



**Convention on the
Rights of the Child**

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.1233
5 June 2007

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Forty-fifth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1233rd MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 23 May 2007, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. LEE

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Second and third periodic reports of Maldives

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Editing Unit, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 6) (continued)

Second and third periodic reports of Maldives (CRC/C/MDV/3; CRC/C/MDV/Q/3 and Add.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Maldives took places at the Committee table.
2. Ms. DIDI (Maldives), introducing the second and third periodic reports (CRC/C/MDV/3), said that, over the past 10 years, Maldives had not fulfilled its reporting obligations satisfactorily because it had not had an appropriate mechanism to monitor the implementation of the Convention. It had taken some time to develop a rights-based approach in planning, monitoring and delivering a protective environment for children, including the adoption of appropriate legislation.
3. In Maldives, primary schools existed wherever children lived, and there was almost 100 per cent enrolment in primary education up to grade 7. According to the 2006 census, the gender gap in enrolment in secondary education had almost closed. In higher education, students from Maldives had been among the best students selected at the international level in 2007. Nevertheless, Maldives still faced a number of constraints in the provision of the quality of education. Initiatives supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for play-based preschools and child-friendly primary schools, and atoll-level teacher resource centres, were helping to reduce disparities in the provision of quality primary education.
4. The implementation of special measures had reduced the infant and maternal mortality rates to 16 and 0.69 per 1,000 live births, respectively. Immunization coverage (DPT3 and measles) currently exceeded 95 per cent.
5. Since ratifying the Convention, Maldives had endeavoured to provide adequate services for children in need of protection. The main difficulties in making services accessible to children were the geographical dispersion of communities and limited financial, institutional and human resources, particularly trained professionals. The Ministry of Gender and Family had embarked on a decentralization programme to provide protection services to children and families at risk. By the end of 2008, each atoll would have a service centre that worked with a multidisciplinary team to provide children with social protection services. The Ministry was also working with Child Helpline International to establish a helpline for children in Maldives.
6. Maldives was undergoing major political reform. The Roadmap for the Reform Agenda, which had been announced by the President in March 2006, would introduce modern democracy and give fresh impetus to the promotion and protection of children's rights. Efforts to incorporate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic legislation were under way. The Government was taking steps to establish a holistic system of juvenile justice, and a juvenile

justice unit had recently been approved by the Cabinet. The Penal Code had been revised, and draft legislation on evidence, employment and the police had taken account of international human rights standards and best practices. The Family Law would be revised by the end of 2007 to incorporate the children's rights issues.

7. Maldives had ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol in September 2005, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in September 2006.

8. Monitoring and reporting on the implementation of women's and children's rights would be conducted systematically following the establishment of a special division in the Ministry of Gender and Family for that purpose. The Ministry of Planning and National Development was the key government agency responsible for data collection. A registration and information management system for children, young people and families at risk was being developed with the support of UNICEF.

9. There had been a shift in policy in the area of child protection, with focus now on families at risk instead of children alone. The aim was to safeguard the best interests of the child by empowering parents and giving children a protective environment within the family. However, children whose best interests could not be guaranteed in that manner were taken into State care as a last resort. Improving State care and finding alternative forms of care posed a great challenge for the Government. Minimum standards for institutions had been developed and would be formally adopted in the coming months. The possibility of introducing kafalah as an alternative to adoption, and foster care as a formal alternative to State care, was being considered.

10. Very little effort had been made to familiarize children with the Convention. A culture of involving children in implementing and monitoring of their rights had not yet been established, although schoolchildren had been consulted on the drafting of the National Plan of Action for the Well-being of the Maldivian Child 2001-2010. Schools allowed children to form associations and clubs, but there was no association that promoted children's participation in implementing their rights.

11. In Maldives, children with disabilities had minimal access to schooling and other public services. In order to remedy that situation, a national policy on disability was being formulated and a technical working group was preparing a plan of action. Steps were being taken to ensure that there was at least one school in every atoll that provided education to disabled children through an integrated approach. A national registry of disabled children would be established by the end of 2007. She commended the work of Care Society for its efforts on behalf of disabled children in Maldives.

