



# Economic and Social Council

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## Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-eighth session

### Summary record of the 47th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Friday, 19 September 2025, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Saran

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

**Consideration of reports (continued)**

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

*Initial report of the Lao People's Democratic Republic (continued) (E/C.12/LAO/1; E/C.12/LAO/Q/1; E/C.12/LAO/RQ/7)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic joined the meeting.*

2. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic**, resuming his delegation's replies to the questions raised at the previous meeting concerning the right to work, said that, under article 60 of the Labour Law, employees and employers had the right to apply for membership of mass organizations or other legally operating social organizations in the country. They also had the right to appoint a representative within the labour unit or workplace. Article 164 stated that agencies representing employees were trade unions whose role was to participate in protecting the rights and benefits of employees working within a labour unit. Under article 154, if a labour dispute was ongoing, employees were required to continue working as normal, and employers were required to make the workplace available, unless the situation was deemed extremely serious or a tripartite organization authorized a work stoppage to prevent further damage.

3. If labour disputes could not be resolved, strikes could be organized in accordance with the law. While the Labour Law did not explicitly provide for the right to strike, the Government's approach was to manage and resolve labour disputes, including through mediation and arbitration by the committee for labour dispute resolution. That process was outlined in the Labour Law and Decree on Labour Dispute Resolution, which were designed to prevent strikes and address conflicts before they escalated. The process was a harmonious means of protecting workers' interests while preventing the disruption of the economy and the social order. The Government was working closely with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to incorporate the relevant labour standards into the domestic legal framework.

4. With regard to the question raised concerning the labour inspection system, a recently adopted decision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare clarified the powers and duties of labour inspectors and provided a solid framework for labour inspection and the enforcement of labour standards, including in the informal sector. The Ministry had also worked with the special economic zone administration to review the registration process and issue work permits for migrant workers working in those zones. Moreover, on-site training was provided on occupational safety and health. Inspections were systematically carried out in the special economic zones.

5. There were several channels for complaints. Workers could submit complaints directly to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare or its provincial offices. They could request their union or worker representative committee to submit complaints on their behalf. Hotlines and complaint boxes had been introduced in certain provinces and special economic zones, especially to support migrant and informal workers. Inspectors must keep complainants' identities confidential if requested. Complaints could be handled through inspection procedures. If unresolved, they could be escalated to a dispute settlement committee or ultimately to the courts.

6. Lastly, social insurance was part of the National Social Protection Strategy, adopted in 2020, which was built on three main pillars. The first was healthcare: the Lao People's Democratic Republic had achieved universal health coverage, reaching some 95 per cent of the population. The second was social security, which covered only 11.8 per cent of the population, or approximately 800,000 people. Coverage was mostly limited to government employees and a small number of enterprises. Only 2 to 3 per cent of enterprises were enrolled in the system. The last was social welfare, with a focus on vulnerable groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons. The programmes that had been introduced included school meals, poverty reduction activities, microfinance and

disaster relief. The Government aimed to increase coverage from 11.8 per cent to 50 per cent by 2030 by simplifying employer registration, introducing incentives and digital tools for small and medium-sized enterprises and encouraging voluntary contributions from informal workers, among other measures. It also planned to promote data integration, conduct public awareness campaigns and strengthen cooperation with development partners.

7. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Labour Law explicitly prohibited sexual harassment in the workplace. Victims of sexual harassment had the right to terminate their employment contract and lodge complaints with the courts and claim compensation for harm. Although the Penal Code did not explicitly define sexual harassment as a standalone offence, acts of sexual harassment could be prosecuted under related offences such as the use of violence against women. In addition, there was a national action plan to prevent the use of violence against women. While there were a number of laws in place to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, more needed to be done to collect the relevant data and raise public awareness about the issue.

8. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** added that the Lao Women's Union provided counselling and legal advice through a hotline service or on-site support at the counselling and protection centre. The Union conducted awareness campaigns in communities and educational institutions to educate citizens on the types and nature of sexual harassment and violence. It also worked to strengthen the capacity of staff to ensure effective service delivery.

9. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that recent surveys showed that 32 per cent of children under 5 were affected by stunting and wasting affected 24 per cent. The Government had adopted a National Plan of Action on Nutrition for the period 2021–2025 to tackle the problem and had established national nutrition committees at the national, provincial, district and village levels. The plan listed 22 interventions and 36 indicators in the area of health, education, agriculture and others. The Ministry of Health provided vitamins and vaccinations for children under 5, access to clean water, disease control and primary healthcare services and health promotion in schools. The country had achieved 100 per cent access to clean water through the implementation of national policies and strategies for rural water and sanitation, community engagement in construction and maintenance and the establishment of a clean water management fund. Government health sector funding had increased from 1,600 billion Lao Kip in 2021 to 2,500 billion Lao Kip in 2025. Health infrastructure had been developed, including 5 central hospitals, 135 district hospitals and more than 1,000 dispensaries across the country. Health education was promoted via television radio and community media, focusing on disease prevention and hygiene.

10. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the country continued to experience high rates of early marriage, with a current rate of 35 per cent, up from 30 per cent in previous surveys. The Government had implemented programmes and awareness campaigns targeting young people, students and communities to highlight the health and social consequences of early marriage. Efforts included assigning responsibilities to municipalities to address early marriage and related issues like school dropout. A national action plan had been developed to strengthen the capacity of health and family planning staff at all levels to protect children from early marriage. The Government was also making efforts to enforce existing laws and improve legislation related to child protection and early marriage.

11. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that social security scheme covered all 17 provinces. With regard to Vientiane Capital, the Government had made a commitment to providing citizens who were not covered by the social protection scheme with adequate social protection in the relevant five-year plan.

12. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that corporal punishment of children was covered under the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children. The Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Children had also been amended to include a prohibition on such corporal punishment. The Government had also conducted public awareness campaigns on the issue.

13. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that assistance for victims of trafficking in persons included the provision of temporary safe shelter, food,

clothes and other necessary items, psychological support, medical care and legal assistance. Victims could enrol in vocational training courses and were assisted with repatriation. Assistance was coordinated by government ministries, the police, the Centre for Counselling and Protection of Women and Children of the Lao Women's Union and other relevant authorities. The Centre also provided social support and repatriation for women who had been trafficked for the purpose of providing illegal surrogacy services. Between January and May 2025, the authorities had provided consular advice to 150 victims of human trafficking.

14. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Law on Investment Promotion of 2024 was designed to attract high quality investment and ensure the collective rights of investors so that they could contribute to national social development. Investors were required to meet a range of economic, social and environmental obligations. The Law on Minerals of 2017 established measures for the management, monitoring, trading and utilization of minerals in a manner that ensured the health and safety of workers and affected communities and created the conditions for the country's industrialization, modernization and socioeconomic development. Obligations set forth in that law included the payment of fees, service charges, taxes and duties; the protection of the environment, natural resources and cultural heritage; and the payment of compensation for harm caused to communities.

15. One of the aims of the Law on Dam Safety of 2022 was to minimize the impact of hydroelectric projects on local communities. Before carrying out a project, investors and relevant authorities were required to conduct environmental and social impact assessments and to consult representatives of villages in affected areas. Impact assessments were reviewed by independent experts to determine whether they complied with the law. Depending on the scale of the project, investors would be required to make a financial contribution of up to \$1 million to a State fund, which would be used for the protection of the environment and biodiversity or for infrastructure development.

16. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Government recognized the important contribution made by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to national socioeconomic development and to the improvement of livelihoods. The Decree on International NGOs and its accompanying guidelines created favourable conditions for international NGOs to carry out their work. The Government was currently revising the Decree and expected to complete the process by the end of 2025. The Government held consultations every three months with the Network of International NGOs to take stock of progress, discuss emerging challenges and agree on future cooperation. The Government had not imposed any limits on the acceptance of funds or created any obstacles to cooperation between associations, foundations, international NGOs and foreign entities.

17. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that under the National Master Plan for Land Allocation and article 12 of the Land Law revised in 2019, 70 per cent of the country's territory must be preserved as forest coverage, with the other 30 per cent of land being used for other purposes. The provincial authorities had adopted land allocation plans aligned with the 70 per cent target. The Government had issued three decrees establishing the protection regimes for different types of forest. Under the Land Law and the Forestry Law, land use conversion required the approval of the National Assembly and the provincial authorities. In 2025, the Government had suspended the issuance of new mining licences and ordered a review of all projects and concessions that had already been approved or granted; operators that failed to fulfil their obligations could have their licences revoked. It was necessary to ensure that the proceeds of mining operations were fairly distributed so that the country as a whole benefited from activities.

