



# International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Distr.: General  
14 October 2022

Original: English

---

## Human Rights Committee 136th session

### Summary record of the 3919th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 10 October 2022, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Pazartzis

## Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant

*Fifth periodic report of the Philippines*

---

This record is subject to correction. Corrections 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 the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.



*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant**

*Fifth periodic report of the Philippines* ([CCPR/C/PHL/5](#); [CCPR/C/PHL/Q/5](#); [CCPR/C/PHL/RQ/5](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Philippines joined the meeting.*
2. **Mr. Remulla** (Philippines), introducing his country's fifth periodic report, said that his country was committed to engaging with the human rights treaty bodies. That commitment was mirrored in a statement delivered by recently elected President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. at the seventy-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly, in which he had called for an "open, inclusive, and rules-based international order that is governed by international law and informed by the principles of equity and justice".
3. At the general election held in the Philippines in May 2022, in which there had been a record-breaking turnout, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. had become the first president in decades to be elected by a majority. The new Administration was fully aware of the pressing human rights challenges faced by the country and was determined to address them, with the overarching objective of dispensing "real justice in real time". The Department of Justice was at the forefront of the effort to defend human rights and to promote access to justice for vulnerable sectors of the population.
4. The Department was undertaking transformational reforms of justice mechanisms and processes, with an emphasis on inclusivity and social justice. To alleviate prison overcrowding, steps had been taken to build a new world-class prison and conduct a comprehensive review of prisoner records with a view to releasing those whose detention was no longer justified. The target was to release some 5,000 prisoners by June 2023.
5. Other measures included enhancing coordination between prosecutors and law enforcement officials; investigating deaths associated with the campaign to combat illegal drug use and prosecuting and punishing police officers found to be responsible for abuses; strengthening the witness protection programme; improving rehabilitation, prevention, education and assistance programmes for drug victims and their families; and furthering the State's commitment to the United Nations Joint Programme on Human Rights.
6. Over 10 million Filipinos lived and worked overseas, and at least 1 million migrated for employment every year. Their protection was assured by the newly created Department of Migrant Workers, which had assisted 21,291 Filipinos abroad in 2021. The Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking continued to work to protect the rights of Filipino migrant workers and victims of human trafficking, especially women and children. In 2021, under the Recovery and Reintegration Programme for Trafficked Persons, 3,988 survivors had been provided with access to counselling, financial assistance, skills training and temporary shelter.
7. Under former President Rodrigo Duterte and in keeping with article 23 of the Covenant, the State had pursued an anti-illegal drug campaign that had been compatible with international standards and guidance from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Narcotics Control Board. As part of the Philippine Anti-Illegal Drugs Strategy, all government agencies were working to eliminate the drug problem in the country, and accountability mechanisms had been put in place. In 2016, the Dangerous Drugs Board had launched a scheme to encourage drug users and dependents to make use of treatment and rehabilitation services. The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency ensured transparency and accountability in the application of its policies by having officers use body cameras during all overt operations. From July 2016 to August 2022, a total of 4,627 children aged 4 to 17 years had been rescued thanks to the anti-illegal drug campaign and referred to appropriate case management mechanisms.
8. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) had praised the Philippines for having a comprehensive definition of domestic violence and for providing innovative remedies and relief. In 2019, the Supreme Court had issued the Revised Rule on Children in Conflict with the Law to ensure that the justice system treated every child in a manner that upheld their human dignity. In the same year, a law had

been passed declaring children to be “zones of peace” and providing for their protection from grave rights violations.

9. The work of the Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and their Children had implemented accountability mechanisms in 13,538 of the 21,458 incidents reported between 2021 and September 2022. The Philippine National Police (PNP) worked with the Department of Social Welfare and Development to place child victims in care and had developed manuals and policies on the elimination of violence against children. The PNP Women and Children Protection Desk had trained 5,828 investigators.