12. Other major issues that the Government had to address were the prevalence of drug abuse among young people and the involvement of children in politically motivated violence. Rehabilitation of young drug users was not satisfactory and, for a country with nearly 42 per cent of the population under the age of 18, that situation must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

13. Mr. SIDDIQUI (Country Rapporteur) said that in recent years Maldives had made significant economic, social and political progress. Its social progress was reflected by the fact that it had the best record among South Asian countries in the attainment of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

14. He noted with satisfaction that some of the Committee's concerns and recommendations concerning the initial report of Maldives (CRC/C/8/Add.33) had been followed up through the adoption of legislation and policies. However, the Committee's recommendations relating to reservations, the harmonization of domestic legislation with the Convention, discrimination against disabled children and children born out of wedlock, prevention of ill-treatment of children, including sexual abuse, the problem of drug abuse, and the administration of juvenile justice had not been sufficiently addressed. The delegation should explain why Maldives had not implemented those recommendations and when it intended to do so. He invited the State party to withdraw its reservations to articles 14 and 21 of the Convention.

15. He wished to know whether adequate human and financial resources had been allocated for the National Plan of Action for the Well-being of the Maldivian Child 2001-2010, and whether the Plan would be implemented by a government body or in cooperation with civil society. He also wished to know whether any mid-term evaluation had been conducted and, if so, how it had been followed up.

16. He requested clarification regarding reports that the bodies responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention did not have sufficient human and financial resources, and that the Multisectoral Working Group on Childhood Protection had ceased to function in 2005.

17. While he welcomed the efforts of the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Gender and Family, in cooperation with UNICEF, to collect data on the situation of children, he noted that the national data collection system did not cover all aspects of the Convention but focused mainly on children in conflict with the law. Moreover, there was little data on the situation of children in remote atolls. Data collection was hampered by a shortage of trained staff and poor coordination between State authorities and social welfare agencies. He asked how the State party intended to overcome those problems.

18. He invited the delegation to comment on reports that State budget allocations for health and education were decreasing. That was bound to have a negative impact on children. Furthermore, children's associations were not consulted on the preparation of the budget, and there was no record of budget allocations for, and of actual expenditure on, children.

19. The atoll administrations were not representative of the local population, and their ability to meet the needs of children was very limited. He asked how the Government intended to remedy that situation.

20. It had been reported that the Convention was not disseminated in a systematic and targeted fashion, with the result that few parents, children, teachers and caregivers were familiar with its contents. The Government had not published or circulated the initial report of Maldives or the Committee's concluding observations. The delegation should comment on those observations.

21. Despite an eminent Islamic scholar's recommendations to bring domestic legislation into line with the Convention, there had been no amendment to the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child aside from raising the legal age of the child from 16 to 18 years.

22. Ms. VUCKOVIC-SAHOVIC (Alternate Country Rapporteur) said that, since the Committee's consideration of the initial report, civil society seemed to have developed significantly in Maldives. She asked to what extent NGOs had been involved in the drafting of the second and third periodic reports. She requested additional information on the number of NGOs that dealt specifically with children. Partnerships with such organizations should be built up, since NGOs could provide services for children living in remote areas. Technical assistance could be provided by other Governments.

23. Some NGOs had expressed concern about difficult registration procedures. It was the Government's responsibility to assist civil society, and she referred the State party to the Committee's general comment No. 5 on general measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Maldives should promote children's associations, since children who were used to having a say in their own affairs at school were likely to feel confident about expressing their opinions later in life.

24. Mr. KOTRANE said that Maldives had a dualist legal system, as a result of which international instruments must be incorporated into domestic legislation and could not be directly invoked in the courts. In that connection, he asked whether judges and legal experts were sufficiently familiar with the provisions of the Convention to lobby for the necessary legislative reforms.

25. He was concerned at the coexistence of the Civil Code and the sharia, which meant that not all children were subject to the same legal provisions. He enquired whether any steps were being taken to unify Maldivian legislation.

