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Summary record of the 35th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 11 September 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports

(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant
(continued)

Third periodic report of Honduras (E/C.12/HND/3; E/C.12/HND/Q/3; E/C.12/HND/RQ/3)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Honduras joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the delegation of Honduras to the meeting, explained that additional members of the delegation would be participating via video link.
3. **A representative of Honduras** said that the coup d'état in 2009 had disrupted progress in Honduras and had set the country on a path of institutional decay characterized by policies that widened inequalities and dismantled basic public services and by corruption, leading to a rise in extreme poverty, lack of access to good quality health and education services, employment instability and forced migration.
4. However, the Government was now charting a course for democratic renewal, with economic, social and cultural rights at the heart of its governance plan. Honduras ranked sixth among the countries of Latin America for economic growth thanks to considerable investment in social infrastructure which, in addition to promoting development, had, in 2023 alone, created 37,000 direct jobs and a further 43,000 indirect jobs. Honduras had climbed 29 places in the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index as a result of gender-focused economic policies and, in 2023, had seen the region's highest growth in public spending.
5. The roll-out of the National Health Plan had led to the largest financial investment and recruitment of health-care professionals in decades with the aim of strengthening hospital infrastructure and improving the coverage and quality of services, especially in rural areas. Construction had begun on eight hospitals, a national referral centre for cancer patients, five specialized maternal and neonatal care facilities and over 60 stabilization and emergency centres, all equipped with state-of-the-art technologies.
6. President Xiomara Castro Sarmiento was spearheading a number of measures to realize the right to education, for instance, the launch of a school feeding programme in all 18 departments, which had been recognized by the School Meals Coalition as one of the five most successful such programmes in the region; investment in the refurbishment of some 3,000 schools across the country; the "Yo sí puedo" (Yes I can) literacy programme, which had led to nearly half the country's municipalities being declared illiteracy-free; and the national programme on solidarity scholarships and free school enrolment.
7. The President had also submitted to the National Congress a bill on taxation justice designed to end tax exemptions introduced by previous administrations that had cost the Honduran people 500 billion lempiras (L) between 2009 and 2023. The bill would also usher in two new taxation regimes in line with international standards and abolish banking secrecy. In addition, the Government had reverted to a single-account national treasury to ensure transparent, efficient and results-based management of public funds.
8. A high-level intersectoral commission for the implementation of judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights had been established to ensure compliance with the judgments relating to the San Juan, Triunfo de la Cruz and Punta Piedra communities, jointly with the Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras. In addition, a tripartite commission had been set up, at the request of victims, to investigate human rights violations in the Bajo Aguán area and an inter-institutional round table had been established to address matters relating to the Lenca people.
9. Legislative Decree No. 32-2022 on reversing the establishment of Employment and Economic Development Areas, a designation that amounted to selling parts of the national territory to transnational corporations, had been submitted to Congress. However, enforcing the Legislative Decree involved an unfair dispute settlement scheme between investors and

States that was not only extremely costly, but also hindered sovereign initiatives by the peoples of those States.

10. **Mr. Hennebel** (Country Rapporteur) said that the Committee, while recognizing the challenges that existed in the State party, considered that the extended state of emergency nevertheless raised many concerns, including about the militarization of policing, possible human rights violations, major structural, social justice and equality issues and impunity. The clear political will on the part of the Government to tackle those challenges was welcome, but it must ensure that progress did not come at the cost of weaker human rights guarantees.

11. He would welcome more detailed information on the specific measures taken to ensure the effective participation of the various authorities in the implementation and monitoring of the Committee's recommendations and on the tangible steps taken to raise awareness of the Covenant and the Optional Protocol among lawyers, judges and civil society, as the Committee received very few individual communications in relation to Honduras. He would also welcome information on how the Government ensured that the state of emergency did not infringe human rights and how it measured the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights in that context. Information would also be welcome on complaints, investigations, convictions and reparations in cases of threats or attacks against defenders of economic, social and cultural rights over the previous year.