10. PNP had strong partnerships with law enforcement counterparts such as the International Criminal Police Organization and the Association of Heads of Police of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Under a cooperation agreement aimed at freezing traffickers’ financial assets, PNP and the Anti-Money Laundering Council jointly investigated trafficking-related cases. In 2021, the PNP Women and Children Protection Centre had facilitated the arrest of 21 suspected perpetrators and the rescue of 159 victims. There had also been 103 convictions in trafficking-related cases in 2021, including 42 cases of online sexual exploitation of children. A new law on that subject had been passed in 2022.

11. To ensure the welfare of all persons deprived of their liberty, the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology had constructed new jails with the support of local government units and civil society. The Bureau of Corrections continued to address the issue of prison overcrowding. Around 4 billion Philippine pesos had been set aside to relocate the maximum-security New Bilibid Prison to the island of Mindoro. The Bureau of Corrections Act of 2013 provided for the regionalization and reformation of the correctional system. The Public Attorney’s Office had been instructed to tour all detention facilities to ensure that persons deprived of their liberty were being treated properly and were not being held for even one day longer than their sentence.

12. The Government valued the Committee’s expertise and looked forward to its assistance in further strengthening accountability mechanisms and processes. All it asked for was time to put its resolve to protect and promote human rights into action. Despite the enormity of the challenges it faced, the Government believed that solutions were within its grasp and that, with the continued guidance and support of the international community, it could achieve its goal of delivering real justice in real time.

13. **Ms. Kran** said that, since the review of the State party’s fourth periodic report ([CCPR/C/PHL/4](#)) in 2012, the Committee had noted that serious human rights violations, such as extrajudicial killings and attacks on human rights defenders and government critics, had occurred in the country. In view of the general election that had been held in May 2022, the current dialogue came at an opportune time.

14. She wished to know why no update of the 1996 national human rights action plan had ever been adopted, whether there was a timeline for doing so and whether civil society and the United Nations country team would be consulted regarding the development of a new plan. She would appreciate information on what was being done to raise human rights awareness among Filipinos and on when the Human Rights Defenders Bill, the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression Bill and the Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Bill would be enacted.

15. The State party had ratified the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1989. Since then, the Committee had found violations in 15 cases involving the Philippines. She wished to know what steps were being taken to prevent a recurrence of such violations, how and when effective remedies, including compensation to victims’ families, would be provided in those cases, whether the State party intended to establish a follow-up procedure to implement the Committee’s Views and whether it planned to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

16. Former President Duterte had reportedly threatened and verbally attacked international officials, including Ms. Agnès Callamard, former Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, and Ms. Fatou Bensouda, a former Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. She wondered how the new Government would ensure

respect for international officials and whether apologies would be issued to Ms. Callamard and Ms. Bensouda.

17. Despite repeated denials by former President Duterte's Administration, the Philippines News Agency had reported over 6,000 extrajudicial killings linked to the "war on drugs". Under President Marcos Jr., there had already been a 78 per cent increase in such killings. She wished to know whether the State party would take action to put a stop to extrajudicial killings, why there had been so few investigations, trials and convictions in that connection and what the Government planned to do to rectify that situation.

18. She would be grateful for information on how the State party ensured that police officers were properly trained and complied with the Covenant and the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials and on the steps being taken to punish officers who violated human rights standards. She would also be interested in learning whether the compilation of "drug watch lists", which were reportedly based largely on unsubstantiated information, would be discontinued.

19. She would like to know how the State party planned to cooperate with the investigation opened by the International Criminal Court into extrajudicial killings committed as part of the "war on drugs" in the Philippines and with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council. Information would also be appreciated on the methods used by the police force to identify and investigate the vigilante groups that it claimed were responsible for those killings. How and when would the new Government stop the practice of actually rewarding police officers involved in extrajudicial killings and put an end to their impunity?

