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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Thirty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 836th MEETING*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 14 January 2003, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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* No summary record was issued for the 835th meeting.

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4)

Initial report of Estonia (CRC/C/8/Add.45; CRC/C/Q/EST/1; CRC/C/RESP/24; HRI/CORE/1/Add.50/Rev.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Hion, Ms. Kaljurand, Mr. Kink, Mr. Kurs, Ms. Liimal, Ms. Riisalo and Ms. Sarjas (Estonia) took places at the Committee table.
2. Ms. KALJURAND (Estonia) said that, following the restoration of independence in 1991, her country had acceded to 26 United Nations treaties, including all the major human rights instruments. She regretted the delay of 10 years between its signing of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the submission of its initial report, attributable to various problems linked to the consolidation of the new State. In the light of that delay, her Government had decided to submit its initial and second reports as a single document. It had also caught up with its reporting obligations under other human rights instruments.
3. A number of legislative and institutional reforms had been made with a view to implementing the principles laid down in the Constitution and in international treaties. For example, a social insurance scheme had been established which, while still in need of further work, had taken relevant international standards fully into account. Family benefits had steadily increased under the scheme, particularly for families with pre-school-age children, single-parent households and families with several children. The State also provided financial assistance to children with special needs or those deprived of a family environment.
4. Efforts were being made to integrate children with special needs into the mainstream education system, taking into account factors such as increased study time for acquiring basic skills. The simplified and adjusted curricula for pupils with moderate or severe mental disabilities were consistent with the curricula in mainstream schools.
5. The right to education also included the socio-economic dimension. A financial support mechanism had been set up to develop boarding school facilities and assist children from disadvantaged backgrounds. There were plans to maintain at least one school in each county with State-funded boarding facilities. In addition, a programme had been introduced with a view to providing free school meals for all elementary school pupils, and free study materials for secondary school pupils.
6. Steps had been taken to enhance the provision of cultural and recreational activities for children and young people. The membership of sports clubs had increased significantly, encouraged by the international success of Estonian athletes. As well as individual school libraries, there were a total of six children's libraries around the country, as well as a children's literature information centre, established in 1998.

7. Fundamental changes to the framework of child rights protection were expected over the coming years, including the scheduled adoption of a new Child Welfare Act in 2004, and the finalization of an overall child rights strategy, encompassing all the various elements of implementation of the Convention.

8. Ms. KARP said that the Committee was aware of the challenges facing Estonia as it endeavoured to establish itself as an independent country. Nevertheless, she pointed out that it did not usually sanction the submission by a State party of a single document containing both its initial and second periodic reports. The Committee alone would decide whether or not that was acceptable.

9. Despite the difficult economic circumstances and high proportion of children living below the poverty line, the Government had failed to commit funding for the alleviation of poverty. Similarly, it had yet to approve a budgetary strategy for implementing the Child Protection Act of 1992. A significant discrepancy was discernible between the adoption of legislation and the allocation of budgetary and other resources.

10. She expressed concern over the continued absence of an overall strategy for implementing child rights. There had been no evaluation of existing strategies, and there was no clear division of responsibilities between national and local authorities. No minimum standards had been set for the provision of services by local authorities, and a distinct shortage of social workers and other welfare professionals had emerged.

11. Stateless children were denied basic rights and minorities were likely to suffer restrictions of their cultural rights. An increasing number of children were confined to institutions, while the school drop out rate continued to rise. Finally, there were persistent problems, including commercial sexual exploitation, affecting adolescent and mental health.

12. The CHAIRPERSON invited members of the Committee to put questions to the delegation concerning general measures of implementation, the definition of the child and general principles.

13. Ms. KARP said that she understood that there were mistakes in the Estonian translation of the Convention, and asked whether they had been corrected, and whether translations had also been published in minority languages such as Russian.

14. Further details should be provided of how the Ministry of Social Affairs took responsibility for coordinating implementation of the Convention, for example with regard to its relationship with other ministries. A failure to define the role of local authorities was likely to create difficulties in service provision, as well as a duplication of work. The delegation should explain whether local governments were required to submit annual reports on their activities to the central Government, or whether any other monitoring mechanisms were in place. She enquired whether specific support was given to local authorities having difficulty in raising taxes themselves, and whether there were plans to establish minimum standards for local government service provision.