26. He noted that Maldives had made reservations concerning freedom of religion or belief under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. He asked whether there were prospects for greater religious tolerance in the State party. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief had recommended that prisoners should be allowed to practise their religion in detention centres, and he wondered whether Maldives planned to take active steps to promote tolerance and coexistence. With regard to child labour, he said that Maldives should consider joining the International Labour Organization (ILO).

27. The definition of the child in Maldivian legislation should be made more precise. While it was commendable that the minimum age for marriage had been raised from 16 years to 18, the age for criminal responsibility was still too low. The age for the completion of primary education was also too low and should be raised to 15.

28. Ms. ALUOCH said that the Committee had received information that Maldivian police services had, on various occasions, made comments to the media that infringed children's right to privacy and dignity. She asked whether there were any restrictions or guidelines for media reporting of cases involving children. She had heard that sex offenders in Maldives often went unpunished and were even pardoned on occasion, and she enquired whether new legislation would address that issue.

29. Ms. KHATTAB, noting that Maldives had made its reservation to article 14 of the Convention because the Constitution stated that all Maldivians should be Muslim, enquired whether the Constitution would be amended as the country underwent a process of democratization. People should not be forced to be Muslims, but should be free to choose their faith. Many Muslim countries had not made reservations to article 14, while others, such as Morocco and the Syrian Arab Republic, had withdrawn their reservations or intended to do so.

30. With regard to the reservation to article 21 of the Convention, she said that Maldives should consider the example of Egypt, which had withdrawn its reservations on adoption and kafalah once it had realized that the sharia would not be contradicted. She hoped that the Maldives would follow that example by referring the issue to Parliament.

31. She expressed concern at discrimination against children born out of wedlock, who had no rights at all. It was important to integrate such children into society and uphold their best interests. She had heard that there had recently been attempts to stop girls from attending school. She wished to know what was being done to prevent such behaviour, as it was crucial that girls enjoyed equal rights to education.

32. Ms. AL-THANI said that there had been reports in the Maldivian media regarding infanticide. Underage girls who became pregnant often resorted to clandestine abortions, or murdered their newborn infants. The delegation should indicate whether the Government intended to address that problem.

33. Mr. PARFITT said that, although a human rights commission had been established in Maldives in 2003, it was still not fully functional and did not have a children's rights component. Furthermore, it seemed that a child could make a complaint only through his or her guardian. She requested additional information on what Maldives was doing to establish an independent, accessible complaint mechanism for children.

34. Ms. SMITH said that it was important to make children aware of their right to dignity and physical and psychological integrity. It seemed rather contradictory that, although children in Maldives enjoyed freedom of association, they were not allowed to join political parties or adult associations. She wished to know why children were not allowed to join political parties. The delegation should explain the meaning of "adult association". Maldives should provide information on steps that were being taken to promote children's freedom of expression, particularly by involving them in television and other media.

35. With regard to the reservation to article 14, she asked whether consideration would be given to withdrawing that reservation in the context of the current review of the Constitution.

36. Mr. ZERMATTEN said that participation of children in legal matters seemed to be restricted mainly to procedures involving their custody; there was little scope for children's participation in juvenile justice. Procedural provisions would therefore need to be introduced to rectify that situation. It seemed that there was no system to ensure the effective participation of children in schools, and much remained to be done to ensure that children participated in public life. He would welcome specific examples of mechanisms for participation, such as children's parliaments or other institutions.

37. Mr. FILALI asked whether, in its review of the Constitution, the Constitutional Assembly would propose alternatives to the principle that all Maldivians should be Muslim. It was unclear how Maldives dealt with foreigners or non-Muslims. Above all, it was important to consider the impact of religion on children's education.

38. He asked whether Maldives had incorporated the provisions of any international instruments into its domestic law. The delegation should indicate whether judges received training in international conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

39. Turning to the issue of divorce, he said that the restrictions on men's freedom to divorce out of court did not represent a step forward, as the courts merely formalized the decision taken by the husband, without examining the situation of both spouses. He asked what happened to children of "domestic marriages" in cases where the parents separated or died, particularly since such marriages were not normally registered.

