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the Elimination
of all Forms of
Racial Discrimination**

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Seventy-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1918th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 25 February 2009, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. DAH

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

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

Seventeenth to nineteenth periodic reports of Finland (CERD/C/FIN/19)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Finland took places at the Committee table.
2. Mr. KOSONEN (Finland) said that the current report was the result of effective cooperation between the relevant ministries and civil-society stakeholders. In order to strengthen the legal framework for human rights, in 2007 the Ministry of Justice had set up a committee to review relevant legislation and make recommendations, *inter alia* in relation to the role and powers of the ombudsmen working to combat discrimination. That committee had submitted an interim report in February 2008 and would submit its final report at the end of 2009.
3. As to the national languages - Finnish and Swedish - and the Sámi language, he said that the revised Language Act had entered into force in 2004 and guaranteed the language rights of individuals. A report on implementation of the Act and the situation of language rights was submitted periodically to parliament, the first having been submitted in 2006. The new Sámi Language Act, which had likewise entered into force in 2004, emphasized the authorities' obligation to guarantee the language rights of the Sámi, including Inari Sámi, Skolt Sámi and Northern Sámi. A report submitted to the Sámi parliament on implementation of that Act over the period 2004-2006 had reported no real change in the availability of services in the Sámi language in the municipalities of the Sámi Homeland, although his Government felt that some progress had been made; forms relating to judicial matters, for example, had been translated into all three Sámi languages.
4. In 2007, the legislation relating to mother-tongue instruction for immigrants, Roma pupils and Sámi pupils outside the Sámi Homeland had been amended, *inter alia* to increase instruction time from two to two and a half lessons a week. Those lessons were in addition to the regular curriculum. State subsidies to municipalities for Finnish or Swedish classes for pupils whose knowledge of those languages was too poor for regular classroom lessons had been doubled to cover a year, rather than six months, of lessons.
5. The Internal Security Programme, adopted in May 2008, was intended to promote the rule of law and eliminate insecurity, particularly for immigrants and members of ethnic minorities, reduce violence, combat organized crime, and prevent cybercrime and Internet-related risks, with a view to making Finland the safest country in Europe by 2015. Its measures included offering immigrants better information on Finnish legislation and available services, the efficient and fair processing of residence permits, recruitment of members of ethnic minorities in the public sector, and ensuring that legislation and the judicial system addressed racist crimes and racist messages on the Internet.
6. The Directorate of Immigration had been replaced by the Finnish Immigration Service in early 2008. A similar body had been created within the Ministry of the Interior, under the

supervision of the Minister of Immigration and European Affairs. The mandate of the Ombudsman for Minorities had been broadened to include surveys of ethnic discrimination and monitoring of human trafficking.

7. In September 2008, the Ministry of the Interior had initiated a project for the creation of a national system for the monitoring of racism and ethnic discrimination with a view to generating comprehensive statistics, for example on the number of discrimination cases brought before the courts and on the socio-economic status of members of minorities and immigrants.

Implementation would be under the supervision of a broad-based working group. As part of that project the national system for monitoring hate crimes would be strengthened, building on research conducted at the police college in 2007-2008. The project would include a study on prosecutions of racist crimes in the judicial system, which had yielded valuable information on the dropping of prosecutions for procedural reasons, usually lack of evidence.

8. In 2007 and 2008, as part of the national awareness-raising campaign on anti-discrimination, key ministries had promoted a programme to assist NGOs in taking full advantage of mechanisms to combat discrimination and increase their effectiveness and efficiency. Thirteen NGOs, including several representing the Sámi, the Roma and immigrant groups, had received training.

9. Several programmes had been launched to improve the attitudes of employers and employees towards minorities. In the context of the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, events had been coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and a diversity in employment programme organized, including regional seminars for employers and shop stewards, diversity management training for companies, and training material for employers and employees. In addition, the Ministry of the Interior had promoted a project whereby ministries, companies, sports clubs, associations, etc. could declare themselves discrimination-free zones.