18. The Lao People's Democratic Republic was a Party to the Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin of 1995, under which consent for hydroelectric projects must be sought from the other countries of the Lower Mekong Basin. The authorities conducted environmental and social risk assessments and consulted residents of affected villages and districts and neighbouring areas before deciding whether to approve projects. Should a project require the resettlement of affected persons, compensation would be paid in accordance with the Land Law and the Law on Resettlement and Vocation. In the case of the Luang Prabang hydropower project, the authorities had determined that several villages would be affected. Those villages were being rebuilt in new

locations, and resettled villagers would be provided with compensation, homes and agricultural land. New villages had schools, hospitals, asphalt roads and access to water and electricity.

19. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that scientific research had proved that many ethnic groups, including the Lao-Tai, Mon-Khmer and Khmu, had lived in harmony since the 1300s in what was now the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Throughout its history, the country had often been occupied by foreign forces, which had sought to divide and rule its people. However, the different groups had unified in the struggle against foreign aggressors, leading to the proclamation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The history of the country's ethnic groups was therefore very different from that of ethnic groups in other countries and continents.

20. **Mr. Palmisano** (Country Task Force) said that he would be grateful for clarification of whether the State Party had taken, or planned to take, legislative or other measures to ensure the recognition of de facto marital relationships and to increase awareness of the importance of marriage registration, in order to better protect the rights of vulnerable groups, such as women from rural areas and ethnic minorities.

21. He would be interested to know what steps had been taken to clear conflict-affected areas of landmines and to provide rehabilitation services for children who had been injured by explosive remnants of war. He wondered what assistance and support the State provided to child victims of sexual exploitation.

22. As the State Party had recognized, large-scale investment projects could have significant disadvantages for the people affected by them. He wished to know what plans had been made to ensure that the economic benefits of such projects extended beyond foreign investors and accrued to the Lao people. Given the country's vulnerability to climate change, he would appreciate information on any measures that had been taken or were planned for the support of farmers and disaster-displaced communities.

23. **Ms. Lee** (Country Task Force) said that she invited the State Party to take account of the Committee's statement on social protection floors ([E/C.12/2015/1](#)) when designing and improving the social welfare pillar of National Social Protection Strategy. The State Party's efforts to achieve universal health coverage were welcome; however, the World Bank had published data indicating that public spending on health remained lower than that of other countries in the region, while out-of-pocket payments at the point of care imposed a heavy burden on low-income households. She would therefore be interested to know what measures had been taken to increase public health funding and reduce out-of-pocket payments. She wondered what measures had been taken to improve the neonatal and under-5 mortality rates.

24. She would like to know whether the outcomes of environmental and social impact assessments conducted as part of megaprojects were published online. Lastly, she would appreciate the delegation's comments on reports that Hmong people encountered difficulties in obtaining identity documents, hindering their access to public services and social benefits.

25. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that, according to alarming figures from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the prevalence of stunting among children under 5 had shown no improvement since 2017 and remained at 33 per cent, while the prevalence of wasting had risen from 7 per cent to 11 per cent. He wished to know why so many children were going hungry, particularly in rural areas, and what the authorities were doing to address the problem.

26. Data from the International Land Coalition showed that, in recent years, large tracts of land had been sold to foreign investors, a trend that could have a significant impact on the local population. He would be grateful if the delegation could clarify the amount of land that had been sold and provide an overview of the current situation.

27. He would also appreciate further details concerning the relocation and resettlement of Lao citizens for development purposes, including information on the number and the treatment of people who had been resettled because of agricultural policies. He wondered whether such resettlement contributed to the high rates of stunting and wasting.

28. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that, in the light of reports of a lack of doctors in rural areas and of many qualified doctors seeking employment abroad, he would be interested to know what

percentage of the State budget was allocated to health. He would also like to know what progress had been made in achieving universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and whether partnerships with other countries or international organizations had been established for that purpose. How did the Government reconcile the legal requirement that 70 per cent of the country's territory must be forested with the allocation of land for major development projects, especially hydroelectric megaprojects?

