



**International Convention on
the Elimination
of all Forms of
Racial Discrimination**

Distr.
GENERAL

CERD/C/SR.1655
16 August 2004

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Sixty-fifth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1655th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 10 August 2004, at 10. a.m.

Chairman: Mr. YUTZIS

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GE.04-43185 (E) 120804 160804

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED
BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 4)
(continued)

Fourth and fifth periodic reports of Slovakia (continued) (CERD/C/419/Add.2;
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1. At the invitation of the Chairman, the members of the delegation of Slovakia resumed their places at the Committee table.
2. The CHAIRMAN invited the delegation of Slovakia to reply to the Committee's questions.
3. Mr. PETŐCZ (Slovakia) thanked the Committee for its questions and observations, and expressed his pleasure at seeing a large number of NGOs represented at the meetings.
4. In response to the criticism levelled at the language and methodology used in the report, he pointed out that the team entrusted with the formulation of the report was new and might not have been familiar with the standard format. Bearing in mind the variety of measures taken to improve the Roma's living conditions, Slovakia - which had been one of the first countries to formally recognize the Roma people as a national minority - could certainly not be accused of considering the Roma minority an inferior ethnic group. In response to the Committee's specific interest in the situation of the Roma, the report placed particular emphasis on that matter. However, the Government was acutely aware of the need to combat all forms of discrimination.
5. It was important to remember that not all members of the Roma community were victims of social and economic exclusion. Also, while the situation in Roma settlements in the eastern and south-eastern regions caused particular concern, such adverse conditions were not exclusive to the Roma population, but were common to all vulnerable groups.
6. He drew attention to the word "nationality" used with reference to ethnic affiliation in the report. Use of that term in English was somewhat misleading as, in the Slovak language, the word "nationality" qualified a person's belonging to a group with distinct ethnic and linguistic characteristics. It did not, as was the case in other languages, refer to a person's citizenship. Accordingly, national minorities in Slovakia comprised a group of individuals that displayed a number of common characteristics, whether of a linguistic, cultural or historical nature. Strictly speaking, that definition did not apply to the Roma community. However, the Roma were formally recognized as a national minority and granted specific rights on that basis.
7. Ms. ORGOVÁNOVÁ (Slovakia) said that, in spite of a decade of positive government policy, the situation of the Roma minority remained problematic. Societal change was slow and many Roma continued to live in abject poverty. In that connection, her Government welcomed and encouraged the participation of NGOs in endeavours to remedy persistent problems.

8. The Committee had praised the report for its openness, but criticized its allegedly discriminatory or racist language. While the methodology adopted for drafting the report admittedly needed improving, considerable efforts had been made to give a realistic account of the situation in Slovakia. She assured the Committee that future reports would be drafted with the criticisms in mind.
9. The post of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma minority affairs had been created in 1999 and the Plenipotentiary was appointed following an open competition. The Plenipotentiary's Office fell under the purview of the Deputy Prime Minister responsible for Human Rights, National Minorities and Regional Development. The Government sought to expand the current structure by increasing personnel and establishing five regional offices in areas with particularly large Roma populations.
10. The Office's main role was to advise the Government on policies concerning the Roma community and to participate in the implementation of such policies. While funding for the Plenipotentiary was ensured through the general State budget, responsibility for financing individual programmes lay with the competent ministries. The Office's limited financial resources placed severe limitations on its activities.
11. The main objective of government policy in relation to the Roma minority was to achieve integration. The process of integration involved both the "integrator" and the "integrated", and the Government fully assumed its responsibility to create a favourable environment for such a process.
12. Considerable efforts were made to raise Roma awareness of government policies and programmes relating to their community. In recent years, an increasing number of Roma representatives had participated actively in the implementation of such policies, although few were directly involved in decision-making. The majority fulfilled advisory functions in various governmental bodies.
13. While poverty and unemployment were not exclusive to the Roma population, they affected that community disproportionately and severely restricted their capacity to participate in the implementation of government programmes. However, close cooperation with NGOs facilitated the increasing involvement of the most marginalized. Since statistics were not compiled according to ethnic origin, no disaggregated data were available on the situation of the Roma minority. However, the Plenipotentiary's Office had instituted a monitoring process, since obtaining accurate information on the situation of socially excluded groups was crucial for the purpose of taking adequate measures. Many programmes aimed at combating poverty did not specifically target the Roma population, but covered all economically vulnerable groups.
14. In 2002, the Government had adopted a conceptual document entitled "Basic positions of the Slovak Government's Roma community integration policy". The strategy outlined in the document was based on the principle of "temporary affirmative action", in conformity with the relevant provisions of the Slovak Constitution and international human rights instruments. Such affirmative action was of a purely temporary nature and did not impose a permanent quota system.

