



Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

Distr.: General

13 May 2024

Original: English

Committee against Torture Seventy-ninth session

Summary record of the 2097th meeting*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 2 May 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Heller

Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 19 of the Convention
(*continued*)

Eighth periodic report of Finland

* No summary record was issued for the 2096th meeting.

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

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 19 of the Convention *(continued)*

Eighth periodic report of Finland ([CAT/C/FIN/8](#); [CAT/C/FIN/QPR/8](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Finland joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Finland**, introducing her country's eighth periodic report ([CAT/C/FIN/8](#)), said that Finland, like many States, had faced exceptional challenges during the reporting period, including the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and escalating security concerns in the region. However, the Government remained steadfast in its commitment to uphold human rights and combat all forms of torture, ensuring that everyone could trust that the principles of equality before the law and non-discrimination would be respected. The rule of law would be strengthened through the implementation of the Fourth National Action Plan on Fundamental and Human Rights. The State party's ongoing work to monitor and report on the human rights situation contributed to knowledge-based decision-making in that regard.
3. In follow-up to its 2023 statement on promoting equality and non-discrimination, the Government was preparing specific measures for its implementation to be carried out by the different government agencies. Starting from 2024, the decisions, conclusions and recommendations issued to Finland by international human rights bodies would be reviewed annually with a view to their implementation. The availability of a new database of the concluding observations of United Nations and regional bodies on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would facilitate civil society advocacy for the fulfilment of human rights commitments. To safeguard judicial independence, the National Courts Administration had been established as an agency separate from the Ministry of Justice.
4. On the country's eastern border, the Russian authorities were actively organizing the instrumentalized entry of third-country citizens with the aim of sowing discord and disunity in Europe and undermining support for Ukraine, thereby putting the health, safety and well-being of people at risk. The Government had therefore closed the country's eastern border and had so far been unable to agree upon a solution with the Russian border authorities. Currently no procedures were laid down either in national or international law for effectively combating such instrumentalized entry. While the situation was difficult for Russian citizens and dual nationals living in Finland, border security would be prioritized until a permanent solution could be found.
5. Asylum policy was aimed at improving the efficiency of the asylum system to ensure that the most vulnerable people could be assisted while preventing abuses. The Government had recently submitted a legislative package to Parliament designed to tighten asylum policy. It provided for the introduction of a new border procedure in accordance with the European Union Asylum Procedures Directive. That procedure would facilitate the return of unsuccessful applicants in a manner that would be in full compliance with the principle of non-refoulement.
6. A legislative amendment adopted in 2023 had strengthened the rights of victims of trafficking in persons by decoupling their entitlements to assistance from the progress of criminal proceedings. Anti-trafficking measures had been significantly reinforced in recent years with the establishment of a nationwide police anti-trafficking unit and network and the establishment of an anti-trafficking unit in the National Bureau of Investigation.
7. During the reporting period, appropriate sanitary facilities had been installed in all prison cells, and separate wards for juveniles had been established in a number of prisons and remand centres. The Government was preparing an action plan for improving victim support services, in general, and services for victims in connection with criminal proceedings, in particular.
8. Following an internal audit, the content of training for conscripts on the use of force was being updated with the help of legal experts. A similar audit of training on the same subject for public officials was planned. A national audit of military detention facilities was ongoing.

9. The Government had plans to build the capacity of national and local authorities to prevent and identify different types of violence. The second national implementation plan for the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) was under way. A national plan for the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) and an action plan for protecting children from experiencing violence had been adopted.

10. The Barnahus units established in 2019 and the implementation of the National Child Strategy also contributed to the protection of children from violence. A network of support centres for all victims of violence over the age of 16 years, regardless of gender, had been expanded. Since 2015, the number of shelters had increased from 19 to 29 and the number of spaces for families had risen from 114 to 230.

11. Recent legislative amendments had enhanced legal safeguards for psychiatric patients. Under the new provisions, involuntary treatment had to be authorized by an administrative decision, and patients could appeal against such decisions.