40. While legal remedies were available when rights under the Convention were violated, there was no evaluation process because the complaints system was not clear. It was clear that the system of remedies did not work.

41. Ms. AIDOO asked whether the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had been incorporated into domestic law. She asked whether the Gender Equality Council was doing anything to eliminate the sociocultural and religious barriers to girls' enjoyment of their rights.

42. Ms. ORTIZ said that some countries had a code of ethics for the media that included the media's obligation to respect the rights of children, and she enquired whether Maldives had taken any steps to regulate the media in that regard.

The meeting was suspended at 11.15 a.m. and resumed at 11.40 a.m.

43. The CHAIRPERSON wished to know whether Maldives intended to prohibit corporal punishment in the home and as a sentence for offences. She requested more information on early marriages.

44. Ms. DIDI (Maldives) said that the age of majority had been raised to 18 in 2002. Under the draft education act, compulsory schooling would be 12 years and the school leaving age would be 16. She agreed that pardoning even one person convicted of sexually abusing a child was unacceptable; the proposed changes to the Penal Code would ensure that sex offenders were more severely punished than in the past. Reports of sex offences concerning children were systematically referred to the Ministry of Justice.

45. Ms. JAMEEL (Maldives) said that, although NGOs had no authority in Maldives, they had been consulted in the preparation of the periodic reports on an equal footing with government stakeholders, and the role in consultations was expected to grow. While the NGO responsible for submitting the alternative report was new, it had fully participated in the work of the Steering Committee established to coordinate the drafting of reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. NGOs had also played a leading role in many child-related government initiatives, such as the preparation of a national disability policy, and the children's telephone helpline.

46. With regard to children's participation in policymaking, she said that the Government had been waiting for the findings of studies to distinguish between good practices and token forms of child participation. According to research by UNICEF, good practices of child participation were already being implemented in schools in Maldives. Moreover, children had played an active role in developing the telephone helpline. As part of the preparations for the forthcoming national conference on child protection, children would be offered an opportunity to express their concerns.

47. In recent years, the Government had focused on improving the training of persons involved in the rehabilitation of child victims of sexual abuse, both girls and boys. The authorities endeavoured to respond to every complaint of sexual abuse and exploitation of children and took children's and parents' views into account when dealing with such matters. Law enforcement officers were encouraged to pay particular attention to removing the stigma attached to child victims of sexual abuse. The progress made in that regard was reflected in the proposed amendments to the Penal Code.

48. Talks between the Ministry of Information, Arts and Culture and media groups had resulted in the formulation of draft guidelines in keeping with the UNICEF principles on the responsible reporting of children's issues. Once adopted, those guidelines would be disseminated for use in all media-related training.

49. Ms. ALUOCH asked whether police officers and staff at the Attorney-General's Office would also receive training in the responsible reporting of children's issues.

50. Ms. SMITH asked whether girls who had been sexually abused could face criminal proceedings.

51. Ms. JAMEEL (Maldives) said that girls under the age of sexual consent were sometimes prosecuted for "sexual misbehaviour" and could receive a criminal sentence. The Ministry of Gender and Family had worked with the courts and law enforcement officers to end that practice.

52. Ms. SMITH asked for a definition of sexual misbehaviour.

53. Mr. ANIL (Maldives) said that, once adopted, the proposed amendments to the Penal Code would bring the definition of sexual misbehaviour into line with international standards. Under the amended Penal Code, it would no longer be possible for the courts to take consent into account in any case involving a minor who had allegedly been sexually abused. The Government was currently drafting legislation that would enable all evidence, including evidence given by minors, to be reliably presented in court. Law enforcement officers were already receiving

special training in how to investigate sex offences against children and ensure that offenders did not escape prosecution. Under the amended Penal Code, harsher sentences would be handed down to sex offenders, especially in cases involving minors.

54. He hoped that the Government's reservation to article 21 of the Convention would be withdrawn by the end of 2007. It was possible that legislation would be adopted to enable Maldives to join ILO by the end of 2007, after which the Government would be able to sign and ratify all the relevant conventions.