15. The living conditions of a substantial percentage of Roma families precluded their children's full and equal participation in the economic, social and cultural life of the country. With that concern in mind, various ministries had been requested to devise specific sectoral strategies to promote education and foster integration. The monitoring of Roma settlements had revealed considerable shortcomings, including a lack of basic infrastructure, low educational standards and unemployment rates of up to 100 per cent. Given such circumstances, integration was extremely difficult. In addition, financial constraints often hampered the implementation of relevant policies and programmes. According to recent statistics, some 140,000 Roma lived in settlements or ghettos.

16. In 2002, the Government had launched a comprehensive programme for the development of Roma settlements, which was primarily financed through European Union Structural Funds. The Plenipotentiary's Office was responsible for coordination of the programme, while teachers, NGO representatives and representatives of local government were concerned with the formulation and implementation of projects at the local level. The programme's main focus was on housing, education, health, and the protection of vulnerable groups such as women and children. A number of posts had been created for specially-trained social workers who served as mediators between the Roma community and the local authorities. That element of the programme had proven particularly successful and the Government envisaged further expanding its scope. The programme was an important instrument in improving the situation of the Roma minority in Slovakia.

17. Ms. ONDRÁŠOVÁ (Slovakia) said that the adverse living conditions of many Roma families hampered their children's full enjoyment of the right to education; statistics confirmed that the percentage of Roma children in special primary schools for mentally impaired children had been disproportionately high in the past. However, the establishment of a number of programmes designed to facilitate the integration of Roma children in mainstream schools had been quite successful. In the context of those programmes, the special circumstances of socially disadvantaged children were taken into account.

18. Her Government had established a preparatory class in primary schools and created several posts for Roma teaching assistants. The bilingual assistants facilitated Roma children's integration in the classroom and in after-school activities. In addition, a specific programme had been introduced to accelerate the success of Roma pupils. A considerable number of pilot primary schools had been integrated in that programme.

19. Ms. ORGOVÁNOVÁ (Slovakia), turning to the question on support for secondary and university education for the Roma, said that over the past two years three new Roma secondary schools had been opened; they focused on the teaching of Roma history, language and culture. The first was a boarding-school in eastern Slovakia, to which 300 children had been admitted in 2003. Another such school was due to open in central Slovakia at the end of 2004, and the Slovak-English bilingual school in Bratislava now had a new Roma language and culture class, the entrance examinations for which were open to all Slovak children. The University of Nitra had a department for Roma culture teacher-training. An increasing number of non-Roma children and students were beginning to show an interest in Roma culture.

20. Arrangements had been made for teaching assistants to work with minority children in mainstream schools. The Ministry of Education had granted funding for the employment of over 400 teaching assistants in the academic year 2003/04, and reports on the impact of their work had been positive. Their main function was to act as mediators between teachers and pupils who were not proficient in the Slovak language, both in class and during extra-curricular activities. Unfortunately, it was still not certain whether the Ministry of Education would be able to grant sufficient funding to continue the scheme through the next academic year. Regarding instruction in the languages of national minorities, she, as Government Plenipotentiary for the Roma minorities, had established a language commission, which had recently published a Roma language grammar book.

21. Providing housing for marginalized groups such as the Roma posed financial problems for the Government. An economic analysis of the needs of such groups was currently being carried out, in order to target funds more precisely. Groups that depended on social benefits needed State support and housing subsidies, and work was being done in the Ministry of the Interior in that connection.