12. He wished to know what measures were being taken to delimit and protect land, especially Indigenous land, and what legal, technical and policy measures were taken to regulate access to, and protection of, land to end the apparently systematic legal uncertainty in such matters and tackle the structural causes of inequality and injustice in land management and distribution. He also wished to know how effective the courts were in resolving land disputes and what mechanisms were in place in cases where farmers and Indigenous populations were evicted. It would be helpful to know how many people were currently internally displaced in the State party, whether they had been awarded any reparations, what the initial findings of the tripartite commission on land disputes were, what the early results of the Act on the prevention of internal displacement and assistance and protection for internally displaced persons were and how displaced persons were protected from disappearance and exploitation.

13. He was interested in learning about plans to make the taxation system fairer and more closely aligned with the State party's obligations under the Covenant in terms of the redistribution of wealth and the reduction of social inequalities; about measures being taken to balance debt repayment with those obligations, in particular in the area of access to health care and education; and about steps being taken to prevent austerity measures from undermining the realization of economic, social and cultural rights, especially those of vulnerable and underprivileged groups. He was also interested in data on poverty trends in the State party, including on who the most vulnerable groups were, as well as information on the measures taken to drastically cut the number of people living under the poverty line and to reduce income inequality. He wondered what share of the national budget was allocated to military spending.

14. Regarding self-determination, especially for Indigenous communities, he would appreciate information on the measures taken to foster inclusive dialogue and consultations in view of their free, prior and informed consent, and how they worked in practice; on progress achieved in evicting settlers who were illegally occupying Indigenous territories; on the prospects of enforcement of the Legislative Decree reversing the establishment of the Employment and Economic Development Areas; and on the impact of private investment in those Areas on economic, social and cultural rights and the management of the State's sovereign resources.

15. He would also appreciate information on the number of complaints concerning corruption and their outcomes and any planned reforms to strengthen the independence of the judiciary.

16. He wished to know what measures were being taken to explicitly guarantee equality and non-discrimination on such grounds as language, religion, origin and disability, to combat discrimination in the public and private spheres, including discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity and intersectional discrimination, and to provide

effective remedies for victims. He would welcome information on the implementation of the judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights regarding Garifuna communities and on police investigations into offences committed against and disappearances of members of those communities. Lastly, he would like to hear what measures were being taken to improve gender equality, to ensure access to land, credit and income-generating activities for women, to promote women's participation in the labour market and their access to public office, to combat gender stereotypes and promote fair burden-sharing among men and women and to combat femicide, domestic violence and rape.

17. **A representative of Honduras** said that the High-Level Intersectoral Commission for the Implementation of Judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights had been established to ensure the gradual implementation, with the involvement of the victims, of rulings concerning three Garifuna communities. The body was the first of its kind in the country's history and had been very well received by the Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras.

18. The Government was aware of civil society complaints that free, prior and informed consent through consultation was not always obtained. Nevertheless, a consultation process would be undertaken in all nine regions in connection with a planned constitutional amendment to declare Honduras a multicultural and multilingual country. Furthermore, in recognition of the fact that a previous law on consultations had been decried by civil society, the Government had initiated work on a protocol on steps that government bodies should take when consulting Indigenous Peoples, with regard not only to development projects but also to any matter affecting their mode of living or world view.

19. **A representative of Honduras** said that over 70 per cent of the budget of the Solidarity Network Programme was earmarked for women heads of household living in poverty or extreme poverty, who received cash transfers designed to ensure food security and access to health care and education. In addition, the Programme had secured funding for over 2,000 rural credit unions to provide zero-interest loans. Of the unions' membership of over 30,000, 69 per cent were women, and just over two thirds of the business plans submitted were for agricultural businesses. Under the Programme, over 2,000 community leadership and solidarity round tables had been set up and the participants trained; 69 per cent of the membership were women leaders, including Indigenous women.

20. The institutions heading social development projects and programmes included the National Service for Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses, which ran credit schemes, and the National Rural and Urban Development Programme, which provided training and certifications for small businesses in all sectors. Moreover, the Government had prioritized the financing of the National Bank for Agricultural Development so that it could grant low-interest loans to small producers, most of whom were women. Lastly, 35,000 productive technology packages, 7,000 coffee bean production packages and 5,000 livestock farming packages had been distributed.

