



**Convention on the
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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Forty-seventh session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1295th MEETING*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Monday, 21 January 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. ZERMATTEN
(Vice-Chairperson)

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* No summary record was issued for the 1294th meeting.

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In the absence of Ms. Lee, Mr. Zermatten, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 5) (continued)

Second periodic report of the Dominican Republic (CRC/C/DOM/2; CRC/C/DOM/Q/2 and Add.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of the Dominican Republic took places at the Committee table.
2. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation of the Dominican Republic to introduce its second periodic report (CRC/C/DOM/2).
3. Ms. ARES (Dominican Republic), introducing the country's second periodic report, apologized for the absence of the Executive President of the National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONANI), who had been unable to attend due to other obligations. Referring to some of the issues addressed by the Committee in its concluding observations on the initial country report (CRC/C/15/Add.150), she recalled that the Committee had recommended that the Dominican Republic raise and equalize the minimum legal age for marriage for boys and girls. In response to that suggestion, a draft family code would soon be submitted to the legislature to set the age of marriage at 16 for both boys and girls.
4. Over the past five years, the Dominican Republic had carried out a second reform of its basic legal framework for the protection of children and adolescents. As a result of that process, Act No. 14-94 had been replaced by Act No. 136-03 establishing the Code for the System of Protection of the Fundamental Rights of Children and Adolescents. The Code had entered into force on 17 October 2005. The new Act described the principles underlying the legal framework for the protection of children and adolescents and the State's obligations in that respect, and set out the regulations, structures and proceedings relating to family law, juvenile criminal law and constitutional law. It also covered institutional mechanisms and proceedings based on administrative law intended to facilitate the introduction of social policies for the full protection of the rights of children and adolescents, the adoption of special protective measures and the restoration of rights.
5. The general principles of the Code included seven aspects that were clearly in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child: (1) definition of children and adolescents as subjects of law; (2) equality and non-discrimination for all underage persons; (3) the best interests of children and adolescents; (4) absolute priority given to upholding their rights; (5) the State's obligations in that respect; (6) the right to family life; (7) society's participation in the drafting, implementation and design of policies and programmes. The reform also established the right to protection against all forms of labour exploitation and recognized social rights, especially the rights to health and education, as enforceable.
6. The legal and institutional framework set out in Act No. 136-03 constituted the National System of Protection, which was aimed at remedying the legal and procedural inconsistencies of Act No. 14-94. The new Code distinguished between social conflicts and legal conflicts. In other

words, it separated the treatment of victims from that of offenders and the issue of social policies from that of criminal justice, and it drew a distinction between the aims of protection, prevention and repression.

7. The Committee had also drawn attention to the problem of street children.

On 23 November 2007, CONANI had announced a national policy to address that complex issue. In 2008, the Government intended to carry out a set of initiatives and to coordinate all efforts in that regard, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

8. The Dominican Republic remained committed to implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and her delegation was at the disposal of the Committee for any suggestions and comments it might wish to make.

9. Mr. KRAPPMANN (Country Rapporteur) said that the Dominican Republic had gone through a difficult period in recent months, having twice been hard hit by hurricanes, and yet the Government had managed to send written replies (CRC/C/DOM/Q/2/Add.1) updating statistical information contained in the country report, for which it was to be commended. The second periodic report had been elaborated in accordance with the revised guidelines, which was appreciated, because it facilitated the Committee's analysis of the information provided. The part of the report containing a presentation of the country context was most useful. However, on reading the information concerning the implementation of children's rights, starting with paragraph 128, he had wondered why the introductory chapter had not provided a closer analysis of the serious problems facing the Government. It was clear that massive problems persisted, including illegal migration, overt and covert discrimination, and violence. He regretted that the report had made virtually no reference to the concluding observations on the initial country report. The Committee was pleased that the Dominican Republic reported that it had many legal mechanisms in place for the implementation of children's rights. Little was said, however, about how those mechanisms were used and whether they had helped to improve the general human rights situation of children.