22. The Ministry of Health had established a scheme for employing health assistants to work alongside medical practitioners. Additional funding had been granted by the Ministry to provide vaccines, particularly against hepatitis, to underprivileged groups. Although a strategy of temporary “equalizing” measures for the Roma had been devised, some government ministries did not agree that measures should be targeted specifically at that sector of the population. Nevertheless, progress had been made since both the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Health had agreed to fund Roma-targeted projects.

23. Mr. CHLPÍK (Slovakia) said that there were several reasons for the increase in the number of recorded cases of racially motivated crime: first, in 2002 the police had increased their efforts to detect extreme right-wing activity, following an awareness-raising initiative aimed at identifying far-right propaganda and the symbols and badges worn by activists; and second, there had been an increase in cooperation with anti-racist NGOs, which had assisted in revealing racially motivated criminal activity to the authorities.

24. Since 2002, several late reports of racially motivated attacks had been made by victims, who had not come forward previously since they had lacked confidence in police capabilities. An assault on a Roma family in 2000, which had resulted in one death, had prompted the police to pay increased attention to preventing racially motivated offences. Appropriate additional measures had been incorporated in police training and education in human rights protection had been broadened. New police departments had been established specifically to detect racially motivated criminal activities.

25. The Ministry of the Interior had issued regulations on right-wing extremism and racism, and had taken steps to increase collaboration with NGOs working on racial discrimination issues. A committee on racially motivated violence had been established within the Ministry, comprising police officers. Ministry officials, trainers and representatives of the Ministry’s inspectorate, a body that examined, reviewed and processed complaints about the police. The committee had worked to publish a manual on methodology for police officers, which provided

information on appropriate procedures for detecting and processing racially motivated crimes. The manual had been distributed to all police forces in Slovakia. Police officers had also attended seminars on detecting racially motivated offences and recognizing symbols signifying intolerance, which were often worn by extremists.

26. Regarding the distribution of Mein Kampf, the sale of the book had been prevented through efforts by the police, and most existing copies had been seized. Those persons responsible for publishing and distributing the book had been prosecuted, but since they were not Slovak nationals, the criminal proceedings were being continued outside Slovakia.

27. Ms. KASÁROVÁ (Slovakia) said that forced sterilization of Roma women in eastern Slovakia was definitely not State policy. Her Government had acted immediately on the findings of the “Body and Soul” report: criminal proceedings had begun in January 2004, and an impartial team of predominantly female experts, which had been set up in central Slovakia, had carried out investigations. The Faculty of Medicine of Comenius University in Bratislava had been invited to express an expert opinion on the cases, and an expert control group composed of a team of gynaecology and obstetrics professionals had been set up to investigate all cases of sterilization carried out in the hospitals mentioned in the “Body and Soul” report between 1993 and 2003. A second group of specialists had investigated sterilizations in a further 70 obstetrics and gynaecology departments in eastern Slovakia.

28. In the initial criminal investigations and prosecutions, it had been concluded that the crime of genocide had not been committed. That decision had later been reviewed, and a second impartial prosecution had taken place, in close cooperation with international bodies. Representatives of the Council of Europe had visited Slovakia and made recommendations on future legislation, which the Government had subsequently implemented. Although the inquiries into forced sterilizations had not revealed any evidence of genocide, they had shown that there were certain shortcomings in Slovak health legislation in relation to informed consent, access to medical files and administrative errors.

29. After the investigation, the Ministry of Health had made staff changes to the sterilization commissions in several hospitals, and new consent forms and sterilization application forms had been issued. The Government had circulated a request that various ministries should take legislative measures to avert the possibility of forced sterilization. An amended law on health care had been drafted, regulating informed consent, access to medical files and sterilization procedures. The bill had yet to be approved, but it was hoped that it would be passed in September 2004 as part of a general health service reform. The bill revoked the 1972 law on sterilization and amended the Criminal Code, by adding to it the criminal offence of illegal sterilization, which was considered a crime against human dignity. A new regulation had been introduced providing that sterilization could be carried out no earlier than 30 days after the receipt of informed consent. Although the criminal proceedings had been concluded, the victims could still seek compensation through civil cases.

