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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Sixty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1585th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,

on Tuesday, 5 August 2003, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. DIACONU

CONTENTS

SOLEMN DECLARATION BY A NEWLY ELECTED MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE UNDER RULE 14 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Initial report and second, third and fourth periodic reports of Albania (continued)

ORGANIZATIONAL AND OTHER MATTERS (continued)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

SOLEMN DECLARATION BY A NEWLY ELECTED MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE UNDER RULE 14 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE

In accordance with rule 14 of the rules of procedure, Mr. AVTONOMOV, newly elected member of the Committee, made the following solemn declaration:

"I solemnly declare that I will perform my duties and exercise my powers as a member of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination honourably, faithfully, impartially and conscientiously."

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report and second, third and fourth periodic reports of Albania (continued) (CERD/C/397/Add.1)

At the invitation of the Chairman, the members of the delegation of Albania resumed their places at the Committee table.

Mr. SKAPI (Albania) reaffirmed his Government's commitment to reforms aimed at consolidating democracy and respect for human rights, strengthening the rule of law and combating organized crime, illegal trafficking and corruption, in accordance with the Stabilization and Association Agreement. Albania was about to sign with the European Union.

Replying to Committee members' questions on paragraphs 1 to 68 of the report (CERD/C/397/Add.1), he said his Government was aware of the correlation between poverty and racial discrimination and was working on a national strategy on social and economic development, implementation of which would help solve human rights problems in general and those related to discrimination in

particular.

The forthcoming local elections should have no adverse effect on the situation in the country.

His Government was aware of the problems regarding dissemination of the Convention and had employed various methods to raise awareness among the general public and the staff of State institutions. The Convention was now taught at various levels of education, including in universities.

Turning to general points regarding implementation of articles 2 to 7 of the Convention (paragraphs 69 to 286 of the report), he said the statistical data on minorities had been based on the 1989 population and housing census. The reasons for excluding the nationality criterion in the 2001 census had been technical, not political, and had been approved by the European Commission, among others. Nationality had, on the other hand, been included in a recent living standard survey carried out as part of Albania's economic and social development strategy, with the support of the World Bank: the data would be published in the near future.

The Roma and the Aromanians had been recognized as linguistic minorities because neither of those groups had a homeland. Such recognition did not run counter to the provisions of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe. With regard to national minorities, which were not defined in Albanian law, recognition was based on the objective and subjective criteria established in the relevant international conventions. The Aromanians could not be said to fulfil the subjective criterion: as was the case throughout the Balkans, the Aromanians had merged with the population at large and, although to some extent they had preserved their language and cultural traditions, the majority of them did not speak or understand that language and indeed did not claim the status of national minority. It was thus difficult to establish a distinction between Aromanians and the rest of the population.

With regard to the self-styled "Egyptians", he said that, according to the Egyptian Government, that community was ethnically unrelated to Egyptians and Egypt recognized no such minority in Albania. Unlike the nomadic Roma, who had their own language and ethnic characteristics, "Egyptians" were settled, did not have their own language and were fully integrated in Albanian society. Again, the relevant subjective and objective criteria accepted by the Council of Europe were not fulfilled.

Nowhere did Albanian law use the term "minority zone"; the rights of national minorities were recognized throughout Albania, without discrimination on geographical grounds.

No cases of people trafficking had been recorded since August 2002, thanks to the Government's programme to combat all forms of trafficking. Rehabilitation centres had been established for victims.

Mr. NAQE (Albania) said that, under the Constitution, international instruments ratified by Albania prevailed over domestic legislation. The third sentence of paragraph 66 of the report referred to treaties whose implementation depended on the adoption of domestic legislation.

It was hoped that procedures recently initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would lead to a declaration under article 14 of the Convention.

On the question of article 18, paragraph 3, of the Constitution, he pointed out that Albania's Constitution had been drafted in collaboration with various international bodies. No judgements regarding that particular provision had been handed down by the Constitutional Court, the body with the authority to interpret the Constitution.

