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Summary record of the 4041st meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 11 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Abdo Rocholl

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

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

Fifth periodic report of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (continued)
([CCPR/C/VEN/5](#); [CCPR/C/VEN/Q/5](#); [CCPR/C/VEN/RQ/5](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela joined the meeting.*

2. **Mr. Gil Pinto** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), noting that the Committee's guidelines for States parties concerning the interactive dialogue mentioned that approximately 12 to 15 questions would be posed at each of the two meetings, said that it was virtually impossible for his delegation to provide oral replies to the 61 questions posed at the previous meeting ([CCPR/C/SR.4040](#)) in the space of the 60 minutes allotted to it. All 61 questions would be answered in due course, however.

3. No reasonable observer would contend that the members of the Committee who had expressed value judgments concerning his country's Government at the preceding meeting had demonstrated the impartiality required of them by the Committee's rules of procedure ([CCPR/C/3/Rev.12](#)) and the guidelines on the independence and impartiality of members of the human rights treaty bodies, generally known as the Addis Ababa guidelines ([A/67/222](#)).

4. At the preceding meeting, a number of members of the Committee had wrongly criticized the State party for not supplying sufficient information, and one of the members had, in that connection, cited the case of *Simón Mora Carrero and Alcedo Guaicamacuto Mora Carrero v. the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela* ([CCPR/C/128/D/3018/2017](#)) as an example. Yet, in that very case, the Committee had itself found that "the facts before it do not reveal any violation of the articles of the Covenant". In other words, the case to which the member had referred in order to assert that the State party had not supplied sufficient information had in fact been dismissed by the Committee.

5. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that combating intra-prison violence was a great challenge. In order to respond to it, the Ministry of People's Power for Prison Administration had introduced a policy focusing on the reintegration into society of persons who had been in conflict with the law. That policy was being implemented in 78 of the country's 84 prisons and the intention was to apply it in the remaining 6 prisons as well. Although there had been 110 violent intra-prison deaths between 2020 and 2023, the preventive policy, which was based on the organization of sporting, religious and cultural events, training courses and educational opportunities, including at the university level, had made it possible to cut the number of such deaths to 15 in 2022 and to just 1 in 2023. Some 5,000 persons deprived of their liberty had received vocational training from the National Institute for Socialist Education and Training (INCES). Mention should also be made of the 1,026 persons who had pursued studies under programmes such as the Rivas Mission and the Sucre Mission.

6. Training, awareness-raising and the use of standardized protocols to guide civil servants in the performance of their duties were the main tools for preventing torture in places of detention and investigation. Another element was the empowerment of the citizenry: resolution 109 of September 2022 allowed citizens to make video recordings of all security-related procedures and use those recordings as evidence.

7. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the Specialized Prosecutor's Office for the Protection of Human Rights and Gender Diversity had been set up in March 2022. It was striving to process the 68 reports of offences it had received since its establishment (37 complaints filed in 2022 and the 31 complaints received in 2023 up to August). Charges had been brought against 38 persons who had violated the rights of members of the community of gender-diverse persons, along with 8 arraignments; three persons who had committed such offences were currently serving prison sentences.

8. The Directorate General for Human Rights had 180 public prosecutors. Since 2016, 265,000 proceedings had been initiated to protect victims of human rights violations. Over

the same period, 5,853 civil servants had been charged with offences against the right to life, personal integrity and personal liberty, among others.

9. If a death, whether from violence or natural causes, occurred while a person was being held in pretrial detention, a prosecutor from the Directorate General referred the case to the corresponding Chief Prosecutor to ensure that the appropriate steps were taken. A number of civil servants had been taken into custody in connection with the deaths and injuries that had occurred during the Guanare prison riot and would be awaiting sentencing.

10. **Ms. Kpatacha Tchamdja** said that the Committee would appreciate information about measures to establish and maintain a consolidated register of detained persons and up-to-date statistics on prison overcrowding, disaggregated by place of detention and sex. She wished to know whether recent reforms concerning humane treatment and respect for the dignity of all persons deprived of their liberty were consonant with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) and other applicable instruments, particularly with respect to proper access to food, hygiene and health care in places of detention. Information on the number of places of detention in the country for women and minors would be appreciated. She would be grateful to hear the delegation's comments on reports that detainees were increasingly being transferred to places far from their homes when a prison was closed.