20. The Committee had been informed that over 100 children had been killed in the "war on drugs" and that former President Duterte had described those children as "collateral damage". She would like to know what steps would be taken to protect children during police actions, what physical and psychological support was available to minor children of persons killed in police operations and what steps would be taken to provide their families with effective remedies, which might range from providing access to relevant police documents to granting adequate compensation.

21. It would be helpful to know what was being done to ensure that footage from police body cameras was reviewed not only internally, by the Chief of Police, but also independently.

22. During former President Duterte's term, numerous lawmakers had called for the reinstatement of the death penalty, mainly for drug-related offences. She failed to see how doing so could be consistent with the State party's obligations under article 6 of the Covenant and under the Second Optional Protocol, which it had ratified in 2007. More generally, she wished to know what steps were being taken to deal with drug-related matters in line with the United Nations system common position on drug policy.

23. She would welcome a description of the results achieved to date under the United Nations Joint Programme on Human Rights being implemented by the Government in cooperation with four United Nations agencies and, in particular, an indication of whether the accountability mechanisms envisaged in that programme had been established.

24. **Mr. Yigezu** said that he wished to know whether the State party planned to increase the budget of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, which reportedly required more funding in order to cope with its workload. He would welcome details on the rules governing the selection and appointment of commissioners and on the steps taken to ensure that the Commission was fully independent, in line with the Paris Principles. It would be helpful to learn when the bills on the Charter of the Commission were expected to be passed and how they would strengthen the Commission's independence. He would be interested to hear about any measures that had been taken to prevent the intimidation of former commissioners by legislators.

25. The Committee was concerned about the severe overcrowding in prisons, which had been made worse by the influx of suspects arrested as part of the "war on drugs". He wished to know how the authorities planned to address that problem and whether they were considering the use of alternative measures to detention. He would appreciate the delegation's comments on reports that, in many facilities, conditions of detention did not

comply with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules). He would welcome details on any specific measures in place to meet the needs of women in detention. He would also be grateful for up-to-date, reliable disaggregated data on the number of persons charged with and convicted of offences related to the sale and personal use of drugs, including how many of those persons remained in detention and how many had been released.

26. **Mr. Ben Achour** said that, while it appeared that the State party had made some progress in combating corruption, it remained widespread in many spheres. It was unclear to him whether the creation of the Citizen's Complaint Hotline, the founding of the Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission and the establishment of mechanisms for bringing cases before the Office of the Ombudsman or the courts were sufficient to put an end to corruption. It would be interesting to hear how the authorities ensured that the hotline was not used to make false accusations.

27. He would welcome an account of the basis for the Office of the Ombudsman's refusal to grant public access to certain Statements of Assets, Liabilities and Net Worth, which cast doubt on the Office's independence. It would be useful to receive further information about the powers of the Presidential Anti-Corruption Commission and the results of its activities, as well as information on the human and financial resources made available to the Office of the Ombudsman.

28. He would appreciate clarification of the types of human rights violations involved in the 11,103 claims for redress that had been submitted to the Commission on Human Rights and of whether the claims procedure was designed in such a way as to protect victims from reprisals by officials in law enforcement agencies and the armed forces.

29. He wished to learn more about the measures being taken to expedite the implementation of Executive Order No. 709 establishing the Subcommittee on Access to Justice and Anti-Discrimination. He would also welcome the delegation's assessment of the effectiveness of the transitional justice mechanism established in 2016 to address grievances of the Bangsamoro people and indigenous peoples. He would appreciate details on the recommendations made by the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission in that regard and the mechanism's results in terms of prosecutions and the implementation of measures of reparation, restitution and non-repetition.

30. The Committee had been informed that the passage of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020, which had been widely criticized both inside and outside the State party, had not been preceded by an inclusive consultation process. A number of United Nations special procedure mandate holders had stated that certain provisions of the Act were incompatible with the Covenant and with Security Council and Human Rights Council resolutions; he would be interested to hear the delegation's response to those assertions.

31. The Committee was concerned about reports of "red-tagging" individuals and organizations as communists or terrorists and enemies of the State. It was also concerned about provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Act that permitted the detention without charge of suspects for up to 24 calendar days without a warrant.