12. In April 2023, a new law on gender recognition had entered into force that strengthened the rights to self-determination, integrity of the person and privacy by eliminating the medical diagnosis and sterility requirements. Legal gender recognition was now based solely on a personal declaration by adult Finnish citizens and residents.

13. **The Chair** said that the Committee was aware of the exceptional circumstances faced by Finland owing to the ongoing armed conflict in the region. It would take note, of course, of comments by the delegation on sensitive issues, including migration. However, as a non-political body, the Committee did not take a position on conflicts involving other States. It would concentrate on its task of considering the State party's periodic report and making recommendations on the fulfilment of its obligations under the Convention.

14. **Mr. Tuzmukhamedov** (Country Rapporteur) said that the delegation's remarks relating to an exceptional situation on the State party's eastern border appeared to fall outside the scope of the reporting procedure under article 19 of the Convention and instead relate to a grievance concerning a third State, which would fall within the scope of the inter-State complaint procedure provided for under article 21. If the discussion were to be shifted to matters coming under article 21, then, as a citizen of that third State, he would be obliged to withdraw and the dialogue would need to be postponed. However, in the light of the Chair's remarks on the demarcation of the issues to be considered by the Committee and on the understanding that that differentiation would be respected, he would proceed, with the Chair's permission.

15. **The Chair** invited Mr. Tuzmukhamedov to proceed.

16. **Mr. Tuzmukhamedov** said that he would appreciate clarification as to whether the Constitution prohibited only torture or also the other types of ill-treatment covered by the Convention, as it was not entirely clear from the unofficial English translation of that document. Judging from the English translation of the Criminal Code, other offences falling under article 16 of the Convention appeared to figure only as aggravating circumstances rather than as crimes in their own right; if that was correct, an explanation of the legislative intent of not codifying them as separate offences would be of interest, as would information about any cases of prosecutions brought on charges of aggravated torture.

17. Would it be correct to assume, from a reading of sections 106 and 94 of the Constitution, that it prevailed over all other laws and international treaties? He was curious how conflicts between national law and an international treaty would be resolved by administrative bodies or courts. In view of several recent court judgments relying on European human rights instruments and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, he would like to hear about any court decisions relying on the Convention or citing the Committee's decisions, including those on individual communications against Finland.

18. He would be interested to learn more about the State party's practice with regard to diplomatic assurances in cases of extradition. He would like to know whether diplomatic and consular means were used to safeguard the rights of persons being removed from Finland to

their country of origin or a third country, including personal on-site visits by diplomats to verify the absence of torture or ill-treatment.

19. He had taken note of national court cases that had cited the European Convention on Extradition in their judgments on challenges to extradition requests. Could the delegation bring any cases to the Committee's attention where the national courts had drawn on the authority of the Convention against Torture? More recently, the Supreme Court had cited the European Convention on Human Rights in a case involving forced medication. He would be interested to learn about any similar cases in which the courts had referred to the Convention or the Committee's jurisprudence.

20. He wished to know whether the Convention was implemented directly or through a local law in the autonomous region of Åland. He wondered whether the parliament of Åland or the Sami Parliament had a post equivalent to the Helsinki-based Parliamentary Ombudsman. He would appreciate a response to the concerns raised by the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence regarding persistent discrimination, racism and hatred directed against Sami people and delays in amending the law on the Sami Parliament to bring it into compliance with international standards and the decisions of international human rights mechanisms.

21. He was interested in hearing about the lessons learned from the implementation of the National Roma Policy 2018–2022 and the status of the 2023–2030 version. In the light of the concerns expressed by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination regarding the intensification of hostile sentiments towards persons perceived to be of foreign background in the State party, he would welcome information on hate crimes based on victims' ethnic, racial or national origin and on the outcomes of any criminal proceedings initiated in those cases. He noted that discrimination in education, including restrictions on the study of minority languages or instruction in them, amounted to treatment that might cause mental suffering and that, in a recent judgment, the International Court of Justice had taken the view that language was often an essential social bond among the members of an ethnic group and that a decline in access to education in a minority language would produce a disparate adverse effect on the rights of the members of that minority.

22. While the State party's record in terms of ratification of core human rights treaties was commendable, he was curious why Finland continued to refrain from acceding to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families.

