



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Distr.: General
14 November 2024

Original: English

Human Rights Committee

142nd session

Summary record of the 4151st meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 16 October 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Abdo Rocholl

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

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant
(continued)

Sixth periodic report of Iceland (continued) (CCPR/C/ISL/6; CCPR/C/ISL/QPR/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Iceland joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Iceland**, resuming her delegation's replies to the questions raised at the previous meeting, said that in the absence of a central anti-corruption body, the Prime Minister's Office was responsible for combating corruption in the executive branch, for example by developing codes of conduct and preventing conflicts of interest, while the Ministry of Justice dealt with corruption more broadly, including in law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. A national anti-corruption strategy was being developed to coordinate the efforts of other government agencies.
3. The Whistle-Blower Act (No. 40/2020) afforded protection to whistle-blowers provided that certain requirements had been met, such as the use of internal reporting channels before disclosure to the media. The Act had been adopted relatively recently, and few statistics on its application had been gathered. Data had not yet been gathered on the development of whistle-blowing procedures by public institutions, although they had been implemented by more than 30 per cent of companies with between 50 and 149 employees and more than 50 per cent of companies with more than 150 employees. Instructions and deadlines, rather than fines, had so far been issued to organizations that failed to establish such procedures. The Administration of Occupational Safety and Health allowed individuals to request protection when submitting reports relating to workplaces. It also raised awareness of the Act during inspections and via its website, as well as conducting surveys. The Prime Minister's Office had created an educational video about the Act for government employees.
4. Corruption was also being addressed through improvements to public access to information, and a review of the Information Act had found it to generally align with the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents. Although concerns had been raised regarding response times to requests for information, there had been no cases in which a public official had attempted to conceal wrongdoing. Work was ongoing to align legislation with international integrity and anti-corruption standards.
5. No charges had been brought in the criminal investigation into the "Fishrot" case being undertaken by the District Prosecutor's Office. Given the independence of the police and the prosecution, it was not possible to request information on the status of that investigation. It was not true that journalists had been criminally investigated owing to their work on the case; the police had investigated the alleged drugging of an individual and theft of their mobile telephone, leading to the alleged unauthorized distribution of data stored on the device. Journalists' right to free speech was protected in the Constitution, and journalists were not required to disclose their sources during criminal proceedings. They were not, however, immune from criminal charges, even in relation to their work. Media providers were required to establish their own rules on editorial independence, and the Government supported the democratic role of the news media. There were no legal mechanisms for curbing or suppressing journalists' right to publish or disseminate their work.
6. **A representative of Iceland** said that although freedom of expression encompassed the freedom to express offensive or unpopular opinions, it was not unlimited and could be curtailed according to the law in the interests of public order or State security, or to protect human health, morals or another party's rights or reputation. The independent Media Commission was responsible for applying legal provisions on hate speech to the media and could receive complaints, conduct investigations and issue decisions, which were definitive at the administrative level but could be appealed in the courts. No such complaints had yet been submitted. Media organizations found to have violated hate speech provisions were liable to a fine or other sanction.
7. **A representative of Iceland** said that prison sentences were not handed down in defamation cases involving domestic violence. Indeed, it had been several decades since a

prison sentence had been imposed for defamation; the courts usually resolved such cases by declaring the offending statement null and void.

8. **A representative of Iceland** said that efforts to address multiple forms of discrimination had focused mainly on immigrants and persons with disabilities. Research was being undertaken into topics including the financial inclusion of immigrants, housing segregation and the marginalization of young immigrants. Other research projects had found that slightly more than half of persons with disabilities were active in the labour market, approximately one third worked in segregated workplaces and more than a quarter were not in education, employment, rehabilitation or training. To support their employment, people with between 26 and 50 per cent work capacity received personalized assistance in searching for jobs and a grant lasting up to 24 months to bring their income into line with the full disability pension. Labour market policies were being introduced to increase job opportunities for persons with disabilities, and existing policies were under review. A project that increased part-time employment opportunities for persons with varying work capacities by promoting an inclusive workplace culture was being piloted in institutions of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and one rural municipality.