32. He would appreciate detailed information on the added value of the Universal Health Care Act of 2018 as compared to the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law of 2012. It would be helpful to receive an update on the status of the planned legislation on the decriminalization of abortion. In view of the acute lack of primary health-care facilities in the State party, it would be interesting to learn more about what was being done to expand the provision of medical care and increase the budgets of primary health-care establishments and hospitals to ensure the women had access to safe abortion services. It would also be useful to have more clarity on the measures being taken to reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections and HIV.

33. **Mr. Bulkan** said that a number of gaps remained in the State party's legislation on discrimination: for example, ethnic minorities had no legal protection against discrimination in employment practices, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons were exposed to police harassment as a consequence of the retention of the offence of "grave scandal" in the Revised Penal Code. He would welcome information on the timeline for the adoption of

comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation and on any mechanisms that were in place to detect discriminatory practices and to provide remedies to victims. It was unclear why the bill prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression had been pending before Congress for more than 20 years, and he wished to know whether the State party planned to repeal the “grave scandal” provision or, at a minimum, clarify its scope of application so that it could not be used by law enforcement officials to extort money from members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

34. The Committee had received reports that, since 2016, a large number of women, many of whom had been critical of the Administration of former President Duterte, had been summarily removed from their posts. Examples included Maria Lourdes Sereno, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; Leila de Lima, former Chair of the Senate Committee on Justice and Human Rights; and Leni Robredo, former Vice President. He would welcome an explanation of the basis for the dismissal of those and other female officials, particularly in the light of the fact that men who had criticized the previous Administration had not experienced similar treatment. It would be useful to receive updated information on the nature and level of women’s participation in the public and private sectors.

35. He wished to draw the delegation’s attention to reports of the widespread use of shackles on persons with psychosocial disabilities in confined spaces for extended periods of time. He would be grateful for details on any efforts to raise awareness about the situation of such persons and tackle the stigma surrounding them.

36. He would welcome an account of any measures that were in place to address discrimination against Muslims, with a particular focus on the perpetuation of stereotypes in statements made by public officials that linked Muslims to terrorism and on the discrimination young Muslims faced in the area of employment. He also wished to learn about any measures for addressing the discrimination reportedly faced by indigenous peoples in the areas of health care, education and social services.

37. The Committee had received reports of the widespread use of torture to extract confessions. It was unclear why there were no official records of reports of torture even though non-governmental organizations had documented hundreds of cases during the reporting period. He wished to know what proportion of criminal prosecutions, in particular for serious offences such as murder, rested solely on confessions. He would appreciate clarification of why the State party had not yet made public the findings of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment following its visit in 2015. He would welcome, as an expression of good faith, a commitment from the authorities to release the Subcommittee’s report and take immediate substantive action on its recommendations.

38. It would be useful to know how many of the police officers who had been dismissed between 2016 and 2020 had been implicated in the torture of suspects or detainees. He would be grateful for details of the number of investigations that had been conducted under the Anti-Torture Act and other relevant legislation during the reporting period, the outcomes of those investigations and the compensation provided to the victims.

39. **Mr. Soh** said that he welcomed the information provided on measures taken under the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act of 2004 but regretted that the State party had not described the specific results of those measures. In particular, he wished to know how many cases of violence against women had been reported, how many prosecutions had been brought, how many convictions handed down and what sentences had been imposed on the perpetrators. In the light of media reports of increased domestic and sexual violence linked to lockdown measures introduced during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, he wondered why the Philippine Statistics Authority had reported that the number of cases of violence had fallen in 2020 and whether that reduction might be due to underreporting, given the restrictions on victims’ movements and their fear that such cases would not be properly investigated and prosecuted. It would be useful to know what specific measures were in place to ensure that victims of violence had access to reporting and protection mechanisms during public health emergencies.