Turning to the subject of administrative structures for dealing with minorities, he said one of the duties of the Office for Minorities within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to monitor Albania's compliance with its international obligations in the field of national minority rights. Other duties of that Office included: developing an official dialogue with minority groups in order to remain aware of their demands and problems; bringing to the Government's attention any problems or complaints raised; supporting the activities of minority groups aimed at developing their cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic identity; and fostering a climate of inter-ethnic understanding.

The Division for National Minorities within the Ministry of Local Government and Decentralization was responsible for finding solutions to any problems facing minorities, in cooperation with other relevant ministries; for gathering information on the situation of minorities with a view to establishing policy; and for dealing with issues relating to the effective participation of national minorities in the decision-making process.

Educational issues were dealt with by an education inspector.

The Government had laid the foundations for constructive dialogue with minorities. A recent meeting organized by the Office for Minorities between the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and representatives of minorities' associations had created the right perspective for identifying and solving the problems facing minorities, and further meetings had been held with associations of different minority groups. On the basis of those meetings, the Office had drafted a platform policy document setting forth the Government's position on minorities' demands, their present status and aspirations, the scope of government policy and the responsible institutions. The platform was intended as a basis for a comprehensive working programme for all the existing structures dealing with minority issues, as well as improving the general situation of minorities in Albania.

Lastly, he said that, also in the interests of dialogue and transparency, the opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities on the implementation of the Framework Convention in Albania had been translated into minority languages.

Mr. NINA (Albania) said the national strategy for the improvement of Roma living conditions had been submitted to the Government for final approval.

His delegation had attempted to address the issue of cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the previous meeting. It had no further information regarding the Committee's general recommendation XXV on gender-related dimensions of racial discrimination.

With regard to implementation of article 2 of the Convention, he said his Government had taken serious steps to combat terrorism, in particular following the attacks of 11 September 2001. Its actions had had no negative implications for the implementation of the Convention.

Relying to questions on the implementation of article 7, he said the unofficial figure for Albanian citizens living outside Albania was 7 million, but more precise information would be provided at a later date.

Albanian was a separate branch of the Indo-European family of languages. It had officially adopted its Roman alphabet in 1908.

There was no information concerning the killing of German prisoners of war during or after the Second World War. His delegation had no comment on information received by the Committee concerning violations of the Convention by Serbian authorities in respect of Kosovars prior to the 1999 conflict in Kosovo.

In his delegation's view, the statement in paragraph 107 of the report, to the effect that the Roma were not subject to discrimination, was not in any way contradicted by the adoption of the national strategy.

Albania's legislation on non-public education did not prevent members of national minorities from opening schools. They were subject to the same rules as other Albanians in that regard. As yet there were no non-public schools open only to members of minorities; there were, however, schools operating in minority languages that were open to the population at large.

Members of minorities were fully eligible to stand in the forthcoming local elections, either individually or as party representatives.

With regard to access to the media and the level of media coverage of minorities' problems, the authorities were considering the possibility of subsidizing initiatives to increase the airtime devoted to minorities in the public media. In accordance with the principles of media freedom, however, the State had very little power to intervene in such a way in the independent media, whose activities were limited only by their financial resources. Limited access was due rather to the financial problems that affected all Albanians regardless of religion or nationality. Various minorities had applied for broadcasting licences.

The restitution of property belonging to religious communities was carried out with no discrimination whatsoever. The difficulties encountered applied to all sectors of the population. In accordance with the Constitution, legislation on the restitution of property had been drafted and would shortly be submitted to Parliament. The adoption of such legislation would represent an important reform in minority affairs.

Ms. GJATA (Albania) said the Government accepted that improvements needed to be made to the legal framework covering minorities, particularly in the use of traditional names, street names and signs. A number of consultations had been held with NGO representatives for the drafting of Albania's report, and their opinions had been taken into account.