21. **A representative of Honduras** said that, pursuant to the mandate of the High-Level Intersectoral Commission for the Implementation of Judgments of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, a number of subcommissions had been set up to, *inter alia*, develop the legal instruments necessary for the Commission to conduct its activities, to look into how well existing laws aligned with standards concerning free, prior and informed consent, especially in protected areas and the mining industry, and to coordinate actions to ensure that all relevant State-run social projects were subject to consultation with Garifuna communities in keeping with their ancestral traditions and customs. The Commission was also examining national legislation to identify laws that infringed the rights of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran peoples and, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, was developing a bill on consultation and free, prior and informed consent.

22. Pursuant to the judgment of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the case *Escaleras Mejía et al. v. Honduras*, and with assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, work was under way on a due diligence protocol for the investigation of offences against environmental defenders.

23. The tripartite commission investigating human rights violations in the Bajo Aguán area had held 11 technical meetings with a number of Government bodies and beneficiaries.

Recent developments included the creation of guidelines on the functioning of the commission, the submission of a budget and the appointment of commissioners.

24. Honduras had taken steps to reclaim its national sovereignty, particularly with regard to reversing the law on Employment and Economic Development Areas. The Republic of Honduras had faced including arbitration proceedings following a claim for damages by one of the Development Areas and sanctions for non-compliance with international treaties. Honduras had denounced the Development Areas on 28 August 2024.

25. **A representative of Honduras** said that his country had a national protection mechanism for human rights defenders. Rules of procedure for implementing the budget of the General Directorate for the Protection Mechanism had recently been approved to expedite the response to threats faced by journalists and human rights defenders. In November 2023, protection measures had been in place in 181 active cases, 138 of which related to human rights defenders, social leaders, journalists or judicial officials. To strengthen the response of the national protection mechanism, staff numbers had been doubled in 2024 and specialist training had been organized.

26. In 2022, Honduras had adopted a law on the provision of care to persons displaced as a result of violence. Around 3 per cent of the total population had been internally displaced. Natural disasters were the cause of nearly 40 per cent of displacements in urban areas, while violence and insecurity were the reasons for nearly 30 per cent of displacements in rural areas.

27. The Ministry of Human Rights communicated the recommendations issued by the Committee to the relevant public authorities. The System for the Monitoring of International Recommendations allowed the three branches of Government to monitor and evaluate the implementation of such recommendations.

28. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he would be grateful if the State party could clarify whether the bill on consultation and free, prior and informed consent had been adopted, and whether it contained provisions guaranteeing that all such consultations were undertaken with a view to obtaining the free, prior and informed consent of the groups affected by State decision-making.

29. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** (Country Task Force) said that he would like to know whether the State party intended to develop a business and human rights plan that included implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

30. **A representative of Honduras** said that, in 2020, a bill on free, prior and informed consent had been widely denounced by Indigenous and Afro-Honduran organizations for being insufficiently respectful of the consultation process. A protocol was being developed to ensure that the Government engaged in a constructive and respectful dialogue with Indigenous Peoples on decisions affecting them. Indigenous Peoples did not cite the Constitution in international rulings since it contained no specific reference to them. A multi-stakeholder round table had been set up to address that issue.

31. **A representative of Honduras** said that a Business and Human Rights Round Table had been established in 2022 to develop an action plan in line with the Guiding Principles of Business and Human Rights, and participants had received training on the Guiding Principles in 2023. The Round Table continued to meet to address issues such as the State's and private companies' responsibility regarding the human rights violations suffered by Miskito divers.

32. **Ms. Lemus de Vásquez** (Country Task Force) said that she would welcome information on the measures adopted to reduce unemployment and underemployment, particularly among young people, women and Indigenous and Afro-Honduran Peoples; on the technical and vocational training programmes available; and on steps taken to promote women's participation in the labour market and decrease their overrepresentation in unpaid and informal work.