40. The Committee remained concerned about social attitudes towards domestic violence, which was often regarded as a personal or family problem, and the absence of a clear-cut law

providing for the dissolution of marriage, which resulted in victims feeling compelled to remain in violent relationships. For that reason, he wished to know whether victims could file for the dissolution of their marriages on the grounds of domestic or marital abuse under the Family Code. He would also appreciate clarification regarding the status of the bills to legalize divorce that had been introduced in the House of Representatives, including the bill approved by the House Committee on Population and Family Relations in August 2021.

41. The Committee welcomed the State party's climate change and environmental degradation mitigation and adaptation efforts and, in that regard, wished to draw the delegation's attention to paragraph 62 of the Committee's general comment No. 36 (2019). He would be interested to know what plans were under way to implement the recommendations contained in the May 2022 report of the National Inquiry on Climate Change concerning the impact of climate change on the human rights of the Filipino people. Did the Government intend to enact laws establishing legal responsibility for corporate or business-related human rights abuses? Was it planning to develop a national action plan on business and human rights?

*The meeting was suspended at 4.25 p.m. and resumed at 4.50 p.m.*

42. **Mr. Remulla** (Philippines) said that, as his delegation did not include a representative of the legislative branch, he was unable to provide the Committee with up-to-date information on the status of the bills pending in Congress on human rights defenders, anti-discrimination measures, divorce, the death penalty and the powers of the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines. In accordance with the principle of separation of powers, the executive branch had little control over the bills submitted to Congress or its deliberations on legislation. However, the executive could request the legislature to prioritize certain bills and could give its opinions on proposed legislation during committee hearings. The Department of Justice shared the Committee's view that the death penalty was not an effective deterrent to crime.

43. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Government was currently implementing the third edition of its National Human Rights Action Plan, which covered the period 2018–2022. The Action Plan had been crafted in consultation with civil society organizations and the lead agencies responsible for implementing various treaties. A midterm assessment of the Action Plan had been carried out in 2020, and an end-of-term assessment would be carried out in late 2022. The Commission on Human Rights would soon convene various stakeholders to begin drafting the fourth version of the Plan.

44. **Mr. Remulla** (Philippines) said that the Government did not deny the reports of prison overcrowding – a problem that was particularly serious at the New Bilibid Prison and the Correctional Institution for Women, both of which housed prisoner populations well in excess of their capacity. Following the enactment of the Bureau of Corrections Act of 2013, which provided for the regionalization of the correctional system, the Government had launched an invitation to tender for the construction of 14 new prisons, each with a capacity of 2,500 persons. Plans had also been laid for the construction of a super-maximum-security prison on the island of Mindoro, which would house high-risk and violent offenders, thus separating them from the rest of the prison population and ensuring that they could do no further harm to society. Building a prison in each region meant that more offenders would be able serve their sentences in prisons close to their families and support systems, giving them a better chance of rehabilitation.

45. The definition of terrorism contained in section 4 of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 explicitly excluded “advocacy, protest, dissent, stoppage of work, industrial or mass action, and other similar exercises of civil and political rights not intended to cause death or serious physical harm to a person, to endanger a person's life, or to create a serious risk to public safety”. The Act's provision for detention without charge of suspects for up to 24 days – an initial period of 14 days plus a 10-day extension – was similar to the provisions of other countries in the region and struck a balance between State security and respect for human rights. The Government was currently engaged in efforts to educate members of the public about their rights under the Act and to inform the police and the armed forces about their roles and responsibilities in enforcing that law. Section 29 of the Act, which provided for detention without judicial warrant of arrest, included sufficient safeguards to prevent arbitrary detention.