23. He had difficulty accepting the State party's argument, as expressed in its report, that there was no need to remove the statute of limitations for the offence of torture because the Convention did not expressly prohibit it. The existence of a statute of limitations for the offence of torture was, in any event, contrary to article 29 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, according to which crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court were not subject to any statute of limitations – an argument that Finland, as a party to the Rome Statute, had itself made in its fourth national report for the universal periodic review. Similarly contradictory was the State party's assertion that the Convention did not require torture to be defined as an international offence under States parties' national law since, in fact, the decree regulating the application of the relevant section of the Criminal Code explicitly listed torture, among other acts, as being an international offence in keeping with the Rome Statute and the four Geneva Conventions. He would welcome the delegation's comments on those discrepancies.

24. The State party was invited to provide up-to-date information on training programmes designed to ensure that all law enforcement officials, prison staff and border guards were fully acquainted with the provisions of the Convention. An update on any training focused on crisis prevention, crisis management and post-crisis relief and recovery would also be of interest. Detailed information would be appreciated on the training provided to judges, prosecutors, forensic doctors and medical personnel dealing with detained persons, including migrants in an irregular situation, in the detection and documentation of the physical and psychological signs of torture. He would appreciate clarification on the extent to which such training took into account the Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Istanbul

Protocol), especially in the light of the statement made in the report that the Manual was not used in training for reception centre staff, the police or border guards. Given the lack of measures to assess the effectiveness and impact of training regarding the Convention, which hindered the effective implementation of its article 10, it would be useful to hear what conclusions had been drawn from the supervisor oversight and performance appraisal process mentioned in paragraph 86 of the report. It would also be useful to learn about any training regarding the Convention and other relevant international norms provided to military personnel concerning their obligations in times of peace or armed conflict, both at home and abroad, and about training on this topic delivered through international assistance programmes.

25. Lastly, the Committee would appreciate a more substantive reply to its question regarding the action taken pursuant to the Government's May 2019 report on observations and recommendations for local cooperation on the referral mechanism regarding persons of concern in local multi-stakeholder collaboration on preventing violent radicalization.

26. **Ms. Maeda** (Country Rapporteur) said that the Committee wished to better understand why the State party believed that establishing the national preventive mechanism as a separate entity under the Parliamentary Ombudsman would not be appropriate or efficient. Information would be welcome on the measures taken to ensure that the selection and appointment process for the Director of the Human Rights Centre was transparent and participatory. What institutional reforms were planned to address the recommendations made by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) and the Committee's previous concluding observations?

27. Amid reports that the number of prisoners, including those on remand, was projected to increase significantly, that all closed prisons were already at capacity and that a majority of prisoners were elderly, information would be appreciated on the causes of the overcrowding and on the State party's policy regarding alternatives to detention in line with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures (the Tokyo Rules).

28. As the duration of remand often reportedly exceeded the seven-day limit in practice, she wished to know how much time elapsed between a person's arrest and the court's decision concerning their placement on remand, what percentage of remand prisoners were held in police facilities, what the status of the plan to transfer responsibility for remand prisoners from the police to the administrative branch was and what measures were in place to keep the responsibility for criminal investigations and for custodial arrangements separate.

29. The Committee would appreciate a reply concerning how non-resident foreign nationals who did not speak Finnish were notified of their rights upon arrest, how quickly their families were notified of their detention and how and when consular officials of their country of origin were notified.

30. The delegation was invited to provide data on the number of cases in which interviews conducted during the pretrial investigation phase had been recorded and the number of suspects who had refused to be recorded, as well as information on the findings of the assessment of video recording procedures and practices.

31. She would be interested to hear about the system for monitoring the use of electric stun guns and wished to know what law regulated their use and what the penalties for their misuse were. With reference to reports of incidents involving the use of pepper spray by police against participants in peaceful protests, including children, she wished to learn more about the measures used to ensure that the use of force was in line with the principles of necessity and proportionality. Did training programmes cover the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, the United Nations Human Rights Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement and the Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests?