33. It would be of interest to know whether the State party intended to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183), the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189) and the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190). She wondered what measures would be taken to ensure that the employment of children under the age of 14 was not permitted, to confirm

that the minimum wage allowed a decent standard of living and to guarantee the effective application of the legal provisions on minimum wage. Had the National Survey of Household Expenditure and Income been conducted recently to determine whether the current minimum wage was in line with the cost of living?

34. She wished to know whether steps had been taken to abolish the bipartite review process applied to the minimum wage in the maquila sector and to reduce the wage inequality gap for women workers in the manufacturing and textile export industry. It would be useful to learn when the bill on occupational health would be adopted and what measures had been taken to act on the findings of labour inspections carried out in the port and at sea to protect Miskito divers. She wondered how the capacity of the sanctioning authority been strengthened and what steps had been taken to protect small-scale fishers and offer them employment alternatives and financial and social support.

35. She would like to hear more about the reforms adopted to guarantee the rights of workers in the agricultural, maquila and domestic work sectors, as well as the measures implemented to strengthen the Labour Inspectorate and the complaint mechanisms available to workers. She wondered what progress had been made to ensure access to universal social security for maquila workers and to enhance monitoring to identify abusive work practices.

36. The Committee would welcome further details on the investigations into the violations committed against the rights of 13 workers in the maquila sector in 2023, and on the measures taken to ensure that laws regarding the unionization of employees were enforced and respected. She would be curious to know what the impact of repealing the Framework Act on the Social Protection System had been on workers and what legal framework would replace it. Updated and disaggregated data on the current percentage of the population benefiting from social security would be welcome.

37. **A representative of Honduras** said that the Government worked to support women to enter the labour market through various initiatives, including labour intermediation and the Cities for Women Programme, through which over 700 capacity-building initiatives for women had been organized in 2024. The model of work followed in the maquila sector was under review and issues such as workers' wages and working conditions were monitored by labour inspectors. Social dialogue and negotiation was promoted between workers, unions, non-governmental organizations and employers in the maquila sector. The Ministry of Labour had proposed a reform that would allow labour inspections in private homes to facilitate monitoring of violations against domestic workers. In the public sector, more than 61,000 workers had benefited from two consecutive salary increases of L 1,300 in 2023 and 2024.

38. **A representative of Honduras** said that, in collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, the Honduran Centre for the Study of State Policies in the Social Sector had produced two key documents regarding an update to the social protection policy and a bill on a comprehensive social protection system. The final version of the bill would be presented to the National Congress for consideration.

39. Comprehensive inspections had verified that the approved rules of procedure were being followed by the inter-agency commission responsible for support and prevention activities regarding the issue of dive fishing. A labour lawyer had been hired to ensure that free legal support was available to Miskito divers and their families. Furthermore, two labour inspectors with legal training had been hired to supervise issues such as working conditions and occupational hazards. The Ministry of Social Development planned to create a record of all Miskito families in the area to ensure that their needs were met.

40. **A representative of Honduras**, speaking via video link, said that the Government was aware of the need to ensure fair salaries for both public- and private-sector workers in Honduras. The average monthly salary currently stood at L 13,156, which was 10 per cent more than the cost of the basic food basket. With support from ILO, the Government sought to align its approach to trade union rights with international norms, notably the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87). In fact, workers in Honduras could form or join trade unions, and participate in union activity, without fear of dismissal or reprisal.

41. Inspectors from the Ministry of Labour monitored compliance with labour law on the part of employers and workers. For its part, the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Human Rights provided technical advice on labour law as well as undertaking inspections in its own right and prosecuting any breaches of the law. Between 2019 and 2023, the courts had handed down convictions in two cases involving violations of union rights. The 2023 case involving 13 workers in the maquila sector was still being investigated.

The meeting was suspended at 4.35 p.m. and resumed at 4.45 p.m.

42. **A representative of Honduras** said that labour inspections had been stepped up in the agricultural sector to ensure that employers were respecting the norms governing salaries, working hours and conditions of employment. The Office of the President was promoting an initiative intended to improve conditions for Miskito divers. More than 9,000 inspections had been conducted between January and August 2024, and fines had been imposed on persons who failed to respect the health and safety norms for undersea dive fishing. The Directorate General of the Merchant Navy had provided training to staff of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security on how to conduct inspections on the high seas.