11. With regard to the free movement of persons, the Committee would like to learn whether the State party had succeeded in solving the problems that had arisen with the renewal of passports or identity cards of persons who had left the country. Was sufficient consideration being given to the situation of children who were born abroad of Venezuelan parents but who could not be registered as Venezuelan nationals because their parents had no documents or because consular services were not operating properly? The Committee would be grateful for information about steps taken to protect Indigenous communities against forced internal displacement, especially in border and mining areas.

12. The Committee would like to know whether the National Human Rights Plan and the forums created by the National Human Rights Council had succeeded in creating a conducive environment for the expansion of civic space in the State party. Was the bill on international cooperation in line with the Covenant? She would welcome up-to-date information on measures taken to respect the freedom of association and trade union rights, including trade union activity by workers' organizations or their representatives. She would also like to know how many defenders of workers' rights were in detention or subject to non-custodial measures, what charges had been brought against them and the stage reached in proceedings concerning them. The Committee would also welcome information on any specific measures taken to ensure that political parties and universities could function without undue interference.

13. **Mr. Santos Pais** said that he would like to know whether the transfer of the pretrial detention facilities of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service and the Directorate General of Military Counter-Intelligence to the Ministry of People's Power for Prison Administration had been completed and whether the clandestine detention centres known as "safe houses" had been done away with. He wondered whether there was a consolidated register of all persons being held in police custody, pretrial detention and prison. Was it true that the Supreme Court, by Decision No. 735 of 9 December 2021, had ruled that a civilian could still be tried by a military court when exceptional circumstances so warranted, notwithstanding the reform of the Code of Military Justice? If so, in how many cases had that decision been applied? Was it true that nine persons who had been deprived of their liberty between 2018 and 2022, allegedly on political grounds, were being tried by special courts specializing in terrorism cases?

14. He would be grateful if the delegation would comment on reports that courts were often unable to meet the deadlines laid down in the Code of Criminal Procedure for investigations and trials and that, as a result, the duration of pretrial detention sometimes exceeded the legal limits. He would also like to know if it was true that, for a sum of from \$30 to \$50 dollars, persons could ask to be put on a list to have their cases reviewed, provided

that they refrained from obtaining the services of a private defence counsel. In that connection, he wondered whether the State party was considering appointing judges to supervise each prison to ensure that the time limits for pretrial detention were not overstepped. He would also like to know if measures had been taken to ensure that officials who made arrests always wore uniforms and badges that made them clearly and individually identifiable.

15. The Committee was anxious to hear what measures the State party intended to take to ensure that judicial orders to release a prisoner were promptly acted upon and to prevent arbitrary detentions. It would be of interest if the delegation could comment on reports that, between 2014 and 2023, some 15,700 persons had allegedly been subjected to arbitrary detention for political reasons and that approximately 300 persons were still being arbitrarily deprived of their liberty. He would be interested in the delegation's observations concerning reports that family members of political opponents were often jailed and subjected to ill-treatment and that women family members were sometimes subjected to gender-based violence when they visited prisons and during house searches.

16. The Committee had been informed that most judges in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela did not hold permanent appointments and were not selected by competitive recruitment processes. Could the delegation please comment on those reports and on reports that many judges had links with companies that were in receipt of public procurement contracts?

17. He invited the delegation to confirm whether it was true that, in 2002, the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court had held that the decisions and reports of international human rights bodies were not binding and that their implementation was subject to its review.

18. He would also be interested to hear the delegation's thoughts on reports that, over the previous two decades, the Electoral Chamber of the Supreme Court had interfered in bar association elections, that the Court had been issuing rulings that curtailed the right to political participation and that it had suspended the boards of various political parties and appointed new directors in their stead.

19. He would welcome the delegation's response to allegations that public prosecutors did not enjoy job stability, that 700 prosecutors had been appointed in 2019 and 2020 on a temporary basis without going through a competitive examination process and that, under a September 2018 amendment to the Statute of the Public Prosecution Service, the appointment of public prosecutors had been rendered discretionary. He wondered whether it was true that the Public Prosecution Service had not published management reports or official statistics since 2016 and that no list of prosecutors was available. According to the Public Prosecution Service, 249 prosecutors had been investigated for corruption and related charges in 2021 and 27 had been convicted. He would be grateful for additional information in that regard.