32. She would be grateful to receive an update on the results of the investigation into the death in custody of a man after the police had used an electric discharge weapon on him. She would also be grateful for statistics on deaths in custody during the period under review, disaggregated by place of detention, sex, age, ethnicity or nationality and cause of death, as

well as information on the status of the National Police Board guidelines for reporting deaths in custody, on the process for informing the relatives of the deceased and on cases that had been investigated and prosecuted, including the verdicts handed down and any compensation awarded.

33. She would like to know if a new policy had been adopted that incorporated the principle that juveniles should be detained only as a last resort and for the shortest time possible, subject to regular review. Information would also be welcome on any measures to prevent juveniles from being subjected to torture, ill-treatment or corporal punishment in keeping with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the Beijing Rules) and the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty. She would also like to learn more about the measures, including training on children's rights, in place to prevent adolescents from being harassed by staff at detention facilities and to address the special needs of children in conflict with the law, including in terms of education, rehabilitation and reintegration. Could the delegation provide the current number of juveniles deprived of their liberty and confirm that all detained juveniles were held separately from adults?

34. In view of the fact that National Police Board instructions left the decision as to whether or not to carry out health checks on persons held in police custody for more than 24 hours to the discretion of the police department concerned, that police officers were not necessarily aware that detainees should be informed of their right to medical care and that not all police detention facilities were regularly visited by nurses or other health-care professionals, it would be helpful to hear more about the reform of health-care services for detainees that had come into effect in September 2023 and the policies and measures in place to ensure access to health care in places of detention.

35. While the Committee welcomed the amendment of the definition of the offence of rape to align it with human rights standards, it was concerned that when sexual offences, including rape, were committed by persons who were abusing their position of authority, those offences remained categorized as sexual abuse and thus carried a lesser sentence. Accordingly, the delegation was invited to provide further information to the Committee about the State party's plans for a comprehensive reform of legislation governing rape and other sexual offences. Amid reports of underfunding and other challenges, she would welcome information on efforts to improve access to shelters for victims, including those with disabilities.

36. The Committee was concerned to note that the Finnish Migration Service had cancelled the residency permit of a foreign national who had separated from her spouse, even though she had done so because the spouse had subjected her to domestic violence. In view of that situation, she would welcome information on the State party's procedure for renewing the residency permits of victims of domestic violence or violence against women and would like to know whether such decisions were left to the discretion of migration authorities.

37. In January 2023, responsibility for providing social, health-care and rescue services had been transferred from the municipalities to the well-being services counties, which were said to be facing serious financial difficulties. She would be grateful for information on the impact of that transfer on the delivery of the services in question.

38. The Committee would welcome up-to-date data on investigations conducted, prosecutions initiated and convictions secured in cases involving violence against women and domestic violence. The delegation might also describe any measures being taken to promptly and effectively investigate cases of sexual abuse and harassment and to ensure that victims could file complaints and had access to free legal aid, medical assistance, psychosocial counselling and rehabilitation services.

39. She wondered whether any steps were being taken to establish an inclusive action plan for safeguarding the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in line with the recommendations made by Iceland, Spain and the Kingdom of the Netherlands during the most recent universal periodic review of Finland. In view of the fact that the Sterilization Law permitted the sterilization of women with mental disabilities whose legal capacity had

been restricted or removed without their consent, she would like to learn of any measures being taken to protect women and girls with disabilities against sexual violence and abuse.

40. According to information received by the Committee, detention facilities often did not have complaints boxes, and procedures for following up on complaints were very slow. She would therefore be grateful to hear about any steps being taken to improve prisoners' access to complaint mechanisms and the efficacy of those mechanisms. The delegation might also provide statistics on the types of internal complaints made and the institutional procedures for recording, reviewing and forwarding complaints to the respective authorities. What was being done to ensure the allocation of a stable flow of sufficient funding for rehabilitation services for torture survivors, including services for child and adolescent victims of torture?

41. She wished to know whether it was the case that appeals filed by persons who were not citizens of a European Union member State against decisions rejecting a residency application had no suspensive effect unless otherwise decided by the administrative courts. Was it true that appeals against the rejection of an asylum application lodged with the Supreme Administrative Court did not have a suspensive effect?