46. Further to the recommendations of the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission, a bill had been submitted with a view to strengthening the regional transitional justice and reconciliation programme and creating a regional transitional justice and reconciliation commission for the Bangsamoro. The bill was designed to empower the Bangsamoro people as active participants in the pursuit of transitional justice and to provide benefits for combatants in the war for self-determination who had not been found guilty of human rights violations. It would create a Bangsamoro human rights commission that would be tasked with documenting human rights violations committed during the conflict in Mindanao. The Government's efforts to bring lasting peace to the region also included the allocation to the Bangsamoro Transition Authority of billions of pesos in funding, which would be used to reform Bangsamoro society and assuage the suffering of the Bangsamoro people.

47. The Philippines had not yet ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, although it had become the first Asian country to pass legislation on enforced disappearance. Under the Constitution, the ratification of the Convention would have to be approved by the Senate.

48. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Government had considered ratifying the Convention but so far had declined to do so owing to concerns about its communication procedure. Those concerns revolved around the submission of abusive communications by certain interest groups, which sometimes referred cases to treaty bodies without exhausting domestic remedies.

49. **Mr. Remulla** (Philippines) said that he was disturbed by the claim that there had been a 78 per cent increase in extrajudicial killings during the Administration of President Marcos Jr., who had only been in office for 100 days. If the claim was true, the Committee might provide details regarding the alleged victims so that the Department of Justice could order an investigation.

50. The State did not have the resources to monitor all reported incidents of torture; however, it made every effort to ensure that investigations were transparent and inclusive and considered all sources of information.

51. **A representative of the Philippines** said the anti-drugs policy pursued by the new Administration focused on prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, reintegration, aftercare and sustained enforcement. Those priorities would be pursued under the framework of the Philippine Anti-Illegal Drugs Strategy, adopted by Executive Order No. 66. The Strategy was aimed at creating drug-free communities through both supply reduction efforts involving law enforcement and prosecution, while closely adhering to the rule of law and human rights standards, and comprehensive demand-reduction initiatives.

52. A referral system had been established for drug users in need of intervention. Diagnosis was evidence-based, and drug-dependent persons were immediately referred to appropriate treatment and rehabilitation services. The referral process was anchored in the approach prescribed by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Users with low levels of dependency were referred for voluntary treatment, while those with mild and moderate dependencies were referred to community-based drug rehabilitation programmes and outpatient services, also on a voluntary basis. Persons with severe drug-use disorders might be referred to compulsory inpatient treatment and rehabilitation services. The Government intended to adopt policies to strengthen voluntary admission mechanisms based on international approaches and standards. The Dangerous Drugs Board had issued guidelines for the voluntary surrender of drug users. From 2016 to 2022, a total of 298,184 individuals had graduated from community-based drug rehabilitation programmes, which were currently operating in 750 municipalities and 31 cities.

53. **Mr. Remulla** (Philippines) said that the Office of the Ombudsman had been established under the Constitution as an independent body tasked with fighting corruption; it was not subject to influence from the executive, legislature or judiciary. The Office kept on file copies of the Statements of Assets, Liabilities and Net Worth of government officials, which could only be released pursuant to a court order issued for the purpose of an investigation or prosecution. That requirement prevented information on the net worth of



government officials from falling into the wrong hands and thus shielded such officials from crimes such as extortion and kidnapping.

54. The Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines continued to enjoy category A status as accredited by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions and was therefore fully compliant with the Paris Principles. Between 2015 and 2022, the Commission's annual budget had almost tripled and currently stood at approximately US\$16 million, despite a reduction of about US\$500,000 in 2022. That reduction was in line with budget cuts made throughout the public sector in view of the need to repay debts incurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; it should not be seen as a punitive measure or an attempt to downgrade the Commission. Two bills had been submitted to Congress which, if passed, would further strengthen the Commission and expand its powers.

55. **A representative of the Philippines** said that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons should not fear victimization at the hands of the police. Respect for human rights was deeply embedded in law enforcement activities. The police force had established the Women and Children Protection Centre, and it deployed female officers trained in conducting gender-sensitive and child-friendly investigations. During the pandemic, the police had maintained national and local channels for reporting violence against women, including social media accounts, email addresses and hotlines, and it had carried out several operations to rescue victims. Between 2016 and September 2022, the courts had handed down 2,217 convictions to perpetrators of violence against women and children. That number was relatively low because the authorities respected victims' decisions regarding the exercise of their right to bring criminal proceedings. Not all women wished to see their partners incarcerated. Some were satisfied to be referred to counselling with their partners; for others, having the perpetrator kept away from them was a sufficient resolution of the situation.