10. The financial resources allocated for the protection of children's rights were inadequate. Unfortunately, the report contained no explanation of the budget situation, and nowhere did it address the requirements under article 4 of the Convention. Four tables in the written replies showed upward trends, but they did not give a complete picture of allocations earmarked for children. He asked the delegation for more details on the current budget situation and on long-term budget plans regarding children as well as for its assessment of overall available resources allocated for the implementation of children's rights.

11. The report in fact contained only one reference to the concluding observations on the initial country report, in paragraph 130, in which it was indicated that Act No. 14-94 had been replaced by Act No. 136-03 in response to the Committee's suggestion. He commended the Dominican Republic for having promulgated the new act establishing the Code for the System of Protection of the Fundamental Rights of Children and Adolescents, which clearly reflected the principles of the Convention, including the treatment of children as subjects, equality and non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, children's participation and the protection of the family, and he asked what steps had been taken to apply those principles.

12. In paragraph 9 of its concluding observations on the initial country report, the Committee had recommended that the State party take effective measures, including the allocation of available resources, both financial and human, for the full implementation of legislation for the protection of children and adolescents. There were indications that that recommendation was still relevant. CONANI was responsible for the implementation of the policies, programmes and projects based on the Code through the management of national, regional and municipal boards and offices and the coordination of governmental and non-governmental activities at all levels. National and regional boards and offices had been operating for some time, but not local ones. That severely hindered the provision of care and welfare services at the local level.

13. The Committee would like to know about efforts to make the system based on the Code fully functional and effective. Paragraph 183 of the report referred to a number of national action plans, such as the plan to guarantee the rights of children and adolescents (2003-2013) and the plan to combat the worst forms of child labour, as well as action to combat the commercial sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. He asked the delegation to provide information on concrete activities, their coordination and the resources allocated for those initiatives.

14. The Committee had been informed that in February 2007 representatives of the Government had met with institutions and organizations involved with children's protection to analyse the implementation and impact of Act No. 136-03. While that was highly praiseworthy, the Committee would like to know what had been decided about the future development of the system for the protection of children's rights.

15. As he understood it, CONANI was reorganizing the data collection system. Although a considerable amount of data was given in the written replies, there still seemed to be no information on a number of issues relating to violations of children's rights. In addition, disaggregated data above and beyond those concerning age and gender were urgently needed for a better analysis of problems. The national household study and the UNICEF survey in 2006 were valuable steps towards improving data collection. How did the Government intend to continue enhancing the process? Noting that in some instances different age limits were applied, he urged the Dominican Republic to apply the definition of the age of the child set out in article 1 of the Convention, namely every human being below the age of 18 years.

16. He had trouble with the data presented on children in the Dominican Republic. The report stated that in 2002, 395,932 children under the age of 14 had not been registered (para. 333). That was an astonishingly precise figure in view of the number of unreported births. He found it difficult to believe that the number of children in the country was reliably known. The table in paragraph 9 of the report showed that many children were not registered for years. According to his information, many children were never registered at all. The ENHOGAR survey estimated that 22 per cent of children born in the past five years were not registered. If basic data on the population were not available, all statistics would be flawed. He asked whether it was true that many of the figures regarding children were merely estimates.

17. The report noted that all newborn children must be registered. However, many children were not registered for a variety of reasons, including the unlawful status of their parents in the country, fear of expulsion, lack of parental documents, special requirements for certain groups of parents, high costs and bureaucratic inefficiency. Those difficulties affected some population groups more than others, such as the extreme poor, Haitian migrants and teenage mothers. Since

April 2007, pink declarations confirming births had been issued and sent to the embassy of the country from which the mother or other members of the family might have come, even though the mother might have no ties to that country, which was often Haiti. The consequence was that the child did not acquire any nationality, because an undocumented mother might be regarded as “in transit”, and it was worth noting that the “in transit” rule took precedence over the *jus soli* principle in the Constitution. The Government had made a number of attempts to solve the problem, but some of the measures had been counterproductive, did not ensure registration and deprived children of their right to a nationality provided under article 7 of the Convention. He asked the delegation to explain how the Dominican Republic planned to deal with that serious issue, and he urged the Government to accede to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

18. Ms. ORTIZ (Alternate Country Rapporteur) welcomed the high-level delegation, but expressed disappointment that the head of such an important body as CONANI had been unable to attend. The Dominican Republic was a young democracy, and she understood the efforts it was making to implement human rights, and more specifically the rights of the child.