Turning to a number of issues, she said that her delegation had no further comment on the interpretation of article 265 of the Criminal Code. There was no information concerning restrictions to the right of access under article 5 (f) of the Convention. Current legislation on political parties did not prevent parties being created on an ethnic basis. The Party for Human Rights did not represent minority groups only, but a broader community. Under Albanian law, non-Albanian citizens and stateless persons were not entitled to vote. Her delegation could not provide any further information on efforts to raise public awareness concerning the Office of the People's Advocate.

The idea behind paragraph 123 (c) of the report was the creation of a Roma identity that took due account of historical and cultural values. That was one of the main goals of the strategy. Her delegation could supply no further data concerning the application of articles 75 and 253 of the Criminal Code. With regard to the monitoring mechanism provided by the Code of Administrative Procedures in discrimination cases involving administrative officials, she said any citizen was entitled to submit a complaint to the superiors of such officials or to the courts. Civil servants were given regular training in non-discrimination at the Civil Service Training Institute. One aim of the national strategy for the Roma was to improve the Roma's health conditions, thereby reducing infant mortality rates. The threshold for obtaining seats in Parliament had recently been reduced from 4 per cent to 2 per cent.

With regard to self-identification in accordance with the Committee's general recommendation VIII, she pointed out that, according to article 20 of the Constitution, each person had the right freely to express his or her own ethnic identity, in accordance with article 3 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, although such freedom could not be purely subjective. That was also clear from the Commentary on the Framework Convention, which stated that subjective choice was closely linked with some objective aspect of the person's identity. One criterion for the definition of a national minority was that members should exhibit ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics that distinguished them from the rest of the population. It was not merely a matter of personal choice, as was the case with affiliation to a religious community. National or ethnic affiliation must be based on objective criteria also, as established in all the relevant instruments of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). To take account only of the subjective element would lead to an artificial increase in the minority population.

She said that Albania was currently an open and religiously tolerant society and that there was no link between freedom to practise a religion and ethnicity. With regard to minorities, she said estimates of the percentage of minorities living in Albania ranged from 2 to 20 per cent. Her Government was still studying accession to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

Ms. EMINI (Albania) recalled that the Office of the People's Advocate or Ombudsman had been established in June 2000 to hear

complaints from citizens regarding violation of their rights by the administration. No survey had been undertaken to date on the question of national minorities or discrimination against them, in part because there had been no complaints and in part because of the many other duties related to the Office. Some complaints had, however, been received from non-governmental organizations concerning the rights of national minorities. In one case, a complaint had been made that in the Saranda district a police officer from the Vlachs minority had been dismissed because of his ethnic origin; after investigation, the Ombudsman had determined that the officer had been dismissed for professional misconduct and was being prosecuted for abuse of his office. Another complaint involved illegal acts committed in Saranda by the police against two members of the Vlachs community; that case had been turned over to the military prosecutor.

In addition, the Macedonian Youth and Women's Association had complained of discrimination replies against its members in the press; unfortunately, despite a request, no official complaint had been made to the Ombudsman and no investigation had therefore been undertaken. In February 2002 there had been press reports of ethnically motivated violence against two Roma by a group of youths; on investigation the Ombudsman had determined that the violence had not been ethnically motivated.

Generally speaking, the Ombudsman had not received any individual complaints from minority groups regarding violation of their rights. The largest national minority, the Greek minority, was concentrated mostly in southern Albania, in Gjirokaster, and the Ombudsman was studying the possibility of appointing a local representative, although to date no complaint had been submitted. As for the Roma, the Meçkare and Kallbuxhini tribes were better integrated in the education system.

With regard to the prevention of religious propaganda, she pointed out that any kind of propaganda which incited racial or ethnic hatred or turmoil or disturbed public order was prohibited. She noted that the Bektashians, an Islamic sect, were free to practise their religion. Finally, she said that there was no indication that ethnic minorities had been worse affected by the increase in unemployment caused by the privatization process.