9. **Mr. Teraya** said that he would welcome an update on the planned amendments to the General Penal Code that would establish torture as a separate crime; he would also like to know, specifically, whether the amendments would introduce penalties commensurate with the gravity of the crime. He wished to know whether legislation would be adopted to empower the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, in its role as the national preventive mechanism, to comment on judicial practices; whether it received sufficient resources to carry out that role and whether it was independent of the parliament. It would also be useful to know the timeline for the adoption of draft legislation that would ensure respect for human rights and legal security in giving effect to the Ombudsman's recommendations. Lastly, he would appreciate the delegation's comments on the reported increase in the police's use of pepper spray, spit guards and conductive energy devices, known as "tasers". What oversight mechanisms were in place?

10. **Mr. El Haiba** said that the Committee would welcome a response to reports that appeals in connection with applications for international protection did not always have suspensive effect, that deadlines for appeals were excessively short and that asylum-seekers did not receive adequate legal assistance. He also wished to know how the excessive use of force during deportations was investigated and prevented. Details of the measures adopted to ensure full respect for the principle of non-refoulement would be appreciated.

11. He would like to know what specific steps were planned to ensure that asylum applications were duly and efficiently considered, what the main changes brought about by the amendment of the Foreign Nationals Act had been and how they would strengthen protection for the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. He would welcome details of the steps taken to ensure that the definition of statelessness contained in legislation was applied coherently and in line with international standards, along with information on how the State party would formalize and strengthen guidelines for the Directorate of Immigration on procedures for determining statelessness and how those procedures were implemented in practice.

12. He would appreciate information on the financial resources dedicated to supporting children victims of violence, including in rural areas, and would like to know what indicators were used to measure the impact of the plan of action against violence and its consequences 2019–2022. He would welcome information on any specific measures adopted to integrate efforts to prevent sexual violence and harassment into educational and recreational activities for young persons, along with details of the steps taken to make online training on sexual violence and harassment widely accessible. He wished to know how the introduction of electronic investigation files and training for police officers specializing in violence against children, as well as the strengthened cooperation between the police and child protection authorities, had affected the effectiveness of criminal prosecutions; detailed prosecution and conviction rates would be welcome. Lastly, he would be interested to learn how all the measures adopted to address violence against children had affected the prevalence of that crime.

13. **Mr. Carazo** said that he would like to know which bodies, and at which levels, identified victims of trafficking in persons and which entity was responsible for coordinating action to defend those victims' rights. He wished to know whether the resources of the existing national referral mechanism would be increased to improve victim identification and support in rural areas, whether the rate of prosecution of traffickers had changed since the entry into force of amendments to the General Penal Code in 2021 and whether there were sufficient shelters for male victims of trafficking and plans to improve support for them. It would be useful to learn how many victims of trafficking had received legal, medical and psychological support since 2020.

14. The Committee wished to know how respect for migrant workers' labour rights was verified and how migrant workers were protected from abusive practices, more broadly. It would also be helpful to know how the Government worked with trade unions and civil society to raise awareness of forced labour among vulnerable groups; what safeguards had been established since 2022 to ensure that victims of forced labour could report exploitation without fear of deportation or reprisals; and whether improvements might be made to procedures for identifying victims of trafficking in persons or forced labour, beyond criminal investigations.

15. **Mr. Ndiaye** said that he would like information on the criteria used to determine whether a minor could be detained in an adult detention facility. He wondered how the State party reconciled the prohibition against detaining young persons in adult facilities with the 15-day limit on their detention in youth facilities, and would like to know where young persons in conflict with the law were placed after that period had ended. He would be interested to learn what independent mechanisms monitored conditions in youth detention facilities and how respect for international standards was ensured.

16. The Committee would like to know how the State party justified its frequent, and sometimes extended, use of solitary confinement for persons in pretrial detention. It would also like to know what procedure was followed to ensure that medical examinations were carried out before a detainee was placed in solitary confinement; what safeguards existed to protect vulnerable persons in solitary confinement; and whether clear guidelines prevented the placement of detainees with mental health problems or disabilities in solitary confinement and ensured that their specific health needs were considered in decisions relating to their detention. The delegation was invited to comment on reports that foreign nationals were disproportionately subjected to solitary confinement.