19. While the Dominican Republic was to be commended on the establishment of CONANI and on the introduction of the Code for the System of Protection of the Fundamental Rights of Children and Adolescents, it was difficult to see how CONANI could give full attention to protecting children’s rights and at the same time coordinate the work of the various ministries and the activities of civil society. She asked what the Government planned to do to improve coordination, especially since the system for the protection of the rights of the child was not fully operational and children as a consequence did not enjoy their legal rights. CONANI must first focus on ensuring that the system was functioning and must then establish policies for coordinating the work of the various sectors involved and appointing the corresponding authorities, after which a national plan could be developed. There still did not seem to be a national plan for the implementation of the Convention at all government levels.

20. According to footnote 6 of the report, a restructuring process had been embarked upon in line with the requirements of Act No. 136-03. She enquired how far the restructuring process had advanced, what judicial and administrative bodies had been established and whether child protection boards had been set up at local level. She also asked whether anyone had been appointed to head the National Department of Comprehensive Care for Adolescents in Conflict with the Criminal Law (para. 175). It would be useful to learn whether children and adolescents were consulted during the preparation of plans of concern to them and also during the assessment of their implementation.

21. Mr. CITARELLA said that Act No. 136-03 was an important step towards guaranteeing children’s rights. However, the country’s attitude to those rights was still deeply rooted in its customs and traditions, and it was difficult to see how certain rules of the new Code could be implemented. Care should be exercised in ensuring that new legislation in areas such as family law and the Code of Criminal Procedure did not have a detrimental effect on the protection of children’s rights. With regard to the definition of the child, it was inappropriate to refer to children over the age of 12 as “adolescents”, because such a definition did not comply with the Convention. The delegation should indicate why the age of consent to marriage was not the same for boys and girls.

22. Ms. SMITH said that legislation alone was not enough to prevent discrimination against children. There was reportedly discrimination in particular against children of Asian descent in the State party, as well as against black children, asylum-seekers and disabled children. She wondered whether the Government was developing policies to eliminate discrimination, and especially racism.

23. The Committee would welcome more information about the extent to which the Dominican Republic guaranteed the right of the child to be heard. Was there any specific legislation regarding democracy in schools? What legislation was there concerning the right of the child to be heard on medical issues and in court cases, particularly those relating to placement in custodial settings and institutions? She enquired about the establishment of councils for children and youth at the municipal level. She asked to what extent the principle of the best interest of the child was reflected in legislation and in government programmes and policies, particularly in the national poverty reduction strategy.

24. Ms. VUCKOVIC-SAHOVIC was concerned by the reportedly high level of societal violence in the State party, particularly in urban areas. Although the problem was not unique to the Dominican Republic, the situation appeared to be deteriorating, and there was a risk that it would create a negative environment for children. The delegation should provide information on the extent of the problem and indicate whether it was a priority for the Government. She wished to know what action had been taken by the Government in the light of the United Nations Study on Violence against Children.

25. She was concerned that the report of the State party provided no information on corporal punishment. While Act No. 136-03 provided definitions of physical abuse and physical harm, it did not explicitly prohibit corporal punishment by parents. The Committee was aware that corporal punishment was lawful in the home and was widely accepted as a disciplinary measure: research showed that approximately 50 per cent of teachers and parents punished children physically. She wished to know whether the Government was taking steps to address that situation and, if so, whether it was cooperating with civil society in the process. The delegation should explain why corporal punishment was being used in care institutions and schools when it was explicitly prohibited, and should provide information about what had been done to abolish physical punishment in all settings. Children in detention centres were reportedly confined to the same quarters as adults, and were often subjected to degrading treatment or exposed to various forms of violence. Such conditions were not exactly conducive to the education, rehabilitation and social integration of children.

26. Mr. POLLAR asked whether the institutional mechanisms for guaranteeing children's rights were monitored independently, and if so, how.

27. The CHAIRPERSON asked how the Government coordinated with NGOs, and whether they had participated in the elaboration of the report.