43. Honduras was firmly committed to eradicating child labour and to promoting a safe and secure working environment. In that connection, the former Directorate for Children, Adolescents and Families had been promoted to the rank of ministry, its budget allocation had been doubled and, on 9 September 2024, the President of Honduras had approved the new ministry's policy for the protection of children, adolescents and families. Significant measures had also been taken by other government ministries, as well as by the National Commission for the Progressive Elimination of Child Labour and a number of civil society organizations. Between January and July 2024, 297 training courses had been held to draw attention to the importance of combating child labour and respecting labour rights, particularly of women and minors. During the same period, 184 child labour inspections had been carried out, and 70 firms had been awarded certificates demonstrating that they did not engage in child labour.

44. **A representative of Honduras** said that, thanks to an increase of 44.2 per cent in its budget allocation since 2021, the Honduran Social Security Institute had been able to increase the services it offered, notably in the area of medical care, and to enhance its coverage of occupational hazards. The number of beneficiaries – 1,823,824 in 2023 – was increasing by an average of 1 or 2 per cent per year. Certain financial shortfalls that had arisen with the repeal of the Framework Act on the Social Protection System had been addressed in a new law enacted on 28 May 2024.

45. **A representative of Honduras** said that training towards maritime safety inspections and basic maritime safety courses for officials had been organized in 2022 and 2023, and 79 fishing vessel certificates had been issued. The National Coordination Office for Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Hondurans was undertaking research to identify the socioeconomic needs of communities involved in undersea dive fishing. The Office of the Labour Attorney provided free legal advice on matters concerning work and working conditions.

46. **Ms. Lemus de Vásquez** said that she wished to know if the State was contemplating any measures to abolish the practice for fixing the minimum wage in the maquila sector. She hoped the delegation could provide more information about the situation of small-scale fishers.

47. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to know what norms were in place to tackle the discrimination faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons in looking for work and in the workplace. What sanctions could employers face if they violated those norms? He would be interested to hear about any training programmes or job creation schemes that sought to address that issue. The delegation should inform the Committee about the state of advancement of the bill on domestic work, which had been submitted to the National Congress in 2018, and about the impact its enactment would have on domestic workers.

48. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he would be interested to know whether the State policy to reconcile business and human rights would also address the discrimination in wages and working conditions that existed in sectors such as the maquila.

49. **Ms. Rossi** said that she too was concerned about the situation of small-scale fishers, especially in the light of information the Committee had received about their substandard working conditions and their inability to generate sufficient income to support their families, due also to factors such as pollution and climate change. No action appeared to have been taken to assist the affected communities, notably in the Gulf of Fonseca, and she wished to know if the State had any plans to intervene.

50. **Mr. Hennebel** said that a substantial number of the questions he had raised, concerning, *inter alia*, discrimination, fiscal policy and corruption, had not yet been answered. He hoped the delegation could incorporate those issues when answering questions on matters such as the impact of climate change or women's access to work.

51. **A representative of Honduras** said that programmes to support small-scale fishers were being implemented via the use of technology, the management of fish stocks and the repopulation of native species of fish and shellfish. One of the current President's flagship policies was a socioagricultural programme which was being run by the Ministry of Agriculture and which aimed to provide equipment, technical assistance and productive technology packages to support small-scale producers of grains, livestock and coffee. The overall goal of the programme was to improve output while maintaining food security.

52. The food distribution network in Honduras, which had recently been identified as among the best in Latin America, also reached disadvantaged areas such as the Gulf of Fonseca and the Gracias a Dios Department where the Miskito divers and other vulnerable communities lived. The sustainable school meals programme, which was distributing more food than it ever had before, currently provided only dry and canned food would but soon begin providing fresh meals to schools in all parts of the country.