20. **Mr. Quezada Cabrera** said that, since the launch of the Arco Minero del Orinoco project in 2016, there had apparently been an increase in illegal mining in the states of Amazonas, Bolívar and Delta Amacuro that had triggered increased migratory flows along routes in Bolívar State that were used for human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Apparently, many persons were lured to the area with fraudulent offers of decent employment who were then pressed into what amounted to forced labour. He wished to know what steps the State party was taking to address the situation, what mechanisms were in place to enable victims of modern slavery and human trafficking to report abuse and obtain justice and reparations, what civilian and military institutions were present in mining areas, in particular the Arco Minero del Orinoco zone, and what actions they were taking to monitor the situation, whether State bodies had carried out labour inspections in such areas and, if so, what the findings had been and how the recruitment of workers, including migrant workers, by private contractors was regulated to prevent labour exploitation.

21. Concerning children's rights, he would be grateful for an indication of whether there were plans to raise the minimum marriageable age from 16 to 18 years and for information about the situation with regard to identity rights in the State party in the light of reports of a lack of paper to print birth certificates in 2018 and registry office closures during the first three months of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020. Information on the

measures taken to eliminate alleged barriers to the full enjoyment of identity rights by children and adolescents with disabilities would also be appreciated. Bearing in mind claims that children and adolescents were being forced to engage in dangerous mining activities, he wished to know what was being done to put an end to the worst forms of child labour.

22. He wished to know what specific measures had been taken by the special unit mentioned in paragraph 135 of the replies to the list of issues ([CCPR/C/VEN/RQ/5](#)) to guarantee the security and rights of Indigenous communities, what results it had achieved and what stage had been reached in the titling and demarcation of Indigenous lands, which had allegedly been stalled since 2017.

23. **Ms. Bassim** said that the Committee had received credible reports of violations of the principle of freedom of expression, including threats and harassment directed at independent media workers, arbitrary arrests and imprisonment of journalists critical of the Government, physical assaults against journalists covering protests and other public events, the confiscation and destruction of equipment, interference in the work of foreign press correspondents and the closure of media outlets, sometimes by order of the President. There had also been complaints of opacity and arbitrariness by the National Telecommunications Commission in the approval and renewal of radio broadcasting licences. She invited the delegation to respond to those allegations and to describe the measures taken to ensure that domestic legislation on freedom of expression was compatible with article 19 of the Covenant and the Committee's general comment No. 34 (2011); the steps taken to protect media workers, political opponents, human rights defenders and trade union leaders from intimidation and attacks; and the efforts made to investigate such acts promptly and hold perpetrators accountable. What steps were taken to ensure that the implementation of the Act on Social Responsibility in Radio, Television and Electronic Media and the Constitutional Act against Hatred and for Peaceful Coexistence and Tolerance did not hinder freedom of expression and the independence of the press? She would welcome an indication of the number of complaints of harassment and attacks against media workers, political opponents, human rights defenders and trade union leaders received over the previous five years, along with details of the measures adopted in response by the Government and their results.

24. **Ms. Tigroudja**, noting reports that the number of peaceful assemblies in the State party had dwindled in recent years, that demonstrations by political opponents had been violently repressed, including by private groups known as "*colectivos*" that were supported or tolerated by the State and that the monitoring of peaceful protests had been entrusted to the armed forces rather than the police, said that it would be useful to know what the State party was doing to ensure its compliance with article 21 of the Covenant and the Committee's general comment No. 37 (2020). It would also be useful to learn more about the *colectivos* and the measures being taken to ensure that they did not repress the rights of peaceful protesters. Details of any investigations and prosecutions of security officers or *colectivo* members responsible for violations of the rights of peaceful protesters would also be appreciated.

25. She wished to know what measures the State party used to ensure that the Supreme Court, the National Electoral Council and the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic remained independent and impartial in electoral processes, how many political candidates had been subject to administrative or criminal proceedings and on what grounds and what the outcomes of those proceedings had been. She would also be interested to learn what measures had been taken to ensure that Indigenous communities were consulted and had their consent sought prior to the introduction of any changes to electoral regulations that affected them.

The meeting was suspended at 11.05 a.m. and resumed at 11.25 a.m.