30. Ms. ORGOVÁNOVÁ said that the Roma victims of the Second World War were not recognized in the same way as other victims, possibly because of a lack of publicity by Roma organizations. A commemoration of the Roma Holocaust was held annually on 9 August.

Compensation had been awarded to some members of the Roma population who had suffered during the Holocaust; in most cases it had been granted by the International Organization for Migration and the Government of Germany.

31. She was aware that Slovakia's record on racial discrimination was not perfect, but the delegation had made an effort to give the Committee comprehensive replies to its questions. A report compiled by representatives of the European Union (EU) had stated that there was evidence of a gap between Slovakia's ideas and their execution. The inadequate implementation of plans was due not only to financial difficulties, but also to a reluctance to cooperate at the regional level. Slovakia's accession to the EU had been a positive step, not only with regard to funding, but also because the Government's sensitivity to a broad range of international issues would be increased. A Roma working group had been established to monitor the use of structural funds provided by the EU, particularly for projects focusing on areas with large Roma populations.

32. Ms. KASÁROVÁ (Slovakia) said that the Hungarians were the largest minority group in Slovakia, amounting to 9.7 per cent of the total population. Hungarians had strong political representation, since there were members of the Hungarian Coalition sitting in the Slovak Parliament, two of whom had been elected to membership of the European Parliament.

33. The Treaty on Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation had been signed by Slovakia and Hungary in 1995. Under the treaty, the Slovak-Hungarian Joint Commission on Issues of National Minorities had been established and had met annually between 1999 and 2003. The most recent development in Slovak-Hungarian relations concerning national minorities had been the signing in 2003 of an agreement on cooperation in the areas of culture, education, science and youth. In December 2003, the Slovak and Hungarian Governments had also signed an agreement for mutual support in science, education and culture; its implementation was being evaluated by the Joint Commission.

34. Ms. KUSENDOVÁ explained that the new anti-discrimination law aimed to fully integrate the EU's anti-discrimination directives into domestic legislation. The law set out the principles of equal treatment, as embodied in those directives, in the areas of labour, health care, and access to goods and services, and prohibited discrimination on grounds of gender, religion, race, health, sexual orientation, marital status or affiliation to certain social groups. The law ensured that people could seek redress if they felt that their right to equal treatment had been violated.

35. The anti-discrimination law included the principle of affirmative action, which meant that special measures could be taken to prevent unequal treatment on grounds of ethnic or racial origin. The law also amended other legislation on education, labour relations and the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights. The Centre endeavoured to ensure equal treatment, carried out research, provided assistance for victims, published policy statements and organized educational activities.

36. Mr. PETÖCZ (Slovakia) said that his country had ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the provisions of which applied to all the national minorities

recognized in the Slovak Constitution, including the Roma and Hungarian minorities. A university had been established to provide higher education in the Hungarian language; it was a public institution created by an act of Parliament.

37. His Government was committed to bringing Slovak legislation on national minorities into line with international standards, and the de jure situation in Slovakia was among the best in Europe. Difficulties remained, however, with respect to the implementation of the relevant provisions, not least because the target groups were not exercising the rights granted to them. For example, few members of the Hungarian minority had availed themselves of the provisions of Act No. 300/1993 relating to Names and Surnames, which allowed children born in Slovakia to be given foreign names. The Roma minority, in particular, had yet to establish the organizational structure necessary to educate members about their rights. It was the role of the Government to provide the necessary conditions for them to do so.

38. One of the best ways of promoting tolerance among racial and ethnic groups was to have positive examples of multiculturalism in action. Thus, while many Slovaks remained suspicious of the Hungarian minority, the very fact of having a Hungarian party in the Government was helping to allay their fears. It was also necessary, of course, to ensure that human rights education was provided systematically, from primary school to university. There had been progress in that area, but much remained to be done.

39. The CHAIRMAN observed that the comprehensive replies given by the delegation of Slovakia would facilitate the dialogue with the Committee and had demonstrated once again the importance of having representatives of States parties present when their reports were considered.