10. A survey carried out for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in 2007 on social services provided to immigrants had recommended awareness-training for staff on how to deal with different cultures and languages. Recruitment of immigrants in the social sector was also identified as an important means of improving services to immigrants, and local governments were urged to improve counselling services for immigrants. In the area of health, the government policy programme for health promotion and the recent national action plan to reduce health inequalities had identified the special health needs of immigrants.

11. Racial segregation by ethnic group was the result of both housing and immigration policies and preference on the part of, for example, Somali and Russian immigrants, who were drawn to the capital region and certain neighbourhoods. During the sudden increase in immigration in the early 1990s new immigrants tended to be housed wherever public housing was available. Recent factors included migration patterns of the native population and rapid changes in the housing market.

12. Turning to the issue of Sámi land rights and ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, he said that his country had tried to create a legal framework that would provide a balanced solution meeting its international commitments and at the same time meeting the needs of the Sámi and other inhabitants of the Sámi Homeland. That was, however, a challenging task and a thorough study of settlement,

population, development and land rights had been undertaken in 2003-2006. A law would be drafted based on the conclusions of the study with a view to promoting a model acceptable to all stakeholders. A Sámi cultural centre, with facilities for the Sámi parliament and Sámi-related education, research and culture would be built in the village of Inari as a means of preserving and developing Sámi culture. Construction should be completed by early 2012.

13. The housing situation of Roma continued to be problematic. Of 93 cases submitted to the Ombudsman for Minorities by Roma in 2007, half had concerned housing. Some cities, for example Oulu, had intensified coordination efforts with regard to housing for Roma. In 2007 the National Discrimination Tribunal had dealt with four cases relating to the Roma transmitted by the Ombudsman. A broad-based working group, half of whose members were Roma, had begun work on a Roma policy aimed at promoting equality for the Roma. The group would make recommendations, advise key government bodies, organize hearings and report regularly on progress made.

14. Mr. KEMAL, Country Rapporteur, said that the State party had an impressive array of machinery to combat discrimination. The Ombudsman for Minorities, an independent authority attached to the Ministry of Labour, whose field of competence was limited to ethnic discrimination, dealt with about 2,000 enquiries a year. Other bodies, including the Parliamentary Ombudsman, the Ombudsman for Equality, occupational health and safety authorities, the Chancellor of Justice and the National Discrimination Tribunal, were empowered to address different forms of discrimination. He noted that the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance had expressed concern that the close ties between the Ombudsman for Minorities and the Ministry of Labour with regard to both resources and operating conditions might limit the Ombudsman's effectiveness; he invited the delegation to comment on that point.

15. The Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations promoted interaction between the authorities, NGOs, members of parliament, immigrants and minorities, and advised ministries on ethnic equality. There were also advisory boards on Roma affairs and Sámi affairs, as well as an advisory board for minority issues, which worked with the Ombudsman for Minorities to promote cooperation among government departments with a view to preventing ethnic discrimination.

16. Turning to issues relating to the Sámi minority, he recalled the Committee's recommendation in its previous concluding observations that the State party should give more weight to self-identification and took note of the explanation in the report according to which definition as a Sámi was based on the interpretation of the Supreme Administrative Court and no amendment to the Act on the Sámi parliament was warranted. The Sámi parliament had, however, suggested that the definition of Sámi should be discussed at the Nordic level and he enquired whether such discussions would take place.

17. With regard to Sámi land rights, an issue likewise raised in the Committee's previous concluding observations, he requested further information on the current situation in the light of the comprehensive legal-historical study of that issue carried out in 2003-2006 and the negotiations in 2006 between the Ministry of Justice and the Sámi parliament on a possible solution.