56. **Mr. Remulla** (Philippines) said that the term "red-tagging" was often used by critics of the Government and left-wing groups to disparage any criticism that was justifiably levelled against persons who promoted or worked on behalf of criminal organizations. Individuals who freely criticized the Government while carrying out activities in support of such organizations should not expect to be immune from criticism themselves.

57. Claims that three senior female officials had been targeted on account of their gender were mistaken. The former Supreme Court Chief Justice, Maria Sereno, had been the subject of a quo warranto petition – a proceeding whereby her fellow Supreme Court justices, acting independently, had decided to remove her from office by an 8-6 majority vote. Ms. Leila de Lima was no longer a senator, having been defeated in the recent elections. She was currently imprisoned, not because of her gender or for political reasons, but because prosecutors had proven her participation in drug-related offences. Ms. Leni Robredo had been removed from her Cabinet position owing to political differences with the governing party and because the President had lost confidence in her.

58. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, in August 2018, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples had issued revised guidelines on the formulation of Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plans. Some 175 such plans had been crafted and were being implemented, benefiting about 700,000 communities. To overcome barriers to participation in governance, indigenous communities had selected over 4,000 mandatory representatives to act on their behalf in local decision-making bodies.

59. **Mr. Remulla** (Philippines) said that his country had a vibrant media landscape with more than 2,200 private independent outlets. According to the European Journalism Centre, there were approximately 40 national daily newspapers, 60 regional and community newspapers and 40 newspapers in foreign languages other than English; the National Telecommunications Commission had counted 1,485 privately owned radio stations and 546 television stations. The State operated 32 radio stations and 2 television stations but did not have its own newspaper.

60. **The Chair** said that the Committee would welcome additional information in writing, particularly on the questions that had been asked regarding bills before Congress. She wished to remind the delegation that all branches of government were bound by States parties' reporting obligations under the Covenant.

61. **Mr. Muhumuza** said that he would be grateful for information on the status of black people in the Philippines and on any specific measures that had been taken to improve their situation.

62. **Mr. Yigezu** said that he wished to know why some positions within the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines remained vacant and what was being done to fill those vacancies. He would be interested to know more about the rules governing the appointment process and whether stakeholders were consulted on the appointment of commissioners.

63. **Mr. Bulkan** said that he wished to know what had been done to improve indigenous peoples' access to services such as education and health care and to tackle discrimination against indigenous peoples, Muslims and persons with disabilities, particularly in the sphere of employment.

64. The Committee recognized that the State party had limited resources for monitoring and documenting cases of torture. Nonetheless, he would be grateful if the delegation could comment on reports that police officers relied on torture and other forms of ill-treatment in order to extract confessions in the course of criminal investigations. He would also appreciate information on any investigations conducted under the Anti-Torture Act or other related laws. How many of the police personnel dismissed or suspended between 2016 and 2020 had been found to have committed torture? What were the consequences under the Act for police officers suspected or accused of committing that crime?

65. **Mr. Ben Achour** said that he would be interested to know whether the discussions on decriminalizing abortion in certain circumstances had led to the introduction of a bill on the subject. He would be grateful if the delegation could comment on claims that women who had undergone abortions continued to be liable to prosecution and subjected to harassment.

66. **Ms. Kran** said that she would appreciate further details regarding the action taken pursuant to the Committee's Views. Recalling that the Committee had found violations in 15 communications concerning the Philippines, some of which referred to arbitrary executions, she would be interested to learn how the State party planned to provide effective remedies for the victims and their families.

*The meeting rose at 6 p.m.*