17. He would like to know how the State party provided distance learning for all prisoners, particularly those in solitary confinement and high-security facilities, and whether there were sufficient technological resources to facilitate those programmes. He would also like to know whether new detainees underwent systematic medical screening, how it was ensured that such screening was undertaken promptly and how quickly detainees' requests for healthcare were granted. It would be useful to learn whether the Parliamentary Ombudsman evaluated the availability and quality of educational, recreational and rehabilitation programmes for prisoners, whether such programmes existed for minors and how any shortcomings detected in that area had been addressed. He wished to know what measures were in place to ensure that the Ombudsman's recommendations were followed and whether mechanisms were in place to ensure accountability if the matters raised in the Ombudsman's reports were not addressed.

18. He would welcome information on the impact of the measures adopted, as well as the work that remained to be done, to grant access to care for detainees suffering from serious mental health problems. It would also be useful to learn how mental healthcare teams managed waiting times, particularly for detainees requiring same-day and immediate medical attention. He would appreciate details of legal safeguards concerning involuntary hospitalization and psychiatric treatment, as well as an update on a bill on patients' rights in relation to coercive measures in psychiatric care, including an explanation of why the bill had been recalled. He wished to know how the current lack of regulations on coercive treatment was being remedied.

19. **Ms. Kran** said that it would be interesting to learn what steps had been taken to align article 198 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which prevented appeals against convictions

for minor offences, with article 14 (5) of the Covenant and whether, in the light of the establishment of the new Court of Appeal (Landsréttur), the right to appeal would be extended to such convictions. She wished to know what had been done to address concerns that police surveillance powers had recently been extended without a fully independent oversight mechanism or safeguards regarding the duration of surveillance, and that surveillance decisions were not made with the involvement of the judicial authorities or according to clear criteria.

20. She would like to know how the State party ensured that its constitutional recognition of the Evangelical Lutheran Church did not negatively affect the rights of individuals of other faiths or beliefs and how it planned to consult minority spiritual and humanist organizations in the development of policies on religious matters. Since the registration requirements for religious groups and humanist organizations did not apply to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, she wondered how those requirements were applied fairly and without discrimination and how the legality and transparency of the registration process and requirements was guaranteed. Given that children were automatically registered with a religious or non-religious organization based on their parents' affiliation, it would be helpful to learn how they were informed that they could change their affiliation or opt for non-affiliation, from the age of 16. She would also welcome information on how children of sufficient maturity were allowed to make such decisions before that age, what criteria were used to assess maturity and what procedures and education were in place to support those decisions.

The meeting was suspended at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11.20 a.m.

21. **A representative of Iceland** said that the incorporation of a specific offence of torture into the General Penal Code would take into account the definition of torture provided in the Covenant and include sanctions commensurate with the gravity of the crime. In his role as the national preventive mechanism, the Parliamentary Ombudsman undertook unannounced visits to places of deprivation of liberty, including healthcare facilities, and subsequently prepared reports containing recommendations. Those recommendations had recently been included in a review of the law enforcement system. The Office of the Ombudsman had recently received additional funding that allowed it to perform its monitoring duties more effectively. Any move to allow the Office to review judicial decisions could jeopardize the independence of the judiciary. The Office was fully independent, and the parliament had no authority over its investigations or conclusions.

22. **A representative of Iceland** said that although police officers' use of tasers had previously been subject to special authorization, they had recently been permitted to use them in a proportionate manner and according to specific standards when they believed that other measures would be insufficient. Only officers who had completed the required training, including annual refresher training, were permitted to carry the weapons, and they must use body-worn cameras when deploying them. A working group had been set up to review every use of a taser, and the results were shared with the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police, who decided whether procedural changes were required. The working group would produce a report on its findings 18 months after the entry into force of the changes, which would inform the decision on whether police officers would continue to carry tasers. Surveys were conducted to ascertain the effect of the use of tasers on the public's opinion of the police and on officers' sense of safety. A supervisory committee received complaints relating to police conduct and procedure and examined deaths or significant injuries linked to police operations, and also undertook reviews on its own initiative.

