in particular, in tent camps in Ingushetia and Chechnya were another matter of concern. According to the Secretary-General's representative on internally displaced persons, returnees in camps in Grozny had confirmed that they had not been forced to return, but that they had been promised better conditions than in the tent camps in Ingushetia, compensation for destroyed and lost property and adequate humanitarian assistance. But they had not found much of what they had been promised and remained seriously concerned about the security situation and their own safety.

With regard to article 11, the Committee was concerned about the poor living conditions of the Russian population. It was clear that the economic recovery had not led to improved living conditions and that income disparities had grown. While commending the State party for its efforts to date, she asked whether it intended to set up a national action plan to combat poverty, to be carried out at local level and systematically monitored.

Mr. MARTYNOV thanked the delegation for its clarifications regarding homeless children, but he understood that their numbers were very high. According to the Committee's information, many local administrations either had no staff or inadequately trained staff to deal with the problem. He enquired whether any measures were being taken to overcome that shortcoming and if so, whether they had been effective. It also seemed that programmes to improve the situation of homeless children were not well coordinated. Were there any plans to coordinate local and regional efforts at the federal level?

Concerning article 11 and the right to housing for abandoned and orphaned children, the delegation had referred to unsuccessful attempts to provide housing for children released from orphanages and other social institutions. He sought more detailed information on what the practice was in that regard and how the housing problem of young people who left such institutions was tackled. Article 37 of the Housing Code provided that orphans and abandoned children, after staying in social institutions, had the right to municipal or federal housing if they could not return to their previous housing. He would like to know how cases of children who had not had previous housing were dealt with.

With regard to the minimum wage, he requested further data on current wages and trends.

Mr. MALINVERNI said that, according to the Committee's information, some 50,000 children left their families every year due to family violence, financial problems and parental alcoholism. Did the delegation agree with those figures?

It appeared that juvenile delinquents were detained in very difficult conditions and then released too soon. According to the Committee's information, 6,000 children had been housed in a centre for juvenile delinquents in Moscow, but then released just 30 days later. Another criticism was that the system punished such children for their offences rather than preparing them for a return to

society. He asked the delegation to comment on those allegations.

With regard to article 11, he noted that a compensation committee had been set up for inhabitants of Grozny whose homes had been destroyed. NGO sources indicated that the payment of compensation lacked transparency and was discriminatory. He would like to know the criteria by which such compensation was paid.

Ms. BARAHONA RIERA said that, judging by the information provided by the delegation, progress had been made towards achieving equality of the sexes in the Russian Federation, but much still needed to be done. The delegation had referred to a bill on gender equality before the Duma. Why had it still not been passed? Apparently a bill was also under consideration to make domestic violence a crime, but had not yet been passed either. Most countries had legislation making domestic violence a crime and providing for protection measures for the victims, as well as for training courses, in particular for the police. It seemed that there was a lack of progress, and that the Government clearly needed to take more vigorous action. It would be useful if the delegation could inform the Committee of the causes of domestic violence in the Russian Federation, because the figures on women's deaths as a result of domestic violence were very high. According to the World Bank, one third of Russian women lived in extreme poverty, and thus many could not divorce their husbands because they did not have their own means of subsistence. She would appreciate information on what the Government was doing to provide housing to divorced women and asked whether any legislation protected the right of a divorced wife and any children to remain in the home. She also enquired whether there was any law specifically prohibiting sexual harassment.

According to the reply to question 24 in the list of issues, trafficking in women and children was a subject of great concern. But the phenomenon was widespread, and it would be useful to have figures. There was a bill to make trafficking in persons a crime. She asked what measures were being taken to combat trafficking and also sought information on the results of programmes specifically designed to help its victims.

On article 11, she said that, according to the World Bank, 40 million Russian women lived in poverty. The delegation had stated that funding for social programmes could not be increased because of economic considerations, including the risk of inflation. Yet expenditure on such programmes must be stepped up if poverty was to be reduced. She asked whether there was any initiative to reduce social disparities by taxing wealth and, if so, what problems had arisen in collecting the taxes.

Mr. KERDOUN said that measures taken to deal with the growing level of poverty appeared to focus on raising the minimum wage and increasing public sector wages. Since much of the country's poverty was likely to be concentrated in rural areas, he requested information on the wages of agricultural workers, including indications as to whether any such workers were included in the public sector. He asked for statistics on private sector wages and enquired whether objectives to increase the minimum wage and raise public sector wages had been attained.

Although the tendency in the housing sector was towards privatization, the State should not totally abolish publicly subsidized housing, especially in view of rising poverty. Despite various types of assistance offered to individuals wishing to build or purchase homes, many low-income families would need to rely upon subsidized rentals. He requested information on the current real value of houses and apartments in the Russian Federation and asked whether real estate speculation existed. The delegation should provide statistics on the number of homeless and forcibly evicted persons.

Mr. RIEDEL asked if the delegation could confirm NGO reports of inadequate food being supplied to army servicemen. He enquired whether the practice was widespread and whether any monitoring mechanism had been established.

He wished to know what benchmarks the Government had set for the next reporting period regarding the number of households with running water and waste water disposal. He requested figures for the number of families who had obtained better housing between 2001 and 2003 and asked what benchmarks had been set for the next reporting period.