26. **Mr. Gil Pinto** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that consulates were responsible for issuing identity documents to Venezuelans abroad. However, many of those Venezuelans lived in countries whose Governments refused to allow the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to open consulates in their territory or where Venezuelan consulates had been seized or broken into and destroyed. Thus, the unilateral coercive measures taken by other States were curtailing the right to identity of Venezuelan citizens. Such measures included preventing diplomats and other government officials from having bank accounts and

prohibiting the transfer of money to pay for the issuance of identity documents and even for the paper on which they were printed. Nevertheless, the Government had found ingenious albeit expensive ways of issuing documents in countries that hosted an operational Venezuelan consulate.

27. Statelessness was a problem that no longer existed in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and that had been caused, in the first place, by the refusal of other countries, many of them members of the now defunct Lima Group, to recognize the legitimacy of the Government, Venezuelan institutions and the documents that they issued, a refusal that undermined respect for migrants' rights. Fortunately, the Government had re-established diplomatic and consular relations with most countries in Latin America, thanks to which Venezuelan citizens in the region were beginning to regain access to consulates and to their associated rights. Issues remained, however, in countries that continued to violate the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, including the United States of America, where access to Venezuelan consulates was being denied; Canada, where consular officials were being refused visas; and European countries that had imposed financial sanctions.

28. Operations in the Arco Minero del Orinoco development zone were respectful of the environment and of workers' rights. However, in other areas where mining was prohibited, specifically in the southern states of Amazonas and Bolívar, the National Bolivarian Armed Forces had been deployed at great cost to expel criminal gangs and other groups engaged in illegal mining, trafficking in persons and the smuggling of illicit substances. Since those areas were along the borders with Brazil and Colombia, the Government had been cooperating closely with those two countries through the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization.

29. The Supreme Court had suspended the boards of some political parties in response to complaints lodged by party members, following a failure to resolve those complaints internally. The executive branch had not been involved in any way. Claims of violations of political rights were part of the attacks being waged against Venezuelan institutions. The Constitution clearly protected people's political rights. Political figures in cases reported in the press had been barred from holding posts in the civil service because they had been involved in acts of corruption uncovered by the Office of the Comptroller General of the Republic. They had not been stripped of their right to vote or to stand for election. Officials found to be administratively liable faced sanctions regardless of their political affiliation. Indeed, the Office had imposed such sanctions on numerous members of the governing party and other parties in accordance with the law.

30. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the blockade against the country made it difficult for it to invest in prison infrastructure in order to alleviate overcrowding, as 76 per cent of total social spending was being channelled into the education and health sectors. Nevertheless, the State had made tremendous efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic to make sure that the entire prison population was vaccinated. Furthermore, health committees composed of representatives of the Ministry of People's Power for Prison Administration, the Ministry of People's Power for the Interior, Justice and Peace and the National Medical and Forensic Service, among others, had been set up in all such facilities to ensure the availability of quality primary care and chronic disease monitoring.

31. The pandemic had also ushered in new methods for guaranteeing access to justice for persons deprived of their liberty, such as virtual hearings. Three types of alternative dispute settlement centres, known as "justice houses", had been established according to the seriousness of the potential penalty. The justice houses had also afforded the added benefit of speeding up the processing of cases. The first tier of justice houses was community-based and focused on conflict resolution and mediation with a view to ensuring that individuals did not lapse into a life of more serious crime.

32. There was indeed a consolidated register of persons deprived of their liberty that included both prisoners and persons in pretrial detention; the entries were exhaustive and included up-to-date information on each person's whereabouts. For example, the previous day, 1,040 detainees had been transferred to the courts for hearings. As of the date that the current meeting was taking place, the total inmate population was more than 52,567 people, including some 26,619 men and 2,435 women in prisons and 20,240 men and 2,663 women

in pretrial detention. There were 84 prisons, including 38 for men, 17 for women and 21 for juvenile offenders, along with 500 cells for pretrial detainees. Detention centres overseen by the Directorate General of Military Counter-Intelligence were under the overarching responsibility of the Ministry of People's Power for Prison Administration.

33. Forced sterilization was banned, and any cases where such sterilizations were performed would be prosecuted. The economic empowerment of women was promoted through the Women's Development Bank, the granting of land titles to campesino women and support for training. The Government was concerned by attempts to criminalize the civil society associations known as *colectivos*, which were groups formed to address specific issues. Illegal armed groups that incited violent protests, whatever their political affiliation might be, should be and were brought to justice.

34. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, under a law on child sex abuse adopted in 2021, the minimum age of marriage was 18 years, although, in exceptional cases, child protection courts could authorize children 16 years and older to marry.