18. He recalled the concern expressed by the Committee in its previous concluding observations about allegations of racist and xenophobic attitudes, particularly among young people. In that regard, he had noted the annual grants assigned by the Ministry of Education to support the promotion of multiculturalism and anti-racist activities, and the findings of the studies described in paragraph 87 of the report. He welcomed the increased focus on minority issues in teacher training and on human rights education in school curricula, and commended the efforts made by the State party to combat bullying at school. The bullying of immigrant children was an important issue, and one which the Committee should perhaps include as a matter of course in its examination of State party periodic reports. He had noted the seminars, forums and other activities intended to foster non-discrimination and good ethnic relations, described in paragraphs 91 and 92 of the report. The report had also contained information on the problematic situation of holders of temporary residence permits, who were not entitled to family reunification or municipal health care, and were not allowed to work.

19. Turning to article 3 of the Convention, and the issue of segregation of the housing market, he had noted from the written reply to question 11 of the list of issues that there was no spatial concentration of Roma people, that segregation occurred not in terms of neighbourhoods but in terms of apartment buildings, and that most immigrants wished to have families with children belonging to the majority population as their neighbours.

20. Referring to article 4, he recalled the concern expressed by the Committee about racist, discriminatory and xenophobic material on the Internet and noted that the State party was taking measures to address that problem, involving cooperation of the Ombudsman for Minorities, police and civil society with Internet service-providers. He had noted the difficulties concerning dissemination of unlawful material from Internet-servers located outside Finland, including in the United States, where such material was protected under the First Amendment to the Constitution.

21. Recalling the concern expressed by the Committee in its previous concluding observations about the guarantees of legal protection afforded by the “accelerated procedure” for processing asylum applications, provided for in the revised Aliens Act, he said that he would like to know the reason why all 774 applications processed under that procedure had been rejected, as indicated in the reply to question 3.

22. In its previous concluding observations the Committee had also expressed concern about the difficulties faced by Roma in employment, housing and education, and about the discrimination they faced in daily life, for example when they wished to enter restaurants or bars. He had noted the information provided in paragraphs 158 and 159 of the report and said that he would appreciate further information on how the State party was addressing those problems. He would also welcome further details of steps taken to address the problematic situation regarding the employment of persons with an immigrant background.

23. Noting the State party’s detailed reply to question 15 concerning prosecutions, convictions and sanctions relating to provisions on racial hatred and discrimination, he asked why the provisions continued to be underused and what measures the State party had taken to improve their implementation. He would like to know whether the periodic report had been drawn up in

consultation with civil society organizations, and whether the relevant parts of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action had been taken into account, in line with paragraphs 18 and 19 of the Committee's previous concluding observations.

24. He commended the State party for its efforts to combat racial discrimination. It was necessary to step up those efforts, however, in view of the rising discrimination in Europe against people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, in a context of growing numbers of immigrants seeking refuge in Europe from persecution and deprivation, and the worsening international economic climate.

25. Mr. AVTONOMOV thanked the delegation for the detailed information provided, and commended the Country Rapporteur for his in-depth analysis. The Sámi people were also present in the Russian Federation, and he therefore understood the complexity of their situation. He underlined the importance of consultation with NGOs in the preparation of periodic reports. It was necessary to have quantitative information on ethnic groups in order to be able to address the discrimination problems they faced.

26. With regard to the appointment of an independent ombudsman for discrimination on Åland, as described in paragraph 30 of the report, he said that he would welcome more information on relevant legislation. It would also be useful to know the findings of the study on discrimination carried out in 2007 and any measures that had been taken or planned as a result.

27. He would be grateful if the State party could clarify whether the Roma had a nomadic way of life in Finland, whether they had temporary camps, and whether they were assigned special sites. He would like to know of any obstacles to the Roma's chosen lifestyle, and how their right to education was ensured. It would also be useful to have information on the numbers and situation of Roma prisoners, and in that regard he drew the State party's attention to the Committee's general recommendation XXXI on the prevention of racial discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system.

28. He would welcome information on the status of the proposed Nordic Sámi Convention, and on how the issue of trans-border communication and cultural exchange between the Sámi people was being taken into account in that work.