Mr. KOçi (Albania), speaking with regard to minority education rights, said there was no discrimination against the Roma minority, although some Roma children did not regularly attend school on account of their economic situation or parental resistance. His Government had instituted a strategy to improve the situation of the Roma, and the Ministry of Education had established programmes for Roma children aimed at making the Roma more aware of the importance of education. Those programmes included pre-school initiatives, modern schools with modern laboratories, occupational training, subsidies for poor Roma children, free books and materials and special programmes in universities. The Greek minority was in fact a privileged group with its own primary and secondary schools and teachers. Two universities, including the University of Tirana, had departments of Greek culture and language.

Turning to the area of freedom of religion, which was protected by the Constitution, he recalled that Albania was a signatory to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Land and property had been returned to the churches and their respective religious communities. The Greek Orthodox minority was of course headed by a member of the Greek Orthodox community and the Orthodox Church actively promoted its rights. Although there had been two incidents relating to outward displays of religion, including one involving a Muslim girl's right to wear a headscarf, those incidents had been resolved by the Ombudsman and the Ministry of Education and outward displays of religion were fully tolerated.

Mr. SKAPI (Albania) said his delegation had endeavoured to paint an honest picture of the situation in Albania. Although it had not been able to provide information in response to all the Committee's questions, full responses would be provided in future reports. He assured the Committee that its recommendations and observations would be communicated to his authorities.

Mr. THORNBERRY voiced concerns about the use of so-called objective criteria to define minorities, for example the suggestion that the Vlachs or Roma could not be considered national minorities because they had no motherland, or that Vlachs did not belong to a linguistic minority because they did not have their own language. The State party should reflect on how conditions outside Albania affected the status of minorities inside Albania. What the State party's reaction would be, for example, if Roma leaders declared the Roma to be a non-territorial nation in Europe.

While he recognized that Albanian society had become more open and tolerant, he had to point out that the use of so-called objective criteria was not in keeping with the Committee's general recommendation VIII or with the Framework Convention for the Protection of Minorities. It was not up to a State to assign an identity to minorities; the right to assert one's identity was a human right which had been defended by the Committee in the past and by other international bodies and instruments. The State party, in keeping with its new receptiveness to international standards regarding minority rights, should reflect on its use of objective criteria to identify minorities.

The CHAIRMAN speaking in his personal capacity, reminded the delegation of its responsibility for transmitting to its Government the recommendations and concerns of the Committee and for explaining international standards relating to the elimination of racial discrimination. He was concerned by the lack of demographic data and said that it was urgent to undertake a comprehensive census, which would provide essential information for social and economic planning and for the identification and protection of minorities. In its responses, the delegation had often either provided no information or said it had no comment; those gaps should be filled in future reports. He recalled the importance placed on recognition of minorities by European institutions and welcomed the fact that the Vlach Romanian minority in Albania was recognized by the Government.

Although the delegation had stated that there was no human trafficking in Albania, Albanian nationals were involved in human trafficking and the State party should increase its cooperation with other States in order to combat that practice. While the delegation had stated that there were no legal or political restrictions on access to public places, it should be remembered that incidents involving for instance refusal of service in restaurants or hotels on the basis of colour, race, or ethnic origin would constitute clear violations on the Convention.

He expressed surprise that all complaints made to the Ombudsman seemed to have been rejected and wondered whether the Ombudsman should be more proactive in combating discrimination. With regard to the Roma, although the delegation had stated that

there was no official discrimination against that group, stereotypes and prejudice persisted and it was important to ensure that young Roma received an education in order to create a new generation with an educational level equivalent to that of the general population.