55. While neither the Convention on the Rights of the Child nor the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women had been incorporated into domestic law, the Government intended to adopt legislation to rectify the situation. Some provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been incorporated into child protection legislation. He called on international organizations to provide practical assistance to Maldives in incorporating both conventions into domestic law.

56. Although the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives had had an inauspicious start in 2003, it had been given independent status under the Human Rights Commission Act 2005, which incorporated most of the Paris Principles and granted minors the right to appeal directly to the Commission.

57. Ms. SHAKOOR (Maldives) said that, while some 740 NGOs were registered with the Ministry of Home Affairs, fewer than 10 dealt directly with children's issues. Once legislation on associations was amended, civil society was expected to develop further. Although children were not legally prohibited from participating in NGOs, the situation would be made clearer by the end of 2007, when the new regulations were due to enter into force.

58. The law had been changed to raise the minimum age of conscription into the police and armed forces to 18 years.

59. While no cases of infanticide had been reported to the police in 2005, three cases had been reported in 2006 and another three in 2007. The Ministry of Home Affairs would be working with other ministries to address that growing problem.

60. The Parole Board, established in 2005 and dependent on the Ministry of Home Affairs, had the sole constitutional right to pardon offenders. Since 2005, one person convicted of a sex offence involving a minor had been given parole. Prison inmates were free to practise their religion in Maldives. One request for special food in prison had been made by a Hindu. The Ministry of Home Affairs was considering ways of meeting all religious requirements of prison inmates.

61. Mr. MOHAMED (Maldives) said that minors were not allowed to take part in political activities. Although pluralistic democracy was a recent development in Maldives, there were firmly established guidelines on political rights and responsibilities. The Ministry of Education believed that schools were the best place for young people to learn about human rights and the freedom of expression.

62. Non-Muslim children attended schools in Maldives but did not have to take part in religious studies and activities. The Ministry of Education had addressed the growing trend not to send daughters to school on a case-by-case basis. Following its consultations with student representatives, counsellors, religious scholars and parents, all the girls concerned had returned to school. The Ministry of Education actively monitored student participation in school management, and he appealed to the Committee for assistance in finding further ways to involve children and parents in school management.

63. Ms. MUHAMMAD (Maldives) said that, although the minimum age for marriage had been raised to 18 years, marriage was permitted at the age of 16 and 17 in “exceptional circumstances”. The National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child had to evaluate those circumstances before the marriage could be officially recognized. There had been four such cases over the past two years.

64. The courts recognized all registered marriages, whether the ceremony had taken place in Maldives or abroad. As a result of growing Islamic fundamentalism, marriage ceremonies were sometimes held at home, and the courts recognized the full legal rights of children born of such marriages.

65. Only mutually agreed divorce carried out in court was legal; men who unilaterally divorced their wives out of court were fined. Following the enactment of the Family Law in December 2000, the divorce rate had fallen sharply; however, in recent years it had risen again to almost pre-2000 levels. In view of that trend and other problems, the Government was reviewing family legislation and intended to introduce a bill by the end of 2007 that would further protect the rights of women and children. Premarital counselling was offered with a view to reducing the divorce rate, while mediation programmes existed to solve problems concerning custody, maintenance and other rights.

66. In keeping with international agreements, the first draft of the juvenile justice act emphasized restorative justice and non-custodial forms of punishment. With assistance from UNICEF, judges received special training in the Convention and all child-related legislation.

67. The CHAIRPERSON asked for confirmation that no early marriages took place in the Maldives.

68. Ms. DIDI (Maldives) said that the overall policy of the National Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child was to approve requests for marriage before the age of 18 only in exceptional circumstances. Of the 32 requests for special authorization received since the minimum marriageable age had been set, only 4 had been granted. She regretted that children’s organizations had not been involved in the budget preparation process, and would welcome any suggestions as to how to include them. Since 2005, there had been a threefold increase in budget allocations for child protection. It was difficult to coordinate implementation of the Convention across the vast geographical expanse of Maldives. At the same time, Maldives had been successful in raising the number of registered births (from 70 to 95 per cent since 2001), and financing its vaccination programme from the general budget rather than from international aid.