29. **Ms. Chen** said she would like to know whether the health insurance system, which had covered 94 per cent of the population in September 2020, now covered the whole population, thereby meeting the goal of achieving universal coverage by 2025.

30. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would be grateful for additional information on any measures taken to combat trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation, in line with the recommendations made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its concluding observations of 2024 ([CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10](#)). In particular, she wished to know what measures were being taken to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring countries and international organizations to effectively combat trafficking at the regional level; and to strengthen the State Party's regulatory and law enforcement capacity to effectively monitor and control activities in the Golden Triangle special economic zone to prevent and prosecute cases of trafficking and related crimes. Information on the prosecution and conviction of perpetrators, and the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims, would be welcome.

31. The Committee had been informed that violence against women and girls was widespread in the State Party. It would therefore be useful to know whether the State Party provided shelter and support services for victims of violence, what funding had been set aside for that purpose, and whether the laws of the State Party provided for effective protection orders against violent partners or family members. Lastly, given that article 151 of the Civil Code explicitly prohibited same-sex marriage and therefore denied equal rights of LGBTIQ+ persons, she wondered whether the Government was planning or discussing any changes to that law, which was clearly discriminatory.

32. **Ms. Pérez** said that she wished to know how the State Party promoted an equitable distribution of unpaid work done in the home and whether it had any plans in place to support food self-sufficiency.

33. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to know whether the State Party measured multidimensional poverty and, if so, whether it applied the same indicators as the multidimensional poverty index developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and the United Nations Development Fund. He would also like to know whether the data obtained informed the development of government policies.

34. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that he wondered why the Committee had raised concerns about one particular ethnic group when there were 50 ethnic groups in the country. The rights of all ethnic groups were safeguarded.

35. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the former Minister of Justice and two former Deputy Ministers had been members of ethnic groups. The current Deputy Minister of Justice was a member of the Hmong ethnic group. No ethnic group was excluded from positions of responsibility in the Government.

36. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the authorities of a village were required to certify all persons living in that village. Members of ethnic groups would therefore not be denied social security because of a lack of identity documents.

37. While polygamy was allowed by some ethnic groups, the Government prohibited it to protect the rights of women. Under the Civil Code, persons could marry only after reaching the age of majority. Persons without a marriage certificate who lived together as husband and wife enjoyed legal protections, as did their children.

38. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that assistance was provided to victims of trafficking in persons and sexual abuse under the Law on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Children and the legislation against trafficking in persons. The assistance provided included temporary shelter, psychological, medical and

legal support and repatriation to the victim's home country. A victim-centred approach was taken. Victims of trafficking in persons identified by the police were referred to the Lao Women's Union for psychological, medical and legal assistance. The Union's counselling centres provided assistance to 300 victims of trafficking in persons, served as the victims' legal representatives in judicial proceedings, including those involving civil claims for compensation, and worked to raise awareness of the rights of victims of trafficking. Committees had been established at the central, provincial, district and village levels to address trafficking in persons. Bilateral anti-trafficking frameworks were in place with Thailand and with China, and the country had entered into a tripartite agreement with Viet Nam and Cambodia. The Government also addressed trafficking in persons in cooperation with ASEAN. The financial difficulties resulting from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had left the Government unable to adequately fund anti-trafficking activities, but it was working with international organizations to obtain the needed financial support.

39. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the cause of malnutrition was sometimes not a lack of food but a lack of awareness of how to prepare the food available. Long-term efforts were needed to address stunting. The health sector must promote the consumption of iodine and provide households with information on nutrition. The Government would revise and improve the National Plan of Action on Nutrition. Mortality rates in the country had declined. The measures taken to reduce those rates had included increased access to family planning services and the promotion of proper care during and after pregnancy.