Mr. SHAHI recalled that the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) had noted that during the Kosovo crisis Albania had provided shelter to nearly 500,000 refugees of all ethnic origins and had welcomed the very comprehensive Law on Asylum of 1998, which included the right to family reunification and non-refoulement, although it had also expressed concern about human trafficking. He said the State party must take measures to combat the latter and expressed the hope that the European Union would supplement the Albanian Government's meagre resources in that area. He noted the State party's constructive attitude towards the protection of minorities and requested further information in that regard, in particular for example concerning assimilation of the Vlachs minority.

Mr. KJAERUM asked whether article 265 of the Criminal Code effectively prohibited discrimination and banned organizations that incited racial hatred and whether there were any legislative provisions that protected the right of access to any place or service intended for use by the general public, as provided for in article 5 (f) of the Convention. He also wished to know the current status of the applications by members of the Greek minority for media licences.

Mr. YUTZIS sought clarification of what was meant by the reference in paragraph 123 (c) of the report (CERD/C/397/Add.1) to the "establishment of an acceptable identity" for the Roma community. While he acknowledged that it was sometimes difficult for societies to accept populations that shared a different culture, he wondered whether promoting the conditions under which minority communities could affirm their own identities might not be a better objective to pursue. In his own country, Argentina, unfortunately, the indigenous culture had been replaced over time by Western culture through the assimilation or indeed extermination of the indigenous population. It was an issue that deserved serious attention.

Mr. LINDGREN ALVES agreed that the Committee needed a fuller understanding of what was meant by "establishment of an acceptable identity".

Mr. PILLAI, referring to the ethnic composition of the Albanian population, noted that, because of their large numbers, the existence of national minorities could not be denied and that the issue therefore needed to be addressed. He wondered, furthermore, why a distinction had been drawn in the report between national minorities on the one hand and cultural and linguistic minorities on the other.

Mr. AMIR noted that Albania had been occupied and subjugated for most of the previous century. Its current objective should be the pursuit of national unity and cohesion through recognition of the country's diversity and the rights of its minorities. He noted with satisfaction that the country had begun to take steps in that direction by agreeing to be bound by the provisions of the Convention.

Mr. SKAPI (Albania), replying to the questions and comments of the Committee, said that Albania placed no limitations on the right of access by minorities to any place or service intended for use by the general public. With respect to its cultural and linguistic minorities, the Government was attempting to bring its policies into line with European standards in the field, since it was seeking membership of the European Union. Unfortunately, his delegation had no information on the current status of the applications by members of minority groups for media licences. The Committee's questions and comments would be faithfully relayed to the appropriate authorities upon his delegation's return to Albania.

Ms. GJATA (Albania) said that the reference to "establishment of an acceptable identity" for the Roma community in paragraph 123 (c) of the report meant preserving the historical identity of the community and affirming its values.

Mr. NINA (Albania), referring to the prohibition of organizations that incited racial hatred, said that Albanian law did provide for the creation of organizations that engaged in political, scientific, cultural, religious, literary and other activities. The aims of the founding members of such organizations had to be stated in the articles of association and they were required to apply to the courts for legalization. The courts verified that the organizations' aims and activities did not violate the law, including the provisions of the Criminal Code prohibiting incitement to racial hatred. An organization could be dissolved in a number of ways: by a decision to that effect taken by its membership at a special general meeting, through the fulfilment of its aims or an acknowledgement of its inability to do so, if it decided to suspend its activities, or if its aims and activities were deemed illegal.

Mr. ABOUL-NASR said that he wished to make it clear to the delegation that the Committee applied the provisions of the Convention as its standard and not the standards of the European Union, some of which did not conform to the Convention.

Mr. de GOUTTES (Country Rapporteur) welcomed the progress made by Albania towards a return to the rule of law. He also welcomed the quality of Albania's report and of the delegation's replies to the questions posed by the members of the Committee. He noted with particular satisfaction that the delegation had recognized the close link between poverty and racial discrimination.