53. **A representative of Honduras** said that the Government was working to provide the fishing communities on the Gulf of Fonseca with financial services such as savings accounts, loans and money transfers. Primary health-care services were made available in the areas where those communities lived, and their children were provided with clothing, backpacks and shoes to enable them to attend school. The same services were also being offered to small-scale fishing communities in the departments of Atlántida and Colón along the country's Atlantic seaboard.

54. **A representative of Honduras** said that the Inter-Institutional Commission to Address and Prevent the Problems Associated with Dive Fishing had taken measures to improve safety for Miskito divers including regular medical check-ups and the imposition of an obligation to use proper diving equipment.

55. The level of investment productivity was very high in Honduras: 91 per cent, compared with a Latin American regional average of 10 per cent. The Ministry of Strategic Planning was giving priority to the transition from informal to formal economic activity, seeking to create secure employment and social inclusion opportunities for disadvantaged persons, including, *inter alia*, women, persons from rural areas, persons from ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities.

56. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** said that he wished to know what proportion of government expenditure had been allocated to education over the previous five years and whether the State had plans to increase that expenditure in the future. He hoped the delegation could provide statistics, disaggregated by sex, regarding children who were outside the school system. The Committee was particularly concerned by reports that up to 15 per cent of children in the country, mostly from Indigenous and Afro-Honduran communities, were not attending primary school.

57. While recognizing that significant efforts had been made to ensure free schooling, the Committee wondered whether those efforts also addressed the supplementary costs of education, which could impede access to education for children from poorer families. Another source of concern was the state of school infrastructure in rural areas. More generally, the Committee wished to know how the State party intended to redress educational

imbalances that disproportionately affected rural, Indigenous, and Afro-Honduran communities. What steps had been taken to ensure that persons with disabilities could exercise their right to education?

58. The Committee would be interested to hear about the teaching of Indigenous languages and, more specifically, to learn about the 1,223 bilingual educational centres that had reportedly been opened. He wondered if the State had any plans to address the gender stereotypes that persisted in school textbooks. Lastly, he hoped to hear about any public policies aimed at providing teachers with adequate training and decent working conditions, which were vital factors in high-quality education.

59. He was interested in hearing about the outcomes of the digital literacy campaigns and wondered what percentage of the population had Internet access. He would welcome information on any programmes aimed at improving literacy and Internet access, especially among the most marginalized groups and rural, Indigenous and Afro-Honduran communities, and on specific measures taken to improve Internet connectivity at all schools across the country. It would be useful to receive information on measures taken to increase the budget allocated to science and technology. Lastly, he would like to know about any measures taken to ensure that women could pursue careers in science with a view to achieving gender equality in science and academia.

60. **A representative of Honduras** said that 450,000 schoolchildren had been vaccinated in the first three months of the current administration's tenure with the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The return to in-person education in April 2022 following the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had provided an opportunity to expand social programmes aimed at the most vulnerable, such as the school feeding programme, through which it had been possible to improve school registration and retention rates, which had been on a downward trend since 2018 but had begun to rise in 2022. More than 3,000 schools had been renovated in the scope of the school infrastructure programme, and a significant amount of funding had been raised to promote virtual education modalities. While in-person education was still the priority, a hybrid education model had been adopted and Internet connections had been installed in a substantial proportion of schools.

61. One of the objectives of Plan 365, an initiative designed to strengthen the national education system, was to improve digital skills. A technical committee for digital education, composed of public and private sector stakeholders and cooperation partners, had been established to determine how to improve broadband connectivity in the country. As a result, broadband connections had been installed at 709 educational institutions and there were plans to do so at another 1,000 institutions. A virtual diploma programme in humanities and sciences had been launched in efforts to offer more flexibility in the national education system. Some 278 students had enrolled in its first iteration and around 800 students were currently enrolled, including students based in other countries. Its success demonstrated the huge potential of virtual education modalities, which could enable students to complete secondary education and gain access to higher education. School dropout rates had fallen to 2.9 per cent in 2023. In primary and secondary schools, the 2023 pass rate for mathematics was 82 per cent and the 2024 rate for Spanish currently stood at 84 per cent.