35. Article 57 of the Constitution established that everyone had the right to freedom of expression but, at the same time, could be held to account for their statements. In recognition of the vital role journalists played in a democracy, there were no restrictions on their activities beyond those laid down in the Constitution, relevant national laws and international instruments to which the State was a party. Journalists and human rights defenders who believed that their freedom of expression had been violated could lodge a complaint with the Public Prosecution Service.

36. The bill on the oversight, status, activities and financing of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whose aim was to prevent NGOs from being used by organized crime groups to undermine public order, was in the public consultation phase. During his visit to the country in January 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had personally submitted observations on the bill to the President of the National Assembly, and the Government was therefore drawing upon, not only wide-ranging public inputs for the formulation of that bill, but also the technical assistance of the Office of the High Commissioner.

37. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that judges were expressly prohibited from engaging in political activity, practising law in a private capacity or holding any other paid public employment. To obtain tenure, judges had to pass a competitive examination. A nomination committee had been established whose independence was guaranteed by the fact that its members represented such a wide portion of the political and social spectrum. Substitute judges had the same entitlements in terms of remuneration as tenured judges. Pursuant to a judgment of the Constitutional Court of 2023, civilians, civilian personnel and reservists not on active duty could not be tried before the military courts.

38. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, between 2018 and 2022, the number of violations of human rights such as the right to life, physical integrity and liberty had dropped by approximately 40 per cent. Victim assistance units had been established throughout the territory and, under a unique initiative, senior officials from the Public Prosecution Service held outreach meetings in public squares around the country every Wednesday. The Government was intent on protecting the population from life-threatening attacks. Thanks to the efforts of the entire justice system, the homicide rate had plummeted since 2017 from over 30,000 to some 11,100. That remarkable drop demonstrated that political stability and peaceful coexistence were progressively being achieved.

39. Regarding misconduct by prosecutors, since 2017 proceedings had been initiated against 395 members of the Public Prosecution Service, including some senior officials, for corruption and abuse of authority, among other offences. Of those officials, 10 had been sentenced to prison, 38 were subject to precautionary measures, and arrest warrants for another 48 had been issued. Since 2021, the National School of Prosecutors had been assessing the knowledge and psychological fitness of participants in the plan for regularizing the employment of temporary prosecutors as well as candidates in the seventh competitive

process for tenured prosecutors. The National School also offered a range of in-service training opportunities dealing with human rights, including specialization and non-degree courses, workshops and conferences.

40. Concerning the supposed existence of 300 political prisoners, he wished to know, given the importance of the right to life, how individuals convicted of involvement in a failed drone attack against President Maduro and the highest civil and military officials in August 2018, individuals convicted of participating in the attempted coup d'état of April 2019 or individuals who, in May 2020, had taken part in a maritime incursion by terrorists and mercenaries sponsored by Silvercorp and aimed at murdering the President and attacking military and police facilities could be considered political prisoners. Unless human rights had expanded to include overthrowing legitimate governments and killing officials, he respectfully invited the Committee to take a closer look at the evidence before citing figures haphazardly.

41. A presidential committee tasked with overhauling the prison system had, along with the Supreme Court, the Public Prosecution Service and other competent authorities, been working to promote the use of alternatives to imprisonment since 2021. In that connection, more than 13,400 people had benefited from non-custodial measures, including more than 640 people who had been granted full release.

42. Six chapters of the Constitution were devoted to the protection of environmental and Indigenous rights and included provisions on precautionary measures and criminal and civil remedies. Examples of efforts to guarantee the safety and integrity of Indigenous Peoples and protect the environment included the operations that had been conducted to evacuate illegal miners from protected areas, the declaration of Canaima National Park as a world heritage site and technical inspections and aerial surveillance of protected areas. Persons who infringed Indigenous or environmental rights, for instance through illegal mining, unlawful occupation of protected areas, or smuggling or trading in strategic commodities, were liable to harsh penalties.

43. **Mr. Santos Pais** said that he would like to know if he had understood correctly that persons disqualified from assuming positions in the civil service by the Comptroller General could nonetheless stand for election. It was his understanding that persons who had wished to become candidates in the forthcoming presidential elections had been prevented from doing so because of their disqualification from public service. Were such disqualifications made public and were the affected persons notified of their disqualification?

44. He was keen to learn whether the Supreme Court had issued a specific decision as to whether it was competent to decide that, in a given instance and despite the recent reform of the Military Code of Justice, a civilian could be tried by a military tribunal.