28. Ms. HERCZOG said it would be interesting to learn about the steps that had been taken to increase awareness of the Convention and children's rights among professionals and the public. She welcomed the fact that judges had received training in the rights of the child and the Convention.

29. Mr. FILALI asked why the State party had not ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, or other human rights conventions, such as the Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It was important to have comprehensive legislation in place in order to guarantee children's rights. In terms of the domestic law of the State party, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights had recommended that some areas of Dominican legislation be revised in order to ensure that the Convention was directly applicable.

30. Mr. KOTRANE asked whether the Convention had been directly invoked in courts in the State party, and whether its provisions prevailed over domestic legislation. The delegation should provide more information about the Office of the Ombudsman. Was it the only authority competent to hear complaints? Did children make use of it when their rights were violated, and was there a special ombudsman for minors?

The meeting was suspended at 11.10 a.m. and resumed at 11.35 a.m.

31. Ms. ARES (Dominican Republic) said that the National System for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents was divided into military and judicial subsystems. In accordance with Act No. 136-03, a series of programmes to protect children's rights had been implemented by the National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONANI). However, the Council was currently undergoing an intensive restructuring process, and might not work directly with protection services in future. In accordance with the terms of that law, 10 regional and 4 municipal offices had been established, with a further 11 municipal offices due to open in 2008. In addition, 44 municipal directorates had been set up, and staff had been trained at the national level.

32. NGOs were involved in most of the child protection bodies in the country and were represented on the Council. All government programmes were implemented with the support of civil society and NGOs, which were represented on committees and contributed their expertise in areas such as sexual exploitation and child labour.

33. Mr. PADILLA (Dominican Republic) said that Act No. 136-03 provided a means of coordinating the National System for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents. With regard to the judicial system, children's tribunals and a children's ombudsman had been established, although the law governing the latter was still in the process of being drafted and no appointment had yet been made.

34. Mr. KOTRANE said he failed to see how the office of the ombudsman could already have been established when the law governing it was still being drafted. He asked whether its staff would be appointed or elected.

35. Mr. PADILLA (Dominican Republic) said that a draft law on the Office of the Ombudsman did already exist. A list of civil society partners, professionals and institutions had been drawn up and would be presented to a committee responsible for electing the Ombudsman. The law would come into force once the relevant person had been elected.

36. Mr. KRAPPMANN (Country Rapporteur) asked for more details concerning the Dominican Republic's administrative subsystem. Would more than 10 offices be required at regional level? At local level, since there were some 500 municipalities, would hundreds more municipal boards and offices be required in addition to the 4 municipal offices already established and the further 11 planned? In towns and communities without a municipal office, were child protection services in place and how were children's rights implemented?

37. Ms. ORTIZ (Alternate Country Rapporteur) asked how long the law establishing the post of ombudsman had been in force and whether there was a specific law to create a children's ombudsman. She wished to know exactly how many municipal offices were planned. Furthermore, was training on the newly-created judicial organs (e.g. the courts, procurator's office, police) delivered as part of the curriculum or were separate seminars organized?

38. Mr. PADILLA (Dominican Republic) replied that the law establishing the post of ombudsman had been in force since 2001.

39. Ms. ARES (Dominican Republic) said that, in accordance with Act No. 136-03, 10 regional offices had been created corresponding to the 10 regions of the Dominican Republic. At municipal level, 110 offices would be required to cover the entire national territory and in October 2007 the first municipal offices had been set up. Meanwhile, the regional offices were providing 100 per cent coverage throughout the regions. Ten local committees for the protection and restoration of rights would be set up in 2008 and it was hoped that 50 per cent of municipalities would have such local committees by 2010. It was important to understand that, as set forth in the Act, before the municipal offices and local committees could be established to provide protection at local level, regional offices had first to be created, to which the local bodies could then report.

40. Mr. PADILLA (Dominican Republic) said that in towns and communities without a municipal office, children's rights were already guaranteed by the State through the health, education and protection services offered by the institutions of the National Office, which were located in every part of the country. Part of the remit of the regional and local offices was to coordinate the inter-institutional work of the National Office. However, the Dominican Republic's aim in creating a new protection system under the Code for the System of Protection of the Fundamental Rights of Children and Adolescents, established pursuant to Act No. 136-03, was to ensure better overall harmonization and coherence by taking a sectoral approach. As for the number of municipal offices planned for the next two years, it was not an arbitrary figure but part of a five-year national plan being implemented by government agencies with the assistance of international organizations such as UNICEF.