23. The backlog of asylum applications was the result of an increase in applications since the start of the war in Ukraine. Nevertheless, strict procedural deadlines were respected, although efficiency did not compromise due investigation or the quality of decisions. The international protection system was subject to ongoing review, including in terms of processing times. Legislative changes in the area of international protection had included the restructuring of the Immigration and Asylum Appeals Board and adjustments to the rules governing return decisions. Staffing levels had been increased and digital tools developed to improve the system's efficiency and effectiveness.

24. The changes to the system of legal representation for asylum-seekers had increased the availability of legal representatives to assist asylum-seekers during interviews. All of the more than 100 lawyers on the list of approved legal representatives held the required qualifications. Asylum appeals submitted after the deadline were dismissed unless the delay was excusable – for example, if the authorities had failed to provide accurate information on the right to appeal – or compelling reasons existed as to why the appeal should be considered.

25. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Foreign Nationals Act provided for procedural safeguards in the area of statelessness and had been amended to separate procedures relating to international protection from those concerning statelessness; stateless persons had the right to international protection regardless of their refugee status. Stateless individuals who received refugee status could apply for Icelandic citizenship.

26. **A representative of Iceland** said that several grants were available to facilitate voluntary return. Forced deportations were necessary when individuals who were the subject of deportation orders refused to leave the country and were in line with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) Code of Conduct.

27. **A representative of Iceland** said that a family justice centre served as the national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking in persons and hosted a dedicated trafficking unit that comprised representatives of several agencies and coordinated relevant action, provided timely services to victims and collected data. The centre's funding had recently been increased. Male victims of trafficking were placed in secure accommodation, for example guesthouses. Although suspected victims of trafficking had access to emergency healthcare regardless of immigration status, psychological assistance was provided only in extreme emergencies. Foreign citizens, including victims of trafficking in persons who were not legally residing in Iceland, had access to psychological first aid followed by longer-term support via social services.

28. In 2021, a steering group on trafficking in persons had published a leaflet on how to recognize signs of human trafficking, including in children. The Directorate of Immigration had developed procedures for its personnel to follow in suspected cases of trafficking and had trained them to consider the best interests of children when they or their parents were believed to be victims of trafficking. In 2022, a working group on trafficking in persons had been established within the Nordic Council of Ministers and, in 2023, the Icelandic authorities had organized a conference and two training sessions for professionals from the Nordic countries on combating trafficking in persons. The working group intended to set up a mechanism to enable police officers to share information and best practices in tackling trafficking in persons. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions included the management of cases of trafficking in persons as a key part of the training for prosecutors.

29. The Government's close cooperation with social partner organizations ensured that collective agreements were upheld. Trade unions – which assisted both members and non-members – responded to wage-related complaints. Social partners informed the authorities of any information about trafficking, exploitation or other violations of labour law received by them. Under legislative amendments that would take effect in early 2025, an action plan would be developed to better combat social dumping, and additional resources would be allocated to the prevention of occupational safety and health violations.

30. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Government avoided engaging in indirect refoulement by ensuring that no foreign national was returned under the Dublin III Regulation to a country that did not comply with the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights). The non-refoulement principle was always taken into consideration by the immigration appeals board in examining applications for international protection. The conditions in the home countries of most foreign nationals who were deported from Iceland were such that the criteria for the granting of subsidiary protection were generally satisfied.

31. **A representative of Iceland** said that Icelandic law clearly provided that children should be held in the same prisons as adults only when it was in the child's best interest. While children no longer served sentences in adult prisons, they had been held at such prisons in pretrial detention when they had been considered to be at risk at other facilities or for investigative reasons. In such cases, children were held in single-person units and

accompanied at all times by trained child protection officials. Ongoing evaluation determined whether it would be in the child's best interest for them to be moved elsewhere. Several measures, including increased funding, had been taken to improve the services provided at the Stuðlar youth facility. Pursuant to the Child Protection Act, children could not legally be deprived of liberty for more than 14 days; nevertheless, it was sometimes deemed to be in their best interest to be held at Stuðlar, which had specialized child services, for longer periods. A revision of the Child Protection Act was planned with a view to making the child protection system more child-friendly and better protect the rights of children, including those deprived of their liberty.