15. She would be interested to learn whether a unit for children's affairs had been established within the office of the Legal Chancellor, and whether the majority of children knew anything about its work. It would be useful to learn whether the recommendations of the Legal Chancellor concerning the closure of schools in rural areas and measures to curb violence in schools had been followed up successfully. She asked whether the Government had considered establishing a more accessible ombudsman for children, to operate in conformity with the Paris Principles.

16. The delegation should elaborate further on the national programmes described in the report, in particular the "Development of child welfare" programme, and explain how those programmes affected children in everyday life.

17. Mr. CITARELLA welcomed the fact that international agreements took precedence over domestic law in Estonia. However, he would like to know whether judges were entitled to overrule national laws which were inconsistent with international treaties. He asked whether children between the ages of 15 and 18 years were entitled to marry with parental consent, or whether specific authorization was required from the courts. He would welcome an explanation as to why mandatory education began at the relatively late age of 7 years. Lastly, he sought clarification of the status of the Legal Chancellor. The delegation should explain how the Chancellor's independence was ensured, as well as the procedure for nominations for the post.

18. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said she wanted to establish whether, in accordance with article 4 of the Convention, the State party allocated the maximum extent of its available resources to child protection measures. The report failed to include details of how activities relating to implementation of the Convention were budgeted for. In particular, she asked whether policies were funded on the basis of prior financial analysis, or whether budgeting was carried out on an ad hoc basis. She sought clarification of whether the budget for health and education was decreasing in spite of rising costs in those fields.

19. She asked for an explanation of the taxation system, with a view to understanding how resources were generated for social services. It was unclear whether the State allocated resources to local authorities or whether taxes were collected at the local level. She would like to know whether the budgetary calculations for health and education were made solely on the basis of government resources, or whether they included funds from the private sector. The delegation should also describe whether non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or private companies were involved in service provision and whether, in such cases, they were subject to State supervision.

20. Lastly, she asked whether, in practice, there were groups of children who were marginalized, contrary to the Government's claim that all children were covered equally by the law. She had in mind particularly those whose parents suffered uncertain legal status.

21. Ms. KHATTAB wondered why, in view of the fact that the economic situation in Estonia was as healthy as any in Eastern Europe, there had been a reduction in the budgetary allocation for children. Secondly, she asked whether the Government was developing special programmes for the southern and rural areas of the country, which suffered from underdevelopment. Thirdly, she wondered whether there were plans to draw up annual situational reports on children, so that

progress in implementing the Convention could be monitored; if such a report were prepared, it should be made available to the public. Fourthly, she noted that a Child Welfare Act was planned for 2004. The very title of the Act betrayed a welfare-based rather than a rights-based approach and she wondered whether there was time for the Government to reconsider its position. As for the Legal Chancellor, she asked whether the current incumbent had entered on his duties and what his mandate was. She wondered whether he was truly independent and whether he was entitled to receive and follow up complaints. She also wished to know how many children had made complaints to date. She urged the Government to consider carrying out a child impact analysis of all new policies. Lastly, she noted that, according to the Aliens Act, children were defined as being under 15. She wondered whether the Act had been amended in that regard.

22. Ms. OUEDRAOGO expressed concern that table 3 of the written replies (CRC/C/RESP/24) referred to a large number of children of “undetermined” nationality and she wondered what action was being taken to establish their nationalities. It was also worrying that, according to tables 5 and 6, the budget for children with disabilities had fallen between 2001 and 2002. With reference to paragraph 13 of the report (CRC/C/8/Add.45), she said that it would be preferable to undertake an overall review of the country’s legislation in order to iron out any inconsistencies. She wondered whether the new Family Act mentioned in paragraph 12 of the report as scheduled for submission to the Government in 2001, had in fact been adopted. In that context, she wondered what progress had been made in following up and monitoring the implementation of the Convention. Lastly, she asked what financial support was provided by the Government for activities undertaken by local authorities to help children.