40. **Mr. Abashidze** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to know how many children had been old enough to start school in 2025 and how many had actually started. He wondered what the main causes were of the low rate of school attendance and the high dropout rate, what was being done to address those causes and what results had been achieved. He would like to find out what the State Party was doing to address the teacher shortage, how large the budget allocated to educational infrastructure was, how many new schools were being built and what steps were being taken to ensure that schools had access to water, sanitation, electricity and the Internet. He wished to know how the children who had been studying at the schools that had been closed during the COVID-19 pandemic because of their lack of Internet access and inability to offer distance learning had been able to make up the schoolwork that they had missed. It would be helpful to know what mechanisms were in place to prevent corporal punishment in the education system, whether the languages of ethnic groups were used in schools, whether the State Party continued to operate boarding schools for minority groups. He wondered whether there was a practice of collecting informal fees in schools, how much of a demand there was for private schools in the country and whether private schools must meet the minimum State standards in education.

41. He wished to know whether children's cultural centres and families and villages designated as cultural families or cultural villages were entitled to benefits, including funding, from the Government; what was being done to ensure access to radio and television in rural and remote areas and the availability of programming in the languages of ethnic groups; whether the State budget included funding to support the cultural life of ethnic groups; and how the cultural sites of ethnic groups were protected. He would be grateful for detailed information on how the rights enshrined in the Covenant were integrated into the national education system.

*The meeting was suspended at noon and resumed at 12.05 p.m.*

42. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, in recent years, the State education budget had on average accounted for 10 to 13 per cent of gross domestic product per year. To address the teacher shortage, the Government was providing incentives for retired teachers to return to teaching and allowing civil servants and military officers to take up teaching positions. The Government's school lunch box policy, which was funded by the Government, international organizations and civil society organizations, helped keep students in school. The Government had a budget to provide scholarships and allowances to students from poor or large families. Twenty per cent of the national curriculum was allowed to be taught in the languages of the ethnic groups.

43. Since 2010, the Ministry of Education and Sports had had a policy of charging no school fees for the period of compulsory education. Before opening, private schools were required to be assessed by the Ministry and meet its standards. After they opened, the Ministry monitored them periodically. Schools that had been unable to access the online learning platform used by the Ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic had been given extra time after the pandemic to catch up with the curriculum. The Government was making an effort to expand Internet coverage in the country, but the country's mountainous terrain presented a significant challenge.

44. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that model cultural villages promoted the transfer of traditions from generation to generation. They fostered unity and generated direct benefits for the villages themselves. Before being awarded model cultural village status, villages needed to meet certain criteria and, after certification, they had to engage in certain activities, including setting up artisan and artistic performance groups, which attracted domestic tourists, thereby generating income. The Government did not provide a direct budget to the villages but rather provided them with indirect support, including through women's unions and youth organizations, which engaged in the development of the villages.

45. Children's cultural centres provided a forum for children, adolescents and young people, including those from different ethnic groups, to exchange with one another and present cultural performances. That helped them to build confidence and trust and, most importantly, gave them opportunities to use their free time for useful activities, removing them from situations in which they might be at risk of involvement in drug abuse. The centres helped children to learn about traditions and culture while also developing themselves. They were also involved in disseminating culture to other ethnic groups by promoting groups of performers who, through artistic performances, could generate income.

46. The Government had expanded the telecommunications network, including in remote areas, and had developed its roster of radio and television programmes. All villages had loudspeaker systems for information announcements, which greatly benefited persons living in remote areas. The Government had a policy to digitalize all radio and television channels to facilitate access to information. Based on the information available, 6.5 million people, or 85 per cent of the population, now had access to a mobile telephone network. A total of 4.7 million people, or more than 70 per cent of the total population, had access to the Internet.

47. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that there were no plans to establish a national human rights institution in accordance with the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the Paris Principles) because of capacity and resource constraints. Furthermore, the existing national human rights mechanism reflected actual conditions in the country. The Government would continue to exchange views and best practices with States that had already established such institutions in conformity with the Paris Principles.

48. The Government carefully reviewed the content of international treaties and their protocols, but the country was not yet in a position to ratify additional instruments, as further improvements to domestic legislation were required. That situation applied to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which the country had signed in 2008. Given that the State was already a Party to seven core human rights treaties, it faced significant challenges in meeting its reporting obligations, which demanded considerable time and resources.

49. The Lao People's Democratic Republic comprised 50 ethnic groups, all of which enjoyed equal rights without discrimination. No group was officially recognized as an Indigenous People.