40. Mr. SICILIANOS (Country rapporteur) said that the State party's representatives had not yet replied to questions 5, 9, 10 and 12 on the list of issues. He proposed that the delegation should be given the opportunity to complete its responses before members asked follow-up questions.

41. Mr. ABOUL-NASR, speaking on a point of order, said that the list of issues was an informal document and that the questions it contained were meant only to prompt discussion. There was no obligation on the delegation to reply to every question. It might well lack the information it needed.

42. The CHAIRMAN said that it was entirely at the discretion of the State party's representatives to decide whether they wished, or were able, to answer a particular question. However, there was nothing to prevent a member of the Committee from requesting additional information.

43. Mr. PETÖCZ (Slovakia) said that questions 5, 9, 10 and 12 had been touched on in the information provided by his delegation. It was, of course, ready to give more detailed replies.

44. Ms. ORGOVÁNOVÁ (Slovakia) said that the language commission set up within her Office was less active than before as its primary task had been to emphasize the need for standardization of the written Roma language. It had chosen the Eastern Slovak dialect, used by approximately 80 per cent of Roma in Slovakia, as the basis for the spelling of the language.

Other tasks of the commission included the publication of a Roma grammar; the launching of a pilot project for the teaching of Roma in primary and secondary schools; and the establishment of a department of Roma language and culture at the university in Nitra.

45. Ms. KAPISOVSKÁ (Slovakia) said that, before her country could ratify the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime, a number of its provisions would have to be incorporated in Slovak legislation. The necessary amendments and additions would be made in connection with the revision of the country's criminal legislation. A new criminal code was currently before Parliament.

46. Mr. CHLPIK (Slovakia) said that it might be helpful to provide a specific example of a case handled by the special unit established within the Ministry of the Interior to investigate allegations of discrimination, acts of violence or ill-treatment by police officers. In early 2004, a member of a minority had alleged that he had been verbally abused and assaulted by a police officer. The allegations had been substantiated and the officer had been dismissed. Subsequently, he had been charged with assault. Another mechanism through which members of minorities could file complaints of police misconduct was the commission established to deal with racially motivated violence. The commission's meetings were attended by representatives of the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma minorities and the Prosecutor-General's Office.

47. Ms. ORGOVÁNOVÁ (Slovakia) said that unemployment among Roma was particularly high in those regions where the general unemployment rate was high. Roma job-seekers were further hampered by discrimination and by their low level of education and lack of vocational skills. Her Government was implementing a number of programmes to improve the situation of Roma and other disadvantaged groups. In addition, it was about to launch a media campaign to combat discrimination in the labour market.

48. Ms. KUSEDOVÁ (Slovakia) said that her Government had recognized the need for specific programmes, including affirmative action measures, to target the Roma population and other disadvantaged groups. The new legislation on employment services provided for more than 20 programmes to increase employment within those categories of the population. Combating joblessness among Roma was also a priority of the national action plan for employment. Within the framework of the plan, programmes had been carried out to improve the employability of Roma. At the same time, efforts were being made, in the context of the "Equal" programme to change employers' attitudes to Roma job-seekers. She could not provide statistics on the impact of those initiatives, since her Government did not establish data disaggregated by ethnic origin.

49. The problem of unemployment could not be tackled in isolation. It was also necessary to address the difficult financial situation and marginalization of jobless persons, and her Government had established a social development fund for that purpose. It had also applied for financing from the European Social Fund in order to improve the situation of Roma communities.

50. Ms. KAPISOVSKÁ (Slovakia) said that the concerns expressed by the Committee in its decision concerning communication No. 11/1998 (Miroslav Lacko v. Slovak Republic) would be addressed through the revision of the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure. The case itself had been resolved in civil proceedings.

51. Mr. PETÖCZ (Slovakia) said that information on the number of persons convicted for racially motivated crimes, the sentences passed and the compensation granted to victims had been distributed informally.