23. Ms. CHUTIKUL said that, judging by sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 of the written replies, it appeared that two bodies were charged with protecting the rights of the child and she wondered how far their mandates overlapped. Secondly, she asked whether the report had been prepared by a single agency or intersectorally: for the monitoring of the implementation of the Convention, it was important for the Committee to know whether an ad hoc or a permanent body was involved. Thirdly, she asked how the recommendations on “a world fit for children” annexed to the report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly (A/S-27/19/Rev.1) had been used in the Estonian Child Welfare Strategy for 2003-2005. In that context, she expressed concern at the reference to “welfare” rather than to children’s rights. Lastly, she asked whether the forthcoming Child Welfare Act was a revision of the Child Protection Act of 1992 or whether it was an entirely new document. If the latter was the case, she asked how the two Acts differed.

24. Ms. KARP had three further questions. First, she asked how far the results of studies on the social benefits of awareness of the Convention - in the area of reproductive health, for example - had helped the Government formulate its long-term strategy. Secondly, she noted that, according to the report, the number of social work professionals was very low: it seemed that some local authorities lacked even a single social worker. She asked what action the Government proposed to take. Lastly, she asked about the Government’s strategy on the integration of resources: it was more economical of both human and financial resources if ministries and other bodies could work together.

The meeting was suspended at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11.15 a.m.

25. Ms. KALJURAND (Estonia) said that the norms of international law formed an integral part of Estonian legislation, which must be in conformity with them. Theoretically, therefore, international agreements should prevail over domestic law. In practice, however, in view of the fact that international agreements were not widely known, judges were often more comfortable applying Estonian law.

26. Ms. HION (Estonia) added that the Constitution contained a provision that the courts should declare unconstitutional any provision that violated the rights enshrined in the Constitution or in international conventions. In one case, as the report stated (para. 5), the Supreme Court had, indeed, applied the Convention rather than domestic legislation.

27. Ms. KALJURAND (Estonia) said, with reference to the availability of the text of the Convention, that it had been translated into both Estonian and Russian and was available on the web site of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Reports were generally drawn up in English and translated into Estonian only, after which they were posted on the web site; the recommendations of international human rights bodies were also posted. As many documents as possible were translated into Russian; any restrictions were due solely to budgetary considerations.

28. Ms. SARJAS (Estonia) said, regarding the preparation of the report, that the process had taken six months, with participation by a number of different ministries together with such non-governmental organizations as the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, the UNICEF National Committee, the Estonian Human Rights Institute and the Estonian Child Foundation. Meetings had been held once a month, and more frequently at the beginning and end of the process. Information had been posted to all participants by e-mail twice a month and all had been entitled to add their comments. The final text had been ready by early June, at which point further comments had been added. Even after the text had been translated into English, further amendments had been made.

29. Ms. HION (Estonia) added that a number of non-governmental organizations had pointed out shortcomings in the Estonian version of the Convention and had written to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Legal Chancellor to that effect, without proposing any specific amendments. The Legal Chancellor was open to any suggestions. She emphasized that any defects were minor; the substance of the text was correct.

30. Mr. KURS (Estonia) said, with regard to efforts to raise awareness of the Convention, that special programmes existed within universities for those working with children. Valuable work was also done by the Estonian Union for Child Welfare, while the Union of Estonian Student Councils had undertaken projects on young people's rights. Lastly, school curricula included lessons on the Convention and children's rights. Such lessons were compulsory and began as early as the primary level.

31. Ms. KHATTAB pointed out that such lessons were often better absorbed through activities than through teaching. She therefore asked what extracurricular activities were organized.

32. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether seminars on children's rights were held for judges, similar to those provided for police officers and other professionals.