69. Local governance was a new concept in Maldives and an integral part of the reform agenda. For example, child protection committees were being established on every atoll in order to ensure respect for children's rights. However, much remained to be done to ensure the development of local governance.

70. Mr. SIDDIQUI (Country Rapporteur) said that, although Maldives had had strong local governance in the past, the modern State had favoured centralization in its efforts to unify the country. The current level of development of transport and communications was such that a return to local governance could be envisaged without compromising national unity. Duly elected local authorities could advocate implementation of the Convention and attention to the needs of children.

71. Ms. DIDI (Maldives) said that the varying interpretations of Islam professed in Maldives was a recent and very sensitive issue. It was attributable to the fact that many Maldivians had travelled to other Muslim countries and had returned with ideas that challenged the centuries-old Islamic traditions prevalent in Maldives. She would welcome the Committee's suggestions as to how to address that problem. Although all workshops held for local volunteer counsellors since 1991 had included segments on the Convention, she acknowledged that efforts to disseminate the Convention were not sufficient.

72. Mr. SIDDIQUI (Country Rapporteur) commended Maldives for its successful efforts to combat poverty, including plans to develop a social safety net programme. He asked what steps the Government planned to take to address the wide disparities that existed between Malé the capital city, and the atolls and between the southern and the northern atolls.

73. Ms. VUCKOVIC-SAHOVIC (Alternate Country Rapporteur) asked what mechanisms had been used to implement the Family Law. She enquired whether the Family Law provided for the possibility of joint custody of the child in the case of divorce. Under article 18 of the Convention, whether or not they were married, both parents had common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. She asked whether the Family Law provided a definition of the family; if not, she encouraged the Government to consider providing a broad definition that included extended family members, since a broad definition would ensure better protection of children in cases of abuse.

74. Ms. KHATTAB asked what measures had been taken to protect children from sexual exploitation. Since sex was traditionally a taboo subject in Maldives, she wondered how children were encouraged to report sexual exploitation. The delegation should provide information on activities it had undertaken on the basis of the Secretary-General's study on violence against children. In undertaking legal reform in that area, the Government might find it useful to consult particular aspects of the study.

75. Mr. PARFITT asked what services were available to girls who wished to report incidents of sexual abuse. He enquired whether a helpline had been set up and whether it was connected to the police or to a reception centre. He wished to know what alternative services were available to children who were in an abusive situation but who could not be admitted to one of the two State-operated institutions. He asked whether legislation provided for such children to be placed in the care of their extended family. He enquired whether there were any provisions that specifically prohibited corporal punishment of children in alternative care institutions. The

regulations governing such institutions should allow independent agencies to make regular visits in order to ensure that children received proper care and treatment. He wished to know whether a complaints mechanism had been set up to investigate complaints made by children in alternative care institutions. He enquired whether care plans were devised for children in those institutions and whether such plans were regularly reviewed by the authorities.

76. Mr. KRAPPMANN commended Maldives for making education available to all children on every atoll. It was gratifying to note that the number of secondary schools and attendance at them had increased. The delegation should explain why there were few recreational facilities available to children. He wished to know when legislation making primary and secondary education compulsory had been adopted.

77. Studies conducted in a number of countries had shown that costs associated with learning posed an obstacle to equal education opportunities and negatively influenced school achievement. Since education in Maldives was not free, the delegation should explain whether pupils and students who could not afford such costs received assistance.

78. He asked whether vocational training had been introduced in secondary schools and whether teachers had been trained accordingly. He wondered whether vocational training was coordinated with labour market demands. He asked what steps were being taken to address the inadequate training of teachers in Maldives. He requested information on the status of plans to develop preschool education, bearing in mind that play was one of the most important ways for young children to learn. He enquired whether Maldives envisaged enacting legislation to ensure children's participation in decisions affecting them in schools, and requested more information about student and classroom councils.

79. Mr. FILALI asked the delegation to explain the meaning of "haddu offences". He enquired whether there was any possibility of changing the legislation that held children under 10 criminally responsible for some haddu offences. He requested a detailed account of plans to reform the juvenile justice system.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.