62. Significant progress had been made in the provision of intercultural and bilingual education, and the Government had complied with a number of court rulings on the matter. All Indigenous Peoples in Honduras were represented at the National Coordination Office for Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Hondurans. The national education curriculum had been updated to include a focus on intercultural and bilingual education, and textbooks used by students living in areas belonging to Indigenous Peoples and Afro-Hondurans had been revised. According to a new policy, teachers recruited to work in intercultural and bilingual schools in Indigenous and Afro-Honduran communities must themselves be members of those communities and be able speak in their mother tongue. In addition, they could be appointed only through public consultations. More than 500 teachers had been recruited in that manner across the country. More than 300,000 Hondurans had developed literacy skills thanks to the national literacy campaign. The publication of textbooks in the Miskito language had reduced the literacy gap in Gracias a Dios Department, an area with a high rate of educational exclusion.

63. The Ministry of Education had worked with the Olympiads committees to organize science fairs at different levels of the national education system, ensuring the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples. To enable children to continue their education despite ill health, school lessons were provided to children in hospital, and in 2024, more than 500 teachers had taken part in capacity-building activities focusing on diversity. Eight bilingual teacher-training schools providing classes in Spanish and English had been established, and a teacher-training school focusing on the Miskito and Garifuna languages was being renovated.

64. The education budget had been increased from L 38 billion in 2022 to L 40 billion in 2023 and was expected to reach nearly L 43 billion in 2024. A proportion of the budget increase would be used to raise teacher salaries, which had been frozen for over a decade. Part of the budget was allocated to a programme enabling school leaders and parents' associations to use public funds to purchase teaching materials, administrative supplies and cleaning products.

65. **A representative of Honduras** said that, through the Solidarity Network Programme, 170,000 grants had been awarded to students in primary, secondary and university education as part of the largest scholarship programme in the country's history. In 2024, 50,000 school kits had been sent to Indigenous and Afro-Honduran communities across the country and 50,000 pairs of school shoes had been given to children living in extreme poverty, with Indigenous and Afro-Honduran children constituting the majority of beneficiaries. Virtual classes were being delivered to some of the poorest villages in the country, and steps were being taken to equip over 100 schools with Internet access and portable digital devices. Efforts were being made to improve literacy among young people and adults living in extreme poverty in the context of the Solidarity Network Programme.

66. **A representative of Honduras** said that 12,000 of the grants awarded through the scholarship programme had been allocated to university students in the amount of US\$ 250–US\$ 300. The conditions for obtaining grants were more flexible for students from vulnerable groups to compensate for the barriers and marginalization they faced in obtaining access to education, and more generous grants were awarded to Indigenous and Afro-Honduran students to account for the higher cost of travelling to university from the remote locations where they lived. Individuals who were awarded grants joined a volunteer scheme that provided them with opportunities to harness their potential as young leaders; for instance, some beneficiaries had been involved in the creation of an academic journal launched by the Ministry of Social Development.

67. A total of 800 portable computers had been distributed, benefiting vulnerable groups in particular. A computer laboratory had recently been installed at the Jalteva Educational Complex, a facility for juvenile offenders, and a library was being built with the involvement of the detainees. Some 2,500 dental kits had been provided to marginalized children, 1,500 kits including high-end graphic calculators had been sent to engineering students and 1,500 study kits had been given to medical students. Twenty-two community libraries were being refurbished for the benefit of vulnerable groups. Publishing houses set up by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Cultures, Arts and Heritage of the Peoples of Honduras had published over 20 books that were accessible free of charge. Further progress in reducing inequalities in education and access to technology would depend on increased investment and budgetary allocations.