33. Mr. KURS (Estonia) said that a number of programmes and research projects were in progress at the University of Tartu.
34. Ms. HION (Estonia) said that the Training Council for Judges had been established in February 2001, consisting of two representatives from the Association of Judges, two from the Prosecutor's Office and one each from the Supreme Court, the University of Tartu Law Faculty and the Estonian Law Centre. Since then, training programmes for judges had been held every six months. If younger trainees wished to be judges, a two-year training programme was available.
35. Ms. RIISALO (Estonia) said that, under the Family Act, minors aged between 15 and 18 could marry only with the written consent of their parents or guardian. The courts could also grant the right to marry if the marriage was in the interest of the minor, for example if the minor had his or her own children to support. However, there were very few cases of marriage involving minors in Estonia.
36. Mr. KURS (Estonia) said that the system of pre-school education was closely linked to the general educational system and was governed by similar regulations in terms of teacher qualifications and educational standards.
37. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether pre-school education was mandatory. He also wished to know why primary education was compulsory only from the age of 7.
38. Ms. KALJURAND (Estonia) said that recent efforts to reduce the age of compulsory school attendance from 7 to 6 years had not seen positive results in the classroom. Consequently, the age of compulsory education had not been changed.
39. Ms. LIIMAL (Estonia) drew attention to the fact that although the age of compulsory education was 7 years, children as young as 6 were allowed to go to primary school. However, many parents felt that it was beneficial for their child to remain in kindergarten until the age of 7. Fixing the age of compulsory school attendance at 7 allowed parents more freedom to meet their child's individual needs.
40. Mr. CITARELLA enquired whether kindergartens were free. If not, could all families afford to enrol their child in a kindergarten?
41. Ms. LIIMAL (Estonia) affirmed that kindergartens were free for all. Parents could be asked to contribute towards the cost of school meals and some materials; however, such costs were often subsidized by the municipality. A very high percentage of children aged between 2 and 6 years were enrolled in kindergartens. A newly-adopted legal provision made it compulsory for municipalities to provide a kindergarten place for all pre-school age children living in the municipality.
42. Ms. KALJURAND (Estonia) said that the Government was concerned about Estonia's low birth rate and was finding it difficult to encourage young couples to start a family.

43. Mr. KINK (Estonia) said that under the Aliens Act, children aged 15 or over could apply for citizenship or for a residence permit. Such children received the same protection as other children. The Act contained provisions to ensure that the rights and interests of minors were taken into account above all else when processing an application for a residence permit. For example, applications by minors were processed more quickly than other applications.

44. Ms. KARP asked whether children aged between 15 and 18 were provided with any support when applying for citizenship or a residence permit.

45. Ms. KALJURAND (Estonia) said that, in cases involving applications made by a child aged between 15 and 18, the child's parents or guardian were allowed to supervise procedures, even though the child was responsible for answering any questions. In applications involving children under the age of 15, the parents or guardians were responsible for answering questions.

46. Ms. SARJAS (Estonia) said that, according to the Republic of the Government Act, the Government was responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Convention. Under the Act, each ministry was specifically responsible for a certain field. The Act provided for the establishment of ad hoc, advisory and permanent inter-ministerial committees to address specific questions relating to child protection; such committees ensured that cooperation took place between the different ministries.

47. Ms. KARP observed that there was a difference between cooperation and coordination. The reporting State should clarify exactly who was responsible in practice for coordinating the implementation of the Convention. Was there a coordination unit in the Ministry of Social Affairs, with a special budgetary allocation?

48. Ms. SARJAS (Estonia) said that although there was no specific unit and no separate budget for coordinating the implementation of the Convention, the Department of Social Welfare of the Ministry of Social Affairs played a particularly important role.

49. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ wondered whether it would be useful to create a specific body to improve coordination between ministries and between ministries and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Such a body could also be responsible for setting priorities for the implementation of the Convention in different sectors.

50. Ms. SARJAS (Estonia) said that the Government was considering creating such a body; discussions were still under way. As yet, no concrete plans had been made. The current system worked but there was no doubt that improvements could be made.

51. Ms. LIIMAL (Estonia) said that the inter-ministerial Child and Family Policy Committee could discuss any issues relating to the implementation of the Convention that could not be addressed by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

52. Ms. SARJAS (Estonia) said that there was no overlap between the responsibilities of the central and local authorities, whose roles and obligations were clearly defined by law. The County Governors, who were appointed by the central Government to monitor the implementation and coordination of State policy at county level, played an important role. They

were responsible inter alia for submitting the recommendations and opinions of local governments to the central Government and for training and organizing the regional teams of specialists who worked with children.

53. Ms. KALJURAND (Estonia), replying to a question by Ms. Karp, said that the Legal Chancellor was gradually opening regional offices. A Russian-speaking representative of the Legal Chancellor had recently been appointed to work in a predominantly Russian-speaking area. No legislative amendments had been necessary for the opening of such offices.