52. Mr. BOYD expressed satisfaction that the delegation of Slovakia included representatives of the ministries and other government bodies that would be responsible for the follow-up to the Committee's concluding observations and recommendations. Noting that there were only two bilingual schools, he asked whether the Government intended to develop a global conceptual approach to bilingual education, which, though resource-intensive, was one of the most effective ways of integrating Roma children within mainstream society.

53. He would like to know what the public reaction had been to the racially motivated crime referred to in paragraph 28 of the periodic report and, in particular, whether the sentences imposed on the four skinheads who had been convicted for bodily harm resulting in the death of a Roma woman were considered adequate. Noting with satisfaction the establishment of a special unit within the Ministry of the Interior to investigate complaints of alleged police misconduct, he asked how many investigations the unit had conducted and what proportion of the complaints lodged had involved racial discrimination or ill-treatment or acts of violence with a racial component.

54. He had been very interested to learn of the alleged case of forced sterilization of Roma women to which the delegation had referred. In order to bring criminal proceedings in the case, the authorities would have had to show that the sterilization had taken place, that it had been performed without the women's informed consent, and that the offence had had a racial or ethnic component. Noting that the investigation had been discontinued because of lack of evidence, he asked which of the three elements had not been proven.

55. Mr. KJAERUM concurred with the comments made by the previous speaker concerning the composition of the delegation. The discussion on national minorities had focused on the Roma population; that was because the Government of Slovakia had dealt quite successfully with the problems facing other national minorities. For example, the tension existing between the Slovak majority and the Hungarian minority in the early 1990s had been eased through the intervention of national and international mechanisms. Concerning the Roma minority, he wished to know whether the difficulties they encountered in the area of housing were due to isolated cases of discrimination or wholesale racial segregation. The evidence the Committee had heard pointed to the latter. Lastly, noting that Roma women faced double discrimination, he requested additional information on the sexual exploitation of Roma women, forced marriages in the Roma community and discrimination against Roma women in the labour market, and also on the strategies the Government was developing to address the specific problems of Roma women.

56. Mr. ABOUL-NASR asked how many Roma dialects there were, which of those dialects was used in bilingual schools and how a particular dialect was chosen. He also requested additional information on the current legislation governing names and name changes.

57. Since the Roma way of life merited respect from the Government, members of that group should be given the opportunity to receive an education, but not be obliged to integrate into society through educational or other measures.
58. Ms. JANUARY-BARDILL requested clarification of the relationship between the different government bodies responsible for national minorities and discrimination issues, as referred to in the periodic report (paras. 29-40), and the current status of those bodies. It would be useful to have a full account of the function of each body, its work and an assessment of its effectiveness in the next report.
59. Mr. de GOUTTES wondered why only one NGO had been involved in the preparation of the report currently under consideration, and suggested that more such organizations should take part in the drafting of the next report.
60. It would be useful to learn whether the “Roma assistants” project would be continued in schools in future. The Committee would welcome the extension of the project and would urge the Government to ensure that sufficient funding was made available.
61. While he understood that the Government had taken certain measures as a result of communication No. 11/1998 (Miroslav Lacko v. Slovak Republic), it would be useful to have more data in the next report. In particular, the reporting State should clarify precisely what complaints had been made regarding the non-admission of members of the Roma community to public places and the responses to the complaints.
62. Mr. AMIR said that he would appreciate additional information on any bilateral agreements on the protection of minorities from neighbouring countries that existed between Slovakia and those countries, and any joint approaches to resolving the problems faced by those minorities. It would be useful to know whether Slovakia, as a member of the Council of Europe, had ratified all the relevant agreements relating to minority groups.
63. Was there a Muslim community living in Slovakia? If so, it would be interesting to learn whether that minority enjoyed the same rights as Slovak citizens or was regarded as a national minority.
64. Mr. CALITZAY said that, since the Roma community had not played any part in developing the Government’s integration policy, it was difficult to understand why those who had chosen not to accept the voluntary integration measures had continued to suffer discrimination. It was also unclear why the Hungarian minority was regarded as more important than the Roma minority.
65. The CHAIRMAN invited the delegation to respond to the questions raised.
66. Mr. PETÖCZ (Slovakia) said that his country had ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which included provisions on minorities from neighbouring States. It had concluded a bilateral agreement with Hungary, which had helped avert potential problems during the 1990s.