32. **A representative of Iceland** said that the fact that, under Icelandic law, the police were obligated either to release detained persons within 24 hours – a shorter period than in many other countries – or to bring them before a judge to request pretrial detention, might account for why pretrial detention was imposed more frequently in Iceland than it was elsewhere. While the Government did not consider the use of pretrial detention in Iceland, which concerned just 2 per cent of all persons arrested, to be disproportionate, it was committed to improving legal safeguards and to identifying less harsh measures that would nevertheless prevent detainees from speaking to others in the early phase of investigations. The disproportionately high number of foreign citizens in pretrial detention in Iceland was being investigated to ensure that discrimination was not a factor. Pretrial detention was imposed only on persons suspected of the most serious offences and only when it was deemed necessary. When pretrial detention was no longer required for investigative reasons, the authorities were obligated to release an individual notwithstanding the period of detention authorized in the court order.

33. Only 1.2 per cent of all persons arrested were placed in solitary confinement. The Government had undertaken to diminish the potential negative effects of solitary confinement through measures such as increased access to physical exercise and daily communication with mental health teams. All accused persons were entitled to the assistance of legal counsel.

34. All four of the prisons run by the Prison and Probation Administration offered outdoor fitness and recreational activities to prisoners, while the availability of on-site work and distance learning varied. Nurses, who were employed by the health services, not the prison authority, were present five days a week at Hólmshetiði prison, where the majority of prisoners began serving their sentence, and ensured that all new prisoners and persons in pretrial detention underwent physical and mental health screening within a few days of their arrival and were referred to doctors when necessary. Prison guards contacted doctors and nurses at the weekend when necessary; efforts were being made to provide guards with more training in that connection. Two substance abuse counsellors provided support to all prisoners and managed a treatment unit in one prison. A mental health team provided harm reduction treatment in all prisons; such treatment could include counselling and maintenance therapy with Suboxone or Buvital where appropriate. Regular Alcoholics Anonymous meetings were held at all prisons and were open to everyone.

35. The Parliamentary Ombudsman was accompanied by experienced lawyers, psychologists and other specialists when visiting prisons and examined general conditions, the means of communication available, the application of security and coercive measures and the keeping of related records, access to experienced healthcare staff, and prisoner engagement with work, studies, treatment and recreation. Each visit was followed up with a report presenting findings and recommending improvements where applicable; the report was published on the website of the Ombudsman and submitted to the parliament. Both the Ombudsman and the parliament were able to follow up on the recommendations made.

36. Improved cooperation between prisons and hospitals in recent years had contributed to ensuring better care for prisoners with mental health issues. No medical treatment was administered in prisons without patient consent.

37. **A representative of Iceland** said that a bill amending the Patients' Rights Act in order to provide a stronger legal basis for coercive measures and to reduce the risk of inhuman treatment had been introduced in the parliament in 2021 but had not been adopted. After extensive consultations, a new bill had been drafted that was primarily aimed at codifying the principle of prohibiting interference with the autonomy, freedom and privacy of patients,

including prisoners and children, and that provided for the ability of patients to challenge the use of coercive measures; it was due to be considered by the parliament in November. The Government acknowledged that more needed to be done to provide specialized services for complex mental health and substance abuse cases in prisons.

38. **A representative of Iceland** said that the bill amending the Legal Competence Act took into account comments from the Committee against Torture and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Its main purpose was to bring the law into line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and ensure that alternative solutions were exhausted prior to depriving a person of his or her legal competence. It strengthened protection against involuntary hospitalization and provided for increased supervision of appointed legal guardians. The bill had been presented to the parliament in spring 2024 and was currently under review.

39. **A representative of Iceland** said that a special advisory committee had reviewed article 198 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and had found that it upheld the fundamental human right of convicted people to seek a review by a higher tribunal and should not be amended. It was the view of the Government that the current law balanced restrictions placed on appeals by the European Court of Human Rights by permitting them in cases of significant public interest or where judgment might be amended. The decision made by the Court of Appeal on whether to grant leave to appeal entailed a substantive review of the judgment made by the court of first instance and was therefore compliant with the Covenant.