45. **Ms. Tigroudja**, noting that, according to the Constitution of the State party, electoral ineligibility must generally be decided by judicial means, said that she would be grateful if the State party could comment on the fact that a large number of findings of ineligibility had been made through administrative channels. Might the State party comment on allegations that the national electoral register did not function properly and that those malfunctions had been brought about intentionally in order to prevent 3.5 million people between the ages of 18 and 35 years from participating in the electoral process?

46. She would also be grateful if the State party could comment on the case of *Cabello Rondón v. El Nacional*, which had resulted in a newspaper being ordered to pay more than US\$ 13 million in moral damages for "aggravated defamation" after reprinting a Spanish newspaper article concerning a member of the National Assembly who belonged to the governing party. Was that figure accurate?

47. **Mr. Quezada Cabrera** said that he would be interested to know what criteria courts took into consideration when providing authorization for a minor under the age of 18 years to marry in accordance with article 12 of the Act on the Prevention and Elimination of Sexual Abuse against Children and Adolescents. Were there other legal provisions establishing prerequisites in that regard?

48. With respect to the rights of Indigenous Peoples, he wondered whether the State party could provide information relating to allegations that there had been a lack of free, prior and

informed consent in line with international standards in connection with the adoption of the extractive policies of the State oil company. He would be grateful for more information on the procedure for the demarcation of Indigenous territories in the light of reports that, up to 2021, only 15 per cent of the land area of Indigenous zones had been demarcated. He would also be interested to hear the delegation's comments on reports that authorization for the 2011 census of Indigenous Peoples had been lacking.

49. **Ms. Kpatcha Tchamdja**, welcoming the restoration of a constructive dialogue with the State party, said that she would like to know to what extent the problem that she had previously raised concerning identity documents had been resolved.

50. **Mr. Gil Pinto** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that, with respect to the questions raised about court decisions concerning disputes regarding political parties' boards of directors, one of the dispute settlement mechanisms available to such parties was to turn to the courts. He wished to assure the Committee that no violation of rights had taken place in that respect; Venezuelan law in relation to associations and political parties in no way contradicted the Covenant.

51. The Comptroller General had not restricted the political rights of any citizen. Such rights could be restricted only by a court decision. Persons who had committed offences or administrative infractions involving public assets could be disqualified from holding public office, as was also the case, for example, in the European Union. All such disqualifications were made public and the persons concerned were officially notified.

52. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that judicial decisions permitting marriage below the age of 18 years took into account the principle of the best interests of the child and recognition of the child as a subject of rights in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

53. **Mr. Gil Pinto** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that all identity documents were being issued promptly, including for children and adolescents. The only delays in that regard occurred in countries such as the United States of America and Canada, where his country was not allowed to maintain consular services and consular procedures therefore had to be conducted through neighbouring countries such as Mexico or the Dominican Republic. People's right to identity and the rights of the child had been violated by the actions of the Lima Group and its politically motivated fact-finding mission.

54. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that all complaints concerning violations of the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Arco Minero del Orinoco zone and of violations of environmental rights had been duly processed by a multidisciplinary commission whose members included the Public Prosecutor. The Autana, Roraima and Bolivarian Shield operations had been carried out to address illegal mining and bring to justice those who had violated the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the environment.

55. Administrative measures, such as disqualification from public service, were not taken because the person in question was a political activist, for example, but because disqualification from holding a position in the civil service was one of the consequences of the commission of unlawful acts.

56. **Mr. Gil Pinto** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that legislation governing the registration and oversight of the activities of national and international NGOs was under review based on a wide-ranging survey of the corresponding legislation in many countries around the world. The resulting law would protect NGOs and provide them with a legal framework for their operations that they currently lacked.

57. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that Venezuelan citizens who felt that their freedom of expression had been restricted or that they had been defamed had the right to submit their claim to a court of law. All decisions were published on the web page of the Supreme Court, where details of all rulings were available, including the procedures to be followed and the damages to be awarded.

58. **Mr. Gil Pinto** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), thanking the Committee for its questions, said that written responses would be provided to all of the 111 questions that had been asked.

59. **The Chair**, thanking the members of the delegation for their responses, stressed the Committee's commitment to fulfilling its mandate to ensure the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the importance of the contribution made by the dialogue that had taken place to establishing a culture of peace.

The meeting rose at 1:00 p.m.