67. The choice of the term “way of life” in the periodic report with reference to the Roma minority had been unfortunate. There was no such phenomenon in Slovakia. Most members of the Roma community lived in poverty, which had nothing to do with the traditional Roma way of life. The first steps had been taken to combat that situation with the development of programmes, the allocation of funding and organizational measures. Once the Roma community was no longer living in poverty, his Government would work to ensure that they enjoyed the same rights as other national minorities.

68. While it was important that minority groups acquired the language of the majority in order to facilitate integration, bilingualism was also an obligation on the majority. A significant number of Slovaks had demonstrated their willingness to learn the Roma language so as to assist that minority in their efforts, and several schools offered relevant classes. Such a dual approach was necessary for the development of a truly multicultural society. Unfortunately, while the Hungarian minority had an extensive education system in its own language, with the Slovak language taught as part of the curriculum, Hungarians needed to speak Slovak in order to enter the job market. There were no schools where Slovaks could learn Hungarian.

69. Ms. ORGOVÁNOVÁ (Slovakia) observed that a secondary arts school had been teaching music, dance and drama to students for over 10 years, and two additional arts schools were to be opened in the near future. While the level of education provided to the Roma population had not reached that provided to the Hungarian minority, measures to improve Roma education were being taken.

70. Regarding the public response to racially motivated offences, more robust condemnation might have been expected from the Government. The reaction of the media and the public had been minimal, and not all NGOs and human rights organizations had reacted. That might have been due to the fact that the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma minority affairs had already issued statements on the question. A campaign had been conducted the previous year to raise public awareness of Roma issues.

71. Integration was a complex issue: while people could not be obliged to integrate, the Government’s duty was to provide the conditions for integration. Some individual members of the Roma minority had been fortunate enough to have access to higher education and had escaped poverty. Many middle-class Roma had, however, lost their jobs. The Government had taken steps to improve housing and infrastructure in the Roma settlements. While it was important to support the Roma community in its efforts to preserve its cultural identity, the Roma must accept certain obligations, such as sending their children to school.

72. Her delegation acknowledged that much work remained to be done to eradicate social exclusion. All Roma in Slovakia understood the Slovak language and were able to communicate in it. Some children who used the Roma mother tongue at home found it difficult to communicate effectively in Slovak at school, and that had given rise to the “Roma assistants” programme. It was unlikely that education would ever be provided exclusively in the Roma language.

73. While statistics had demonstrated that segregation existed, both in geographical and social terms, measures were being taken to eradicate it.

74. Mr. PETÖCZ (Slovakia) said that the law on names allowed members of minorities to use their names in their respective spellings. Prior to the amendment 10 years previously, there had been several administrative obstacles, particularly to the use of Hungarian spellings. Those had been removed, and while it was a positive measure, few people had taken advantage of the change.

75. Ms. KASÁROVÁ (Slovakia) said that the investigation into the alleged forced sterilization of Roma women had been concluded in 2003, when it had been found that there was insufficient evidence that any crime had been committed. The Ministry of Public Health had carried out its own investigation, which had not proved the existence of any segregation or discrimination against Roma women. While some doctors had made administrative errors, there had been no ethnic or racial motivation. The necessary proceedings had been initiated against those responsible for the errors, in line with the amended legislation. There was no evidence of an anti-Roma government policy.

76. Mr. SICILIANOS thanked the delegation for its contribution to the useful dialogue that had taken place. Having summarized the responses provided by the delegation, he said that the State party was clearly keen to make progress and had shown an innovative and flexible approach in its efforts to combat racial discrimination effectively. The periodic report had been thorough and would form the basis of the Committee's concluding observations, in conjunction with the delegation's responses and the additional documentation provided.

77. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee had thus concluded the initial phase of its consideration of the fourth and fifth periodic reports of Slovakia. Its concluding observations would be communicated to the State party in due course.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.