41. With regard to action taken in response to the Committee's concluding observations on the initial report of 2001, in order to ensure that national legislation effectively protected the best interests of the child and to address concerns expressed regarding access to education and discrimination, the Dominican Republic had recently promulgated Act No. 659 as part of its legal reform process. That law allowed all children access to education, regardless of whether they had birth certificates or not. In the past, Haitian children and children of the Dominican Republic without birth certificates had been denied access to schools and medical care.

42. As for the concern regarding the validity of statistics on the number of children in the Dominican Republic, he said that the problem was being addressed. Regular surveys were being conducted. For example, the four-yearly Population and Health Census (ENDESA) had been conducted in 2007 and the latest ENHOGAR survey had served to assess the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

43. Turning to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which the Dominican Republic had signed in 1985 but had not yet ratified, he said that the National Congress was currently overcoming its previous legal technical problems and aimed to ratify the Protocol and other instruments related to the Convention in 2008. The Convention had constitutional ranking in the Dominican Republic and the law did not contradict, but rather complemented it. The Convention could be, and was, invoked directly in the courts, and all State institutions were obliged to incorporate its principles. Domestic legislation had been reviewed and harmonized and several laws, where necessary, made reference to it. The wording might not make explicit mention of the Convention but it was encompassed in the spirit of the law.

44. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether, following the Dominican Republic's efforts to establish more precise statistics regarding the number of children, and in view in particular of the high number of non-registered children, a clearer indication of numbers had emerged since the initial report.

45. Mr. KOTRANE said that the problem when drafting laws that merely encompassed the spirit of the Convention was that national legislation often failed faithfully to translate or reflect the provisions and might even contain contradictions. If national legislation was not in conformity with the Convention, did judges draw attention to that fact? Did they override domestic law in alluding to the provisions of the Convention? Did the provisions of the Convention prevail when the law was being invoked and in bench rulings?

46. Ms. VICIOSO (Dominican Republic) said that applications for the new post of ombudsman would be welcome from both men and women. She gave specific examples of Dominican legislation incorporating the text of the Convention. For example, all laws of the Central Electoral Board made reference to the provisions of the Convention, such as the law relating to the free registration of births to non-resident foreign mothers and the law on the issuance of birth certificates to mothers under the age of 16. She gave a copy of the latter to the Committee for information. Articles 8, 11 and 15 of the Dominican Republic's Constitution also made reference to the provisions of the Convention. She said that, in addition to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Dominican Republic had signed, ratified and implemented article 1 of the Hague Convention, articles 2 and 24 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights.

47. Ms. ARES (Dominican Republic) clarified that the Convention was mentioned in bench rulings as well as in national resolutions and legal texts.

48. Mr. LIZARDO (Dominican Republic), referring to budget allocations, said that the Dominican Republic had faced an economic crisis with the collapse of its main commercial banks in 2003 and 2004, which had had a significant impact on the State's ability to carry out its social programmes, in particular for children. Before the crisis, 12 per cent of the budget had been allocated to servicing State debt compared with 25 per cent following the crisis.

Notwithstanding that challenge, the Government had increased its social spending in recent years. Nearly 9 per cent of gross domestic product was now being allocated to social spending, as opposed to 7 per cent only two years previously. The goal was to achieve 14 per cent by 2015, as part of the Dominican Republic's commitments under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While there was no specific budget item allocated to children, which was considered a cross-cutting category, government investment in the social sector was closely linked to child protection, education and health. In 2001, a structural reform programme was established in the field of social security and a universal health insurance system was set up for the entire population. Everyone had a guaranteed right to family health insurance and if a family could not pay its contribution, it would be paid by the State. There was also a new programme of resource transfer to poor populations, which covered some 300,000 households, and which was budgeted to cover approximately 400,000 families in 2008. Families could receive up to 30 United States dollars per month, but those allocations were linked to child protection measures, such as school attendance, antenatal care, medical care and immunizations.