The Committee looked forward to receiving the information that was not currently available to the delegation, including more recent census data on the ethnic composition of the population, based on the free choice of respondents to questions about the minorities to which they belonged. More information was also needed about the measures being taken to combat corruption, organized crime and human trafficking and about the criteria used for distinguishing between national minorities on the one hand and cultural and linguistic minorities on the other. The Committee would also welcome data on racially motivated crimes, bearing in mind that the absence of complaints did not in itself constitute positive information. Indeed, that absence might simply reflect either the extent to which individuals were unaware of their rights, a mistrust of the police or a lack of sensitivity to racism on the part of the authorities. Public awareness and educational programmes were therefore needed to promote tolerance and understanding among teachers, pupils, law-enforcement agents, media workers and politicians. Every effort should be made in the next report to supplement the information that had been provided at the Committee's current session.

Mr. SKAPI (Albania) said that it was Albania's first experience in reporting to the Committee and no effort would be spared to ensure that the next report was as comprehensive as possible.

The delegation of Albania withdrew.

The meeting was suspended at 12.05 p.m. and resumed at 12.20 p.m.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND OTHER MATTERS (agenda item 2) (continued)

Meetings attended by members of the Committee

The CHAIRMAN said that he wished to report on the meetings that he and other members of the Committee had attended since the Committee's previous session. A brainstorming meeting on reform of the human rights treaty body system had been held in Malbun (Liechtenstein) in May 2003. Mr. Thiam and he had represented the Committee at the meeting, which had been attended by human rights treaty bodies, representatives of States, United Nations entities, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), NGOs and one national institution. A summary of the meeting was given in the meeting report (document HRI/ICM/2003/4), which also listed the points of agreement, comments and other points. The most important point of agreement had been the unanimous rejection of the notion of a single report summarizing a State party's implementation of the full range of human rights treaty provisions to which it was a party. Another idea, the formulation of harmonized reporting guidelines, needed to be discussed further. The objectives of an expanded core document and focused periodic reports, based on suggestions made by the Committee, had been the subject of points of agreement. It had also been agreed that the concept of thematic or modular reports required further clarification. The role of capacity-building, aimed at more effective national reporting, respect of deadlines, the implementation of treaty obligations and follow-up to recommendations of treaty bodies, was another issue on which the meeting had agreed.

He said that he had attended the second Inter-Committee Meeting of the human rights treaty bodies, held in Geneva in June 2003, accompanied by Mr. de Gouttes and Mr. Siciliano. The issues discussed had been broadly similar to those covered at the Liechtenstein meeting. A number of very useful conclusions had been reached. They were set out in the advance unedited version of a document dated 8 July 2003, which had been circulated to Committee members. It had been emphasized that, in the light of the principles of the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, it was necessary to ensure consistency in the examination of reports by all treaty bodies. The meeting had therefore recommended that, in addition to a State party's report, the secretariat should provide all treaty bodies with the same basic information. In order to enhance consistency, before examination of a State party's report the secretariat should provide all members of the relevant treaty bodies with the concluding observations or recommendations of other committees and relevant positions on individual communications or complaints, taken from the preceding three years. Where appropriate, then, committees should refer to the relevant concluding observations or comments of other treaty bodies, either during the dialogue or in their own concluding comments. While reports had to be the basis of committees' examinations, additional information could help committee members to understand the information before them. It was therefore recommended that the secretariat should systematically summarize, but not analyse, country-specific information.

The role of national human rights institutions in reporting had been emphasized, in particular by Mr. Siciliano and Mr. de Gouttes. Committees should do more to involve those national institutions in the monitoring process. As in Liechtenstein, the notion of a single report had been overwhelmingly rejected. The meeting had recommended that the secretariat prepare draft guidelines for an expanded core document for consideration by each committee and for adoption by the third Inter-Committee Meeting in 2004. It was also recommended that each committee adopt appropriate procedures to examine the situation of human rights in States parties whose reports were 10 years or more overdue and which had not responded to reminders of their reporting obligations.