42. Under the Aliens Act, a decision on denial of admittance or stay could be enforced if the person concerned was considered to be "a danger to public order or security". She would be interested to know what was meant by that phrase. According to the State party's report, the submission of a second application for residency did not prevent the enforcement of a decision to deny admittance or stay issued in connection with the first application (CAT/C/FIN/8, para. 52). One of the criteria for the admissibility of the second application appeared to be that it should include new elements or findings, and she would appreciate clarification as to how the Finnish Immigration Service determined whether that was the case and what kinds of documents it consulted in making that decision. If the Service decided that there were no new elements, did the foreign national in question have the right to appeal and, if so, would the appeal have a suspensive effect?

43. The delegation was invited to describe any measures being taken to ensure that national laws and regulations governing appeals procedures respected the principle of non-refoulement. It might also provide statistics on the number of applications for asylum submitted to the authorities, the number that had been accepted and rejected, the number of appeals submitted against decisions to deny an application and the number of such appeals that had been successful. Did applicants for asylum have access to legal aid?

44. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had expressed concern about the Government's plans to amend the Aliens Act to expand the grounds on which the State party could expel a refugee who was lawfully resident in Finland. The Committee would be grateful to learn how the State party would ensure respect for the principle of non-refoulement enshrined in article 3 of the Convention under the planned amendment.

45. **Ms. Racu** said that she would welcome information on the initiative to transfer responsibility for remand prisoners to the Criminal Sanctions Agency by 2025. In particular, she wished to know whether the initiative would entail any change to the State party's prison infrastructure or to the length of time during which a person could be held on remand. The Committee would welcome up-to-date information on access to training, education and social rehabilitation schemes for young persons in pretrial detention and those serving custodial sentences.

46. The Committee was concerned to note that the right to engage in outdoor exercise was not provided for either in the Mental Health Act or in national laws governing psychiatric institutions and social care homes, including homes for older persons. She wished to know whether the State party would take steps to ensure that right for residents of those institutions and what steps the State party took or planned to take to ensure that residents of psychiatric institutions enjoyed the right to appeal against being secluded, restrained, given medication against their will or placed under observation.

47. She would be grateful for information on the procedures used to determine whether residents of psychiatric institutions and care homes, including homes for older persons, should be secluded or restrained and on the time limits applicable to seclusion and restraint.

The State party might describe any measures being taken to ensure that legislation on the use of seclusion and restraint was in compliance with international standards and that those standards were always adhered to in practice.

48. **Mr. Vedel Kessing** said that the Committee welcomed the State party's decision to establish a publicly accessible database of the concluding observations issued by treaty bodies. He would be grateful for information on the Government's annual review of its efforts to implement the recommendations made in those observations. Did the Government publish a report based on the review and had the review served as a basis for any specific decisions made in that regard?

49. Given that overcrowding in remand centres appeared to be a particular problem in Finland, he wondered what steps were being taken to build new facilities and ensure that prisons would have sufficient staff to meet current and future staffing requirements. The Committee was concerned to note that the new bill on immigration, if passed into law, would reportedly not uphold the principle of non-refoulement in all cases and might allow for collective expulsions, in violation of Protocol No. 4 to the European Convention on Human Rights. He wished to know whether the Committee's concerns in that respect were justified and, if so, whether the Government intended to formally derogate from the relevant obligations under European and international law.

50. **Mr. Rouwane** said that he would appreciate an explanation of what was meant by the term "intensified travel ban", which was described as "an alternative to remand imprisonment" in the State party report (CAT/C/FIN/8, paras. 25 and 39). It might also clarify whether young persons serving a "sentence of unconditional imprisonment" (CAT/C/FIN/8, para. 37) would have no possibility of being granted parole or temporary release as a reward for good conduct.

51. **Mr. Iscan** said that, in view of the State party's long-standing support for United Nations human rights mechanisms and the ongoing United Nations liquidity crisis, he wished to know whether the Government planned to take steps to help to ensure the sustainable functioning of those mechanisms, including within the framework of the resolution that the General Assembly was expected to approve in December 2024.