54. Ms. LIIMAL (Estonia), replying to questions about the system of taxation, said that income tax was fixed at a flat rate of 26 per cent. The revenue from income tax was shared between central and local government budgets. The central Government allocated special funds to local governments to carry out the tasks it had delegated and to compensate for differences in income levels or demographic disparities between regions.

55. Social security schemes were financed from the social contributions paid by employers and complemented by the State budget. Family benefits were financed from the State budget. Social assistance provisions were also financed from the State budget, even though the municipalities distributed the funds. Funding responsibilities for social services were shared between the central and local governments. By law, certain services were funded by the central Government, including the rehabilitation of disabled children, the care and maintenance of children without parental care, assistance for disabled persons and services for individuals with psychiatric needs. Health care was financed through health insurance contributions, complemented by State funds. Education was funded both by central and local government. Primary and secondary schools were run by the municipalities, although the State provided funds for paying teachers' salaries and for the provision of teaching materials. A recent initiative had been to provide school boarding facilities to meet the needs of children from families in difficulty.

56. Ms. KARP said she would like further information about family allowances paid by the municipalities. Did they differ from one municipality to the next?

57. Ms. LIIMAL (Estonia) said that all families were entitled to State benefits. Additional birth grants were available from the municipalities, although the amount differed from one municipality to another. Families in need received social assistance from the State. By law, municipalities were permitted to grant additional allowances to those in need if funds remained after having paid out social assistance benefits. There was no evidence to suggest that significant differences existed between payments by municipalities.

58. Mr. KURS (Estonia) added that the State provided special funds to support schools in small rural communities that otherwise might not be able to survive. Extra-curricular activities and hobby schools were funded largely by the local authorities, although the central Government had recently provided some funding to support hobby schools in small municipalities.

59. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said the Estonian budgetary procedures seemed highly complicated. The reporting State should indicate how budgetary allocations were calculated in practice.

60. Ms. LIIMAL (Estonia) explained that the division of budgetary responsibilities was stipulated by law and funds were allocated accordingly. The municipalities did not have to apply to various ministries in order to obtain the funds they required to carry out their tasks. It was the State's responsibility to provide them with sufficient funds.

61. Ms. HION (Estonia) said that the Legal Chancellor was defined in the Constitution as an independent official responsible for ensuring that legal acts adopted by the State legislator and the executive and by local governments were in conformity with the Constitution and the laws. The Legal Chancellor analysed proposals for legislative amendments as well as the activities of State agencies and could submit a report to the *Riigikogu* (Parliament) if necessary. The Legal Chancellor was appointed to office by the *Riigikogu*, on the recommendation of the President of the Republic, for a term of seven years. He or she could be removed from office only by a court order and had the right to speak in parliamentary sessions.

62. If the Legal Chancellor found that a legislative act was in conflict with the Constitution or law, he or she could make a proposal to the relevant body to bring it into conformity. If an act had not been brought into conformity with the Constitution, the Legal Chancellor could make a proposal to the Supreme Court to repeal the act. The Legal Chancellor had to submit an annual report to the *Riigikogu* on the conformity with the Constitution and of all legislation adopted.

63. Criminal charges could be brought against the Legal Chancellor solely upon a proposal of the President and with the consent of the majority of the Parliament. Under the 1999 Legal Chancellor Act, the Legal Chancellor performed the functions of the ombudsman, and everyone had the right to file a complaint with the Legal Chancellor against State officials or local government agencies for violations of constitutional rights or freedoms. Complaints could be made either in writing, by means of the Internet or in oral form. Complaints from children in youth homes could not be examined by the homes themselves. Officials from the office of the Legal Chancellor met regularly with the public; there were local offices throughout Estonia.

64. The Legal Chancellor monitored the activities of State and local government agencies if there was reason to believe that constitutional rights had been violated and had unrestricted access to information from such agencies. If an official was suspected of violating the law, the Legal Chancellor made proposals to rectify the situation. The official reported to the Legal Chancellor on what was being done to comply with the proposals. If the official failed to comply, the Legal Chancellor could report the matter to a higher authority.

65. The CHAIRPERSON asked how many children had availed themselves of the services of the Legal Chancellor in the past two years and whether there was a special unit within the Legal Chancellor's office which dealt with children's issues.