49. Adding to the comments regarding the problem of gathering and disseminating accurate statistics, he said that, in addition to the four-yearly ENDESA survey, the Dominican Republic had introduced a national system of annual household surveys conducted by the National Statistics Office. The Central Bank also conducted workforce surveys to gather information on the whole population and was developing new national data-gathering systems with the aid of international cooperation.

50. Ms. ORTIZ (Alternate Country Rapporteur) said that the Dominican Republic's report did not follow the guidelines on providing disaggregated statistical data and the information given was not sufficiently detailed. As for resources, pursuit of the MDGs had posed serious challenges to the Dominican Republic and, although a great deal of progress had been made, she pointed out that MDGs did not cover all the requirements of the Convention. It was important to develop an adequate monitoring system and UNICEF had a great deal of experience to share in that respect. It was clear that the resources received by children in the Dominican Republic were small in comparison to their needs and, as children represented 40 per cent of the population and were among the poorest sectors of society, it was they that suffered the most. She asked for information on how children were affected both positively and negatively by the free trade arrangement with Canada and the United States and how the Dominican Republic envisaged mitigating the consequent problems.

51. Ms. ARES (Dominican Republic), referring to the gathering of information and monitoring of children in the Dominican Republic, said that in November 2007, when launching policy guidelines for the protection of children, the President had announced the creation of a system for collecting information and monitoring children. He had made the same announcement at the United Nations General Assembly Meeting on Children in New York on 11 December 2007. The Dominican Republic had initiated talks with UNICEF and the National Statistics Office with a view to implementing such a system in 2008.

52. Mr. PADILLA (Dominican Republic) said that there were many sectoral programmes that addressed specific problems such as the worst forms of child labour, commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking and domestic violence. Thanks to a recent initiative aimed at taking stock of activities for children, the Government was aware of 257 programmes run by NGOs, for example in the fields of childcare, nutrition, leisure activities and assistance for children in

institutions. When the periodic report had been compiled, the Government had not had comprehensive statistics on the number of children institutionalized or on the length of stays in institutions. Since such stays were subsidized, it had actually been in the interests of the institutions to keep the children on their rolls even when such practices were contrary to the provisions of the Convention and against the best interests of the child. The National Council for Children and Adolescents (CONANI) had since established rules that called for each institution to keep a registry of children and to be subject to inspections that checked not only on the quality of care, nutrition and schooling, but also on relations with family members, with a view to deinstitutionalizing the child.

53. There was a 10-year National Plan to combat the worst forms of child labour, which involved participation by all State institutions and the 32 provincial administrations, in particular through local committees that included governmental and NGO representatives. CONANI was making efforts to follow up on that plan, but for the time being there was no particular mechanism for that purpose.

54. Ms. DE LEÓN (Dominican Republic) said that in 2007 there had been a reform of the national planning structure, as a result of which the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development had been established. Its mandate was to draw up the national development strategy, which was to be adopted by the Congress and would include a multi-year budget and plan for the period from 2008 to 2012; the strategy would give due attention to the rights of the child.

55. Ms. ORTIZ (Alternate Country Rapporteur), turning to issues related to family, institutions and adoption, noted that, according to the replies to the list of issues, there were large disparities between the respective numbers of boys and girls in residential care in non-governmental institutions in the northern and southern regions. Why was that the case? It would be useful for the Committee to learn more about the residents, including their ages and the reasons for their placement in residential care, as well as the efforts made to return them to a family environment and a stable situation that provided for the continuity of their upbringing. She reminded the delegation that priority must be given to the placement of children in families, or in exceptional cases, in institutions with a family-like structure, but that placement in large institutions was to be avoided. The Government had placed some emphasis on the use of “temporary shelters” (“hogares de paso”), which in 2007 had accommodated 637 children. She requested clarification as to the nature of such shelters. Were they foster families, or a kind of open-door institution available to children in need? If they were not foster families, were there any plans to establish a fostering system?