52. **Mr. Liu** said that he wished to know what alternative measures to detention were being implemented, what the impact of those measures was and whether the State party would consider introducing other measures, such as electronic monitoring devices, as an alternative to detention. He wondered whether forced marriage would be established as a separate offence in the Criminal Code and whether the definition of trafficking in persons in the Criminal Code covered all forms of trafficking, including trafficking for the purposes of economic and sexual exploitation. The Committee would be interested to know how the State party assessed the implementation of the law on trafficking, whether victims who committed offences as a result of having been trafficked were exonerated from punishment and whether any statistics in that connection were available.

The meeting was suspended at noon and resumed at 12.20 p.m.

53. **A representative of Finland** said that, after careful consideration, the State party's decision not to accede to the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families was unchanged. If it were to become a party to that Convention, the number of reservations that it would have to enter would render accession incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention itself, since, under Finnish law, migrant workers were not differentiated from other migrants and enjoyed the same constitutional rights.

54. The annual review of all decisions and recommendations issued to Finland by international human rights bodies would provide the Government with an overall picture of all such guidance for the first time. Since that review was a new initiative, it was not yet known exactly how it would be conducted. The expectation was that the database on recommendations and concluding observations would be a very helpful, easy-to-use tool for all stakeholders, since it could be searched using combinations of various filters, such as the issuing committee, year, theme and keyword. Currently, all the material was in Finnish, but an English version would become available.

55. **A representative of Finland** said that, in order to address overcrowding, the remand prison at Vantaa was being expanded and a new prison building that included accommodations for remand prisoners was being built in Oulu. The new facilities at both locations would open in 2025 or perhaps earlier. Additional resources for the recruitment of staff for the Prison and Probation Service – the new name of what had formerly been called the Criminal Sanctions Agency – had been made available, but more resources were needed. Training programmes for prison staff and for staff of the Prison and Probation Service covered the provisions of the Convention.

56. Her Government was well aware of the need to have remand prisoners moved from police detention facilities immediately following their arraignment, which was one of the reasons why new prison facilities were being built. Budget constraints had delayed the passage of the corresponding legislation, however. That legislation had not been set aside, but it had been deferred as a result, and it would therefore not enter into force in 2025 as initially hoped.

57. Finland made a great deal of use of alternatives to incarceration. Approximately half of all convicted offenders served at least part of their sentence as community service. Alternatives to remand prison had also been developed. Travel bans were one example. The difference between a simple and an intensified travel ban was that the latter was monitored using electronic tagging and GSM technology. Between the entry into force of the legislation providing for the use of intensified travel bans in 2019 and 15 April 2024, the courts had issued 521 simple travel bans and 31 intensified travel bans. Approximately one third of those bans had been imposed on minors in order to avoid their incarceration while investigations were ongoing.

58. New prison wings or wards for minors had been built in 2022 and 2023 but, for a number of reasons, it was unfortunately true that not all minors were held separately from adult prisoners. One reason was that, under European Union directive 2016/800 on procedural safeguards for children in criminal proceedings, a minor who turned 18 while in detention should remain in the wing or ward for juveniles if that was in the child's best interest and not in conflict with the best interests of the juveniles being held with that person. Another reason was that, even though they were few in number (as of May 2024, 5 juveniles were serving a prison sentence and 51 were being held on remand), some belonged to different gangs and therefore, due to safety concerns, could not be held in the same cells or wards, which had only four to six beds each. It was hoped that the new facilities under construction could be opened soon and would remedy the situation.

59. The Criminal Code provided for conditional release to be applied automatically after an adult prisoner had served two thirds of his or her sentence. If the offence had been committed when a person was under 21 years of age, conditional release began after one half of the sentence or, for first-time offenders, one third of the sentence had been served. In addition, there was a system for the early release of a convicted person on a probationary basis under supervision for at most six months before his or her conditional release in order to promote the person's social adjustment. There were thus many ways in which the country was working to reduce prison overcrowding and, above all, the incarceration of juveniles.