68. **A representative of Honduras** said that the National Council for the Promotion of Science, Technology and Innovation, formed of stakeholders from the public and private sectors and academia, had begun working on amendments to the Act on the Promotion of Scientific and Technological Development and Innovation in June 2022 but had recently shifted its focus to the development of a new bill, the aim of which was to bridge gaps identified in the science and technology sector. The bill contained provisions aimed at increasing financing to the sector, including by encouraging public universities to allocate more resources to science and technology. A national network of researchers had been established to achieve greater recognition for researchers and encourage people to join the profession. The Government had undertaken the first census of legal persons in Honduras in the scope of its efforts to create an enabling environment for companies working in technology and innovation. A campaign to combat gender stereotypes relating to careers in science, technology and innovation through a competition aimed at women and girls was in

its third consecutive year. Measures were being taken to widen access for women to universities, including the awarding of scholarships, and 60 per cent of students registered at universities in the previous five years had been women. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation had developed a pilot project to establish regional centres for science education and had worked with the Ministry of Education and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to train teachers in subjects such as robotics. To address the low level of private-sector investment in science and technology, a programme had been launched in 2023 to encourage entrepreneurs to start businesses in the technology sector; over 100 such companies had received support, including seed capital.

69. **A representative of Honduras** said that a national network of agricultural colleges had been established with locations in rural areas and in some Indigenous communities. Students had produced a wide range of goods with the help of entrepreneurship training, and agricultural fairs had been organized to enable them to trade their products. The network had offered students in rural areas the opportunity to develop science and technology skills and learn about sustainable agricultural practices; for example, in 2023, a number of students and teachers had discovered two new pest control methods. The network had also made it possible to study agroforestry practices used by farmers across the country, informing the development of new sustainable agricultural techniques. The launch of the publishing house within the Ministry of Education had enabled a group of teachers pursuing doctoral degrees to contribute towards scientific teaching and learning in Honduras, which had led to significant updates to curricula. The inclusion of science, technology and mathematics at all levels of the education system ensured that students were acquiring up-to-date knowledge that was applicable to their daily lives.

70. The third cycle of virtual education courses would be launched in 2025, allowing students over the age of 18 years to study for diplomas remotely and increasing the number of Hondurans completing secondary and tertiary education. The Government was also focusing on improving early childhood education, including by building 130 preschools in the country's poorest communities and developing an early childhood policy. The roll-out of diploma programmes in agribusiness, agro-industrial studies and the food industry, developed with the support of UNESCO, had expanded the offer of relevant secondary education adapted to the socioeconomic realities of the poorest communities in Honduras, thereby supporting the creation of a circular economy, generating opportunities for economic activity and promoting information-sharing to improve agricultural practices.

71. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** said that it would be helpful to have an idea of the percentage of public expenditure allocated to education. Information on recent trends and future public spending on education would enable the Committee to assess the situation. He would like to know what percentage of children did not have access to education, especially primary education; if possible, it would be useful to receive data disaggregated by level of education and sex or gender. He would be grateful to hear about any systems in place within the Government to review educational materials to ensure that they were free of gender stereotypes and to make any necessary corrections. Statistical data on the number of children who had been victims of school bullying would be appreciated, as would information on any monitoring, protection and awareness-raising measures taken to address the problem. He would welcome information on any specific policies adopted to enable persons with disabilities to gain access to education with dignity and on an equal footing with other students.

72. **Ms. Lemus de Vásquez** said that she would like to know how the State party was addressing the challenges involved in measuring the informal sector of the economy and what tools it was using to collect information on the sector. It would also be interesting to hear about any measures the State party was taking or planning to take to gradually regularize the sector and to promote access to basic employment benefits, including social protection benefits and other rights provided for in the Covenant, among informal workers. She wished to know whether the State party had considered withdrawing its reservation to article 17 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees with a view to helping asylum-seekers and refugees to integrate into society. She was keen to hear about any plans to support asylum-seekers and refugees in gaining access to the formal market and wondered whether

the State party had considered adopting legislation permitting them to work in conditions no less favourable than those enjoyed by Hondurans.

73. **Mr. Hennebel** said that he would appreciate further information on the state of emergency and its potential impact on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. Specific examples of the application of the Covenant at the national level would be appreciated; for instance, it would be helpful to know whether it was possible to invoke the Covenant before the courts, whether judges were able to hand down punishments for violations of its provisions and how such judgments were implemented in practice. Given that a weak legal framework on business and human rights increased the risk of human rights violations, he would be interested to hear about any accountability and complaints mechanisms in place and any mechanisms to promote community engagement in that regard. Additional information on the climate change bill, in particular its expected outcomes, would be welcome.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.