56. While welcoming the efforts made by the State party to bring adoption practices into line with the Convention and with the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, she asked why the number of national adoptions had declined in the past three years. Was the Government considering any measures to broaden the concept of adoption so that more Dominican families would be eligible to adopt children? The number of international adoptions should ideally be equivalent to around 10 or 15 per cent of the number of national adoptions.

57. Noting that in many families, parents left the country for work, she asked whether there were any programmes to deal with the problems that arose in the absence of one or both parents, such as the lack of an emotional framework and the ensuing possibility of drug and alcohol use or domestic violence. What support was provided to people who raised children in such circumstances, such as elder siblings, neighbours, uncles, aunts and grandparents, and what was done to maintain family ties with relatives overseas? Lastly, while various attempts had been made in recent years to provide health and education services for Haitian migrant workers, the delegation should provide updated information on the practical situation of such migrants.

58. Mr. KRAPPMANN (Country Rapporteur) said that while the Dominican Republic had indeed undergone an economic slowdown in 2003 and 2004, it had since had one of the highest growth rates in Latin America, approaching 10 per cent. Why had there been no reduction in poverty rates? Despite the wealth produced in the country and the influx of remittances, the Gini coefficient was among the highest in the world, indicating extreme disparity in wealth. What was being done to improve the distribution of wealth? Many of the poorest families were concentrated in areas that cruelly lacked infrastructure. It was therefore of the utmost importance to invest in the care, development and education facilities that were required to provide them with basic services. What was the country's poverty reduction strategy, and did it include specific measures to alleviate the adverse effects of poverty, in particular on young children and children living in the outskirts of cities?

59. Mr. PURAS said that both quantitatively and qualitatively, the resources allocated to health and the performance of the health services in the Dominican Republic were clearly inadequate. Just 2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) was allocated to health, which meant that out-of-pocket expenditure was quite high. There were high rates of maternal and infant mortality and of violent deaths among adolescents, all of which would be relatively easily preventable if there was the political will to adopt certain cost-effective, intersectoral measures, such as an emphasis on primary health care. What measures were being taken to reduce deaths among adolescents from alcohol, drugs and smoking? Given the strength of the Catholic Church in the country, he asked whether the State played its full role in ensuring that adolescent girls were well educated about issues of reproductive health and their rights in that regard. The fact that some 9,000 adolescent girls reportedly had children every year, representing about a quarter of all births, indicated that current policies were ineffective. Lastly, while the State party had described the legislation that theoretically protected disabled children from discrimination, the delegation should give practical examples of the ways in which such children were actually integrated into the community.

60. Mr. KOTRANE said that, while the report set out in detail the legal provisions governing the payment of maintenance, it failed to describe in practical terms what was done to ensure payment. Under article 27, paragraph 4, of the Convention, the State was obliged to take measures to secure recovery of maintenance regardless of whether the person responsible lived in another country or in the State party. Was there any mechanism, such as bilateral agreements with other countries, to ensure payment of such support? Had the State considered the possibility of establishing a social security fund to provide for cases where no payment was made? Similarly, the report listed general objectives in the fields of education and child labour, but provided no specifics about the measures taken and the actual effects thereof in those fields.

61. Ms. AL-THANI said that notwithstanding a recent decline in the dropout rate, the Ten-Year Education Plan for the period from 2007 to 2017 indicated that only 68 per cent of children were expected to complete grade 8, and less than half would complete secondary school. Dropout rates thus would remain quite high. What was being done to keep children in school? Were there any administrative units responsible for monitoring and analysing the actual situation and for producing recommendations? According to some reports, the high dropout rate was in part attributable to a lack of parental support for schooling. Did the Government have any programmes to educate families about the need to support their children in that regard?

62. Following consideration of the previous periodic report, concern had been voiced about discrimination against disabled children, unregistered children, pregnant adolescents and children of Haitian origin. While children lacking birth certificates were reportedly now admitted to schools, the delegation should provide information on the other vulnerable groups in question and their enrolment rates. According to the report, there were three provinces where the percentages of disabled children attending school were particularly low. The delegation should explain why that was the case, and describe any government programmes to correct such problems. The report also indicated disparities in the enrolment rates between rural and urban areas. What was the Government doing to support the schooling of children from poor rural households?

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.