40. Police had been granted greater authority to use surveillance measures in the public sphere alone and only when their use was supported by reliable information related to organized crime or certain offences against the State such as terrorism. The police had to inform the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions as promptly as possible after commencing such surveillance and could not continue it for more than four months without judicial authorization.

41. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Committee's concluding observations had been taken into consideration in the drafting of amendments to the Registered Religious Communities Act in 2013. Monthly payments were made from the State treasury to registered religious and philosophical organizations – which received the same funding as the National Church of Iceland – for members who were more than 16 years old. organization only if both parents with custody of the child were members; otherwise, registration took place with the agreement of both parents and with that of the child if he or she was aged 12 years and over. Children aged 16 years and over could register or unregister themselves from such organizations independently. Guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture emphasized that religious education should cover the content and customs of different religions rather than seeking to indoctrinate them in specific beliefs and that neither children nor parents should be compelled to account for their beliefs; the same guidelines were applied on school visits to religious organizations and visits by members of religious organizations to schools.

42. **A representative of Iceland** said that recent measures taken to improve the services provided by the Barnahús (Children's House) included increased funding. Those services, which were made available nationwide through staff visits and the Internet included the conduct of specialized interviews with unaccompanied children and children who were the victims of violence. The Government had developed an action plan for targeting peer violence and violence against children. The plan would be in effect until the end of 2026 and its results would be evaluated and used to inform future policies. Materials for educators supporting the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence had been centralized and made available on the website of the Directorate of Education and School Services. The Ministry of Education and Children had increased the number of staff at the National Agency for Children and Families to support social services and other providers of services to migrant children throughout Iceland. There was a focal point at the Agency for refugee children and migrant children's issues. Online training had been offered to service providers around the country and had in turn improved service provision in rural areas.

43. **Ms. Kran**, referring to the case in which four journalists had been arrested for privacy breaches, said that she would like to know whether the charges against the journalists had been dropped and, if so, whether the reasons for the decision to drop charges had been released and how that decision had been communicated to the public, including journalists at large. She would also welcome more information on the steps being taken to ensure that the emphasis on Christianity in the national curriculum did not result in religious discrimination in compulsory education and to protect the free expression and practice of religion among students belonging to religious minorities.

44. **Mr. El Haiba** said that it would be helpful if the delegation could provide statistics on statelessness in Iceland, as well as information on the steps taken to evaluate the provision of professional training on the protection of stateless persons. He would like more information on the extent of the human rights protection granted under the amended Foreign Nationals Act to foreign nationals whose applications for international protection had been definitively rejected. Lastly, he would like to know whether there was a mechanism in place to ensure access to justice for child victims of sexual assault and other children whose fundamental rights had been violated.

45. **Mr. Teraya**, noting the State party's plans to amend the General Penal Code to establish torture as a separate crime, said that he would like to know the expected timeline for that process. He remained concerned that the national preventive mechanism might be unable to exercise its role fully, owing to the measures in place to protect the independence of the judiciary. He would like to know whether the national preventive mechanism had the authority to comment on judicial practices and how concerns raised by the national preventive mechanism or the Parliamentary Ombudsman about detention conditions or legal processes were addressed.

46. **Mr. Gómez Martínez** said that he would like clarification as to whether the placement of a prisoner in solitary confinement must be based on a reasoned judicial decision that referred to the principles of necessity and proportionality and whether the lawyer of the prisoner concerned was heard as part of the decision-making process. He would also like to know whether prisoners in solitary confinement were entitled to receive visits from a doctor.

47. **Mr. Carazo** said that he would like more information about the events that had led to the establishment of shelters for victims of labour exploitation. He would welcome clarification as to the meaning of the term "social dumping" and the content of the new legislation on that subject. He hoped that progress would continue to be made in the protection of human rights in Iceland regardless of the changing circumstances in the country.

48. **Mr. Santos Pais** said that he would be interested to know why the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been incorporated into domestic law but the Covenant had not. He would also like to know what approach was taken in cases where the provisions of the Covenant differed from those of the European Convention on Human Rights.

49. **A representative of Iceland** said that the case mentioned by Ms. Kran had been closed, the journalists in question had not been charged and the decision to terminate the investigation had been publicly disseminated.