It was not clear what results had been achieved by HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention programmes. The delegation should furnish detailed information on the outcomes, objectives and difficulties encountered in carrying out such programmes. In addition, he wished to know what emergency steps were being taken to address the tuberculosis epidemic.

It appeared that many mental patients were institutionalized for disorders that could be handled more cost-effectively on an outpatient basis and he wondered whether the Government intended to take corrective measures. He requested details of the Government's plans to set up a service separate from health establishments to protect the rights of patients in psychiatric wards, including what resources had been allocated.

He asked what the Government was doing about the requirement for patients to make partial payments for medical services, despite constitutional guarantees of free health care. There was apparently no legislation on patients' rights regarding medical errors and the quality of services provided and he wondered how the Government planned to address that issue.

Mr. TIRADO MEJÍA said that he was concerned by the large number of orphaned or abandoned children in institutions. The Committee on the Rights of the Child had expressed similar concern, particularly in regard to current policies on institutionalization and conditions in the institutions. He requested information on the causes of the problem and wondered what steps had been taken through the interdepartmental programme to prevent orphanhood and improve the situation of orphans and abandoned children.

He asked what measures had been taken or were envisaged to deal with the alarming number of drug users in the Russian Federation, given the relationship between drug use and the incidence of HIV/AIDS.

Mr. SADI asked whether the delegation considered that trafficking in women had reached crisis proportions in the Russian Federation. If so, the Government should take emergency measures to deal with it. Moreover, the Russian Federation should assume a leadership role in addressing the issue with respect to other countries in the region. Based on information he had received, the

Government had yet to comply fully with international minimum standards for eliminating human trafficking and did not have anti-trafficking legislation. The problem of prostitution had also reached crisis proportions and he urged the Government to take emergency measures to deal with it.

The Committee had adopted general comments on such subjects as health, housing, food, water and education and he suggested that the Government should give them further consideration.

Mr. CEAUSU commended the Government for its adoption of a bill to restrict tobacco use and asked whether it had similar plans to restrict alcohol consumption, particularly by limiting alcohol advertising. He wondered what the status was of the numerous other bills submitted to Parliament and mentioned in paragraph 321 of the fourth periodic report. Given the slowness of the legislative process, he suggested that the Government should make use of emergency measures, such as government decrees, particularly for urgent health issues.

Maternal mortality rates were very high compared with European averages and he asked what plans the Government had for reducing them. He wished to know what percentage of women gave birth in hospitals or with specialized medical assistance.

He enquired how the Government planned to address the problem of the decrease in the number of rural institutions that provided health care. The fact that many rural inhabitants were of indigenous origin was an additional reason for devoting greater attention to the problem.

Mr. GRISSA said that if 72 per cent of all orphans in the Russian Federation were being brought up by foster families, as stated in the report (para. 224), he wondered who was attending to the other 28 per cent and how their needs for education and health were being met. He enquired what was being done to care for children who had been orphaned as a result of the conflict in Chechnya. Such children should be considered war victims. He asked for an explanation of the "work therapy" that had been organized for orphans and abandoned children.

Mr. TEXIER requested confirmation that the number of persons infected with HIV/AIDS in the Russian Federation was 250,000. He enquired whether policies for the treatment and prevention of HIV/AIDS incorporated measures to provide protection from discrimination for those infected with the virus.

The CHAIRPERSON, speaking as a member of the Committee, said that, according to information received from NGOs, the number of children in the Russian Federation actually decreased each year by one million. At the same time, there was a growing number of children who needed social support. She asked whether the delegation could provide confirmation and explain to what factors such negative trends could be attributed.

Apparently, the number of pregnancies was growing, but many infants were not healthy at birth. Abortion and maternal mortality rates remained high despite progress in decreasing the number of abortions. She wished to know why many women resorted to illegal abortion and why contraception was not more widely used. The delegation should provide information on the Government's family planning policy and on reproductive health education programmes.

Mr. POCHINOK (Russian Federation) said that numerous programmes, rehabilitation centres and specialized schools had been established to provide disabled children and their parents the assistance they needed. The Government's goal was to provide centres in every town at which disabled children could obtain consultation, treatment and instruction. Tremendous financial resources had been allocated to the growing nationwide network, which currently included some 260 rehabilitation centres and 300 specialized schools. Programmes had been set up for distance learning and among the Government's objectives over the next two years was the provision of a computer workstation to every disabled child capable of learning.

Vocational training programmes for disabled children had been established and some 8,000 disabled persons had been trained in 42 specialized institutes in 2002. Although there was still room for improvement, much progress had been made in offering guidance, training and job opportunities to disabled children.

There was an expanding network of 38 specialized tuberculosis sanatoria, some of which had facilities to accommodate parents of child patients.

A bill had been drafted in 2000 on domestic violence after much deliberation on how to deal with the issue. Some had advocated increasing the penalty for perpetrators, while others favoured a preventive approach. The decision had ultimately been made to strengthen the legal provisions protecting women, children and elderly persons from abusive treatment. A system had been set up, to enter into effect in 2004, making it possible to report incidents of abuse occurring anywhere in the country.

The Government had made efforts to improve living conditions for displaced persons in Ingushetia. Owing to their unsuitability, it had been necessary to close some refugee camps and the Government was complying with its obligations to ensure the welfare of the refugees. All displaced persons returning to Chechnya would be guaranteed acceptable housing and provided appropriate compensation.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.