66. Ms. KALJURAND (Estonia) said that there was no need for a separate unit, because the specialists at the Legal Chancellor's office were fully capable of handling such problems. She noted that the Legal Chancellor had recently submitted to the President his priorities for 2003, which included ensuring the rights of children.

67. Mr. KURS (Estonia) said that he did not have any statistics on how many children had made use of the Legal Chancellor's services. In August, the Legal Chancellor had organized a

panel discussion, attended by ministry officials, parents and student representatives, on how to protect children at school; many useful proposals had been made, and some of them had already been implemented.

68. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to put questions to the delegation relating to general principles, civil rights and freedoms, and family environment and alternative care.

69. Ms. KARP enquired how policies for children with disabilities were implemented in practice. What measures were taken to prevent violence against children at schools and in the family? Did the victims of such acts receive any treatment? She also wondered whether Estonia had any policies to cope with the problem of the large number of children who died in accidents and the increasing number of suicides among children.

70. Ms. CHUTIKUL, referring to reports by NGOs, would like to know whether any measures were being taken to combat bullying and other forms of abuse at school.

71. Ms. OUEDRAOGO sought detailed information on the number and nationality of foreigners born in Estonia. What was the Government's policy for reducing the large number of children in institutions and making parents more responsible for raising their offspring?

72. Mr. CITARELLA noted that no legislation specifically prohibited discrimination. He requested updated information on the status of minorities, in particular the Russian minority, and on stateless persons, since some 45,000 stateless children were reportedly living in Estonia.

73. Estonia had a high number of adoptions. Applications for international adoptions were dealt with by the Ministry of Social Welfare, whereas in other countries they were usually a matter for the courts. Had there been any changes in legislation in that area? Why had so many children in Estonia been placed in institutions? Surely the reason could not have to do with the state of the Estonian economy, which was performing quite well.

74. Ms. KHATTAB asked what was being done to ensure equal opportunity for women, to protect the rights of minorities and refugees and to provide legal aid to those who needed it.

75. There had been a number of reports of anxiety among adolescents about violence. Might that be a reason for the increased drug and alcohol abuse among children? Did any programme focus on drug and alcohol abuse among adolescents?

76. Children with special needs had reportedly been the target of bullying, and educational staff were said to be poorly trained to respond. Could the delegation provide information on such reports?

77. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked how many families were currently living in poverty, whether their numbers were on the rise and whether the family policy referred to in paragraph 326 of the country report had come into force. She hoped that, in its reply, the delegation would provide more information on the subsistence minimum, poverty line and the "coping line" (para. 326). Which regions and groups were hardest hit by poverty?

78. Ms. KARP asked what the results had been of the evaluation of Estonia's family policies. Had Estonia developed guidelines for encouraging children to make their views known? Was there a periodic review of the functioning of children's institutions and of juvenile justice?

79. She also referred to the problem of family reunification for foreigners in the wake of the recent Supreme Court decision on the quota system.

80. The CHAIRPERSON said that he was puzzled by a number of references in the tables in the report and the written replies. What was the difference between the case of children whose parents had been deprived of parental rights (table 5 of the report) and that of children separated from their families by court judgement (table 7 of the written replies)? Were children without parental care (table 6 of the report) the same as those deprived of a family environment (para. 195)? What was meant, in table 8 of the written replies, by "children without parental care registered for the first time"? Tables 10, 11 and 12 in the report referred to shelters for children. How long did children stay in shelters and in social welfare institutions? The term "wards" in table 16 was also unclear. Were the general children's homes referred to in that table synonymous with social welfare institutions? Could the delegation provide information on the difference between guardian families and foster families (table 13 in the report) and, more generally, on the functioning of Estonia's child protection system?

81. How was the right to privacy ensured in institutions for children, in particular the confidentiality of the mail and of telephone calls? Did children have the right to receive family visits or spend time outside the institution?

82. Was there a minimum age for children seeking information from the youth counselling bureaux referred to in paragraph 155? Could they ask questions in complete confidentiality? Were children provided with contraceptive devices without their parents being informed?

83. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked which ministries were responsible for the various social welfare institutions for children. How did the system work at the macro-level?

84. Ms. KARP inquired whether there were any programmes of assistance for poor families to help ensure that children did not need to be placed in institutions.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.