60. Compulsory education in Finland had been extended until the age of 18 or until the completion of a general secondary or vocational qualification for all children, including those in conflict with the law. School programmes were in place at least in the prisons in Helsinki, Vantaa and Turku, which were the largest facilities.

61. The recent amendments to the laws on sexual offences had generally been well received. Parliament had stipulated that a follow-up analysis should be undertaken five years after the new laws had entered into force. A very helpful website, which included an English-language version, had been created that provided information on sexual offences; the delegation would provide that link to the Committee.

62. A question had been asked about the procedure for the selection and appointment of the Director of the Human Rights Centre. Anyone could apply for that position, and every candidate would be interviewed by the Parliamentary Ombudsman and his or her advisers. The only difference from other selection procedures was that the opinion of the Constitutional Law Committee of Parliament was requested prior to the candidate's appointment.

63. **A representative of Finland** said that the National Police Board had issued a specific directive in July 2020 regarding police action in cases of domestic violence, intimate partner violence and violence against women, along with a practical manual on dealing with and preventing domestic violence. A field handbook had also been prepared for use by first responders in cases of domestic violence. A new directive issued on 1 November 2023 regarding prioritization of pretrial investigations and decision-making strengthened the judiciary's response to crimes against women. All of those directives had been supported by extended, intensive in-service training sessions.

64. In the curricula of the Police University College, all of which were posted on the College's website, dealings with all categories of vulnerable persons were a cross-cutting theme. The Board and the College had jointly organized a train-the-trainer course on the new laws concerning sexual offences and restraining orders. In addition, police officers had taken part in a multi-professional online course on domestic violence held by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare.

65. With regard to the reporting of hate crimes, the online platform on which members of the public could report a crime had recently been improved to accommodate all categories of vulnerable persons and to make it very easy to use. The Police University College closely monitored activity relating to hate crimes and issued its findings in the form of comprehensive annual reports. It did not typically disaggregate data by ethnicity but did so if changing trends made the situation of a given ethnic group relevant. On 1 December 2023, the Police Board had issued a new directive on the identification, investigation and recording of suspected hate crimes. Extensive training was given to police officers on recognizing and dealing with hate crimes, and such training was an integral part of the curricula at the Police University College.

66. The use of force by the police was monitored on an ongoing basis by the National Police Board, the Ministry of Interior and the Parliamentary Ombudsman. An effort was being made to improve the compilation of statistics on the use of force in order to ensure comprehensive reporting. Determining if certain cases constituted use-of-force situations or not was one challenge in that regard. Another was categorizing responses to the recent sharp increase in the use of violence against the police. The Board would report to the Ministry on the work being done to improve those statistics in September.

67. The Police Act contained highly detailed provisions stipulating what level of force police officers were to use under a given set of circumstances. The factors used to make that determination included, for example, the importance and urgency of the operation, the level of danger to the police and the public involved, and specific characteristics of the person or persons in question. The principles of proportionality and minimum intervention were embedded in the law.

68. The use of electric stun guns was closely monitored. Under the directive on the safe use of such devices in effect since 1 January 2023, they could not be used on children, older adults or pregnant persons. They were also not to be used on intoxicated persons since they were unlikely to have the desired result.

69. On the subject of deaths in police custody, all police detention units everywhere in the country were monitored closely by both the Police Board and the Ministry of the Interior. Work was being done to ensure that reliable and exact statistics were available for 2019–2023 as a basis for further analysis. A working group had been set up to formulate amendments to the laws governing the treatment of persons in police custody but, unfortunately, those amendments had not been approved by Parliament.

70. The National Counter-Terrorism Strategy for 2022–2025 focused on preventing terrorism by addressing its root causes. Efforts were also directed at maintaining a high level of preparedness in order to strengthen society's capacity for recovering from terrorist incidents. The Strategy was based on respect for human rights and was aligned with the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the European Union. The Second National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalization and Extremism had covered the period 2016–2023, and the preparation of the third action plan was under way. Many different government and non-governmental organizations and civil society representatives were involved in that effort. The idea was for

the underlying causes of radicalization and extremism to be tackled by society as a whole and as early as possible so that the involvement of law enforcement authorities would not be necessary.

The meeting rose at 1.00 p.m.