50. **A representative of Iceland** said that, as part of the new national curriculum, students were required to learn about various religions, because religious education was important in a democratic, multicultural society and students must learn to show respect for views that differed from their own. Religious education included field trips to religious organizations and lessons given by representatives of those organizations. Parents who wanted their children to learn more about a specific religion could arrange for them to attend classes and religious services in their free time. Schools must conduct their activities in such a way as to ensure that students did not need to be exempted from certain activities on account of their religious or other beliefs.

51. **A representative of Iceland** said that training on statelessness had been provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to staff of the Directorate of Immigration and other key stakeholders.

52. Article 33 of the Foreign Nationals Act had been amended to clarify the status of applicants for international protection whose applications had been definitively rejected.

Before its amendment, some applicants in that situation had continued to be provided with social services for several years while the authorities faced difficulties in executing deportation orders against them because they were refusing to cooperate. It had therefore been decided that persons who refused to comply with a deportation order should no longer be entitled to services, with the exception of certain groups, such as children and pregnant women, who would continue to have access to services regardless of their willingness to cooperate.

53. The revocation of a person's entitlement to services could be postponed if the person demonstrated willingness to leave the country. In such cases, the person continued to be provided with the services that had been available to them while their application had been pending. A core principle of the protection system was that foreign nationals who did not meet the criteria for international protection or a residence permit on humanitarian grounds must leave the country. A temporary shelter had been set up by the Icelandic Red Cross to provide emergency assistance, such as accommodation and food, to foreign nationals whose applications for international protection had been rejected and who were no longer entitled to services.

54. **A representative of Iceland** said that, on account of the upcoming parliamentary election, it was not possible to provide a timeline for the amendment of the Criminal Code to include a definition of torture. However, the Government hoped that progress would be made in that area in 2025. Although the Parliamentary Ombudsman did not oversee the work of the judiciary, he or she did monitor conditions of solitary confinement. The way in which the Parliamentary Ombudsman operated as the national preventive mechanism was actually quite efficient, since, in addition to submitting an annual report to the parliament, he or she could raise concerns about systemic failures directly with the relevant ministry, which was required to address the concerns by proposing legislative or procedural changes to the parliament.

55. Solitary confinement was always based on a judicial decision. At the beginning of a criminal investigation, the prosecutor could request the court to impose pretrial solitary confinement if it was deemed necessary for the purposes of the investigation. The accused person's lawyer was present during the proceedings and could challenge the request for pretrial solitary confinement and seek more lenient measures. The principle of proportionality was strictly upheld by the prosecutor and the courts in such proceedings. Pretrial solitary confinement was not imposed in cases where more lenient measures were sufficient.

56. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Government was working to improve access to justice for children. The Ombudsman for Children served as a public spokesperson for all children. The information on the website of the Ombudsman was presented in a child-friendly format and children could seek support and counselling from the Ombudsman at any time. The Child Protection Act had recently been amended to make it more accessible to children. The Ministry of Education and Children was working to make administrative processes more child-friendly under the "Child-Friendly Iceland" action plan.

57. **A representative of Iceland** said that only two human rights treaties had been fully incorporated into domestic law: the European Convention on Human Rights had been transposed into domestic law at a time when the Constitution had not yet been brought into line with its provisions, while the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been transposed into domestic law in order to place special emphasis on children's rights. Domestic law was supposed to be interpreted by the courts in accordance with all of the State's human rights obligations. The European Convention on Human Rights did not take precedence over the Covenant. It was a general rule that human rights provisions should be interpreted broadly.

58. **A representative of Iceland** said that the recent election of Iceland to the Human Rights Council reflected the Government's efforts to mainstream human rights in its work at both the national and international levels, with a particular focus on gender equality and the rights of the LGBTQI+ community. Its voluntary pledges included a commitment to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

59. **A representative of Iceland**, thanking the Committee for the constructive dialogue, said that the Government looked forward to receiving the Committee's concluding observations and would do everything in its power to make improvements wherever necessary. It would endeavour to submit any outstanding replies within 48 hours.

60. **The Chair** said that she wished to thank the delegation for its open and efficient approach to the dialogue, which had covered a wide range of themes, including the constitutional and legal framework, violence against women and the treatment of foreign nationals.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.