50. **Ms. Lee** said she wished to know what measures the State Party was taking to address low pay as one of the root causes of teacher shortages, absenteeism and informal, illicit payments in schools. In that regard, she wondered whether the delegation could comment on the concern that the deployment of military personnel as substitutes for teachers risked undermining the neutral, civilian character and the quality of education. She also wondered what safeguards were in place to ensure that certification schemes for model families and

model cultural villages did not unduly influence ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities to abandon or alter their cultural practices.

51. **Mr. Bouzid** said that he would welcome clarification regarding tuition fees for university students. He also wished to know how many universities there were in the State Party, how many students and teachers there were in those universities and whether any Lao students were sent to study abroad.

52. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he would like to know about teachers' salaries in the country, in particular whether they were competitive and how they compared with the average salaries; whether they had a career plan and whether any teachers worked on an unpaid basis.

53. He wondered what degree of influence parents had in the design and implementation of school curricula and what measures the State Party took to ensure that students had access to a comprehensive education based on scientific evidence in various fields, including history, sex education and mathematics.

54. Information had been received indicating that several of the State Party's ethnic groups self-identified, or were often considered, as Indigenous Peoples, in particular the Khmu, Hmong, Akha, Lahu, Yao Mien and others from the Hmong, Khmer and Sino-Tibetan groups. He would welcome clarification on that matter.

55. **Ms. Rossi** said that he wished to know what programmes existed in schools and other educational settings, particularly in the most remote rural areas, concerning comprehensive sexual health education. She would also appreciate information on the legal framework governing voluntary termination of pregnancy and updated figures on maternal mortality.

56. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that before military personnel were assigned to teaching roles, the Ministry of Education and Sports provided them with training on teaching skills. Their deployment was part of a one-year pilot project that was limited to primary schools in remote areas that were difficult to access. Teachers' salaries depended on the budget of the provincial authorities. While there could occasionally be delays in payments, salaries were distributed on a regular basis and there had been no cases of non-payment.

57. There were five universities in the country, all of which fell under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Sports. They cooperated with international organizations and neighbouring countries to exchange experience and technical knowledge. The country had signed memorandums of understanding with many neighbouring and foreign educational institutions. Based on those agreements, Lao students were accepted to study abroad in countries such as the Russian Federation, Hungary, China, Viet Nam and Thailand.

58. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that, thanks to cooperation between the education and health sectors, sex education had been integrated into the national curriculum. In 2021, the Ministry of Health had issued a decision regulating surrogacy and abortion. That decision set out the conditions under which abortion was permitted, including serious health conditions, such as kidney disease; fetal abnormalities; stillbirth; rape; having four or more children; poverty; or being underage.

59. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that the Ministry of Education and Sports had adopted a national action plan on gender equality in 2022. The plan, which included measures on reproductive health, had been incorporated into the education sector's five-year plan. The Ministry also cooperated with international and civil society organizations to implement inclusive reproductive health programmes for adolescents, particularly those who had dropped out of school. The enrolment rate gap between boys and girls at the upper-secondary level stood at approximately 0.9 per cent.

60. **Mr. Caunhye** (Country Rapporteur) said that the Committee was pleased to have held a constructive dialogue with the State Party, which had provided valuable information and highlighted key factors affecting the realization of economic, social and cultural rights. He wished to thank the delegation for its active participation and to extend his appreciation to civil society and other stakeholders for their contributions to the review.

61. **A representative of the Lao People's Democratic Republic** said that he wished to thank the Committee for the opportunity given to his delegation to exchange views and information. In implementing the Covenant, all countries needed to take into account their specific historical and cultural contexts and their particular development needs. The Lao people had suffered from being victims of aggression by distant, powerful countries. While learning from history, the country was determined not to allow such tragedies to be repeated for future generations. Regarding the term “Indigenous People”, the people of his country had lived in harmony for thousands of years without discrimination on ethnic grounds. Some officials perceived the use of such terms as potentially divisive, suggesting a hierarchy among ethnic groups, which went against the solidarity and unity of the country. The focus should instead be on what could be done together to successfully fulfil obligations under the Covenant.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*