Shortly after the Inter-Committee meeting, he had attended the fifteenth meeting of Chairpersons of human rights treaty bodies, in Geneva. That meeting had reaffirmed the points of agreement concluded at the second Inter-Committee Meeting. The Chairpersons had also underlined the need to provide treaty bodies with sufficient financial and human resources to implement recommendations made at earlier meetings. Each treaty body should convene a pre-sessional working group to draft lists of issues and questions prior to examining States parties' reports. As far as possible, the pre-sessional working group should include the individual country rapporteurs dealing with reports to be considered at the forthcoming session. Another recommendation was that the third Inter-Committee Meeting in 2004 should examine draft guidelines for the expanded core documents. The Chairpersons had recommended that cooperation be pursued with the Expanded Bureau of the Commission on Human Rights and the Chairperson of the Sub-Commission on Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, as well as with the special rapporteurs.

On the question of press releases, it was recommended that all treaty bodies should implement measures to enhance their accuracy. Finally, it had been agreed that treaty body experts of all committees should receive an adequate honorarium.

Mr. ABOUL-NASR complained that there should have been more consultation of the Committee about who should attend the meetings described by the Chairman and what would be said on the Committee's behalf. He hoped that the Committee would have an opportunity to read the report and hold an exchange of views before any decisions were taken. He asked whether the recommendations were binding and whether their financial implications had been considered. He also expressed dismay at the general low-level participation by States parties at the Liechtenstein meeting.

Mr. KJAERUM welcomed the conclusions outlined by the Chairman. They were in keeping with the discussions held by the Committee in March 2003. It was particularly pleasing that the notion of single reports had been unanimously rejected. The suggestion that committees should refer to the relevant concluding observations and comments of other treaty bodies was very positive. He naturally endorsed the calls for greater prominence to be given to national human rights institutions. He felt that the United Nations human rights treaty bodies and national human rights institutions had been guilty in the past of two-way neglect. Despite some reservations, on balance he favoured the notions of lists of issues and pre-sessional working groups. He felt that the committees should be allowed a few more years to continue applying distinct models, after which the respective advantages and disadvantages could be examined with a view to refining and harmonizing the system.

Mr. de GOUTTES said that the salient points raised at the meetings referred to by the Chairman were the rejection of a single report, improved cooperation with national human rights bodies and the recommendation that the secretariat should systematically summarize

country-specific information. The latter recommendation would undoubtedly facilitate the work of the Committee and that of country rapporteurs in particular. It was important, however, that the document produced as a result should be a summary and not an analysis.

Mr. YUTZIS said that the meetings' recommendations were in effect a distilled version of suggestions made by Committee members over many years. It would now be possible to devise useful models for the Committee's procedures. He, too, welcomed the rejection of single reports and the call for an enhanced role for national human rights bodies, without which the promotion of human rights would not be possible. On the question of consistency, it was his view that the Committee always did refer to the conclusions of other bodies. That practice had merely been given added legitimacy.

Mr. SICILIANOS pointed out that representation and other matters concerning the Inter-Committee meeting had been discussed and agreed upon by the Committee at its March 2003 session. All the issues raised at the meetings had already been endorsed by the Committee.

Ms. JANUARY-BARDILL said that the next stage of reform of the human rights treaty body system should turn from procedures to structures. She found it odd that only 1 member of an 18-member Committee was a woman. The Committee could not, of course, dictate its own composition but she felt that Governments could take matters such as gender balance into consideration when nominating members of the committees.

Mr. HERNDL said that on behalf of the Committee he had attended a meeting held by the Government of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava in July 2003. That Government was planning draft legislation on racial discrimination and had invited representatives of international bodies with a view to overcoming political divisions in the country's ruling party. He had outlined the Committee's views and aims and fruitful discussions had taken place.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.