29. Mr. EWOMSAN noted the increasing levels of racial discrimination in the State party, *inter alia* against Roma, Muslims and Somalis. He asked why cases of racial discrimination brought before the courts often went unpunished, and what steps the State party was taking to address that problem.

30. Mr. PROSPER said that he would be interested to hear the reasons for the lack of statistics on minority groups. He requested clarification of paragraph 8 of the report, and whether he had understood correctly that information on the numbers of immigrants was available, but in the case of minorities only estimates were available. He wondered whether there might be an objective way to obtain that information, which would not be in violation of the national data protection legislation. He had noted that the various advisory boards described in paragraphs 54-67 of the report were accountable to different ministries, and asked whether there was overall coordination of their work at government level.

31. Mr. MURILLO MARTÍNEZ said that he had noted from paragraph 95 of the report that the National Audit Office had considered it problematic that no efforts were made to integrate recipients of temporary residence permits into Finnish society during the two years of validity of their permits. He asked what steps the State party had taken in that area. In addition, he would like to know what follow-up had been given to the repeated proposals of the Ombudsman for Minorities for a comprehensive study on the position of the Roma in Finnish society, as mentioned in paragraph 105 of the report. He had been pleased to learn of the important work being carried out to combat the propagation of racism via the Internet.

32. Mr. DIACONU said that Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which Finland had recently ratified, was extremely important because it promoted a general prohibition of discrimination that was justiciable before the European Court of Human Rights. In addition, since 2002, Finland had adopted modern laws that responded to the needs of society and were of relevance to the Committee, including the Non-Discrimination Act, amendments to the Criminal Code, and laws on languages, nationality and aliens. It was of note that Finland had founded numerous national institutions, with the participation of ethnic groups. It had also set up Ombudsmen for Minorities and advisory boards on human rights, language and minority issues and ethnic relations. Finland had extremely generous provision for mother-tongue instruction and for Finnish to be taught as a second language; it was the first country to appear before the Committee to have accorded first-language status to the mother tongue. The acceptance of multiple nationality would improve relations with persons of different ethnic origins.

33. Nevertheless, the report openly acknowledged the existence of discrimination in Finland, including the difficulties encountered by Roma people and an increase in the number of racist offences. Furthermore, the recipients of temporary residence permits did not enjoy the same rights as other citizens; they could not hold gainful employment and were not entitled to family reunification. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance had recommended that Finland should abandon the temporary permit scheme, and it was to be hoped that the Government's planned amendment of the Aliens Act would result in more generous treatment of the persons affected from a human rights perspective.

34. The report stated that minorities and immigrants suffered discrimination from employers, that it was difficult to gain recognition for qualifications obtained outside the country and that there were reported cases of Roma being refused access to public places. He asked whether there was another mechanism in place to safeguard the rights of Muslims apart from the Islamic Council of Finland. The Sámi population also suffered discrimination; there appeared to be insufficient measures to teach the Sámi language and to promote knowledge of the history of the Sámi and their culture and traditions.

35. Given that the mechanisms and the will existed, he was optimistic that further progress would be made in preventing racial violence and racial discrimination in Finland by the time of the next report.

36. Mr. de GOUTTES echoed the remarks of previous speakers on Finland's progress in introducing new legislation and in particular its ratification of Protocol No. 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. In his oral presentation, the Finnish representative had stated that anti-discrimination legislation was being reviewed by a

committee set up by the Ministry of Justice which would report on its findings at the end of the year, and had referred to other impending legislation and reforms. A Roma policy programme working group, half of whose members were Roma, was due to complete the first stage of its work in June 2009. The many reforms announced by the delegation would be followed with interest by the Committee. He wondered how the numerous bodies appointed to combat racial discrimination were able to carry out their duties without an overlap of responsibilities.

37. Regarding implementation of articles 4 and 6 of the Convention, he had noted in paragraphs 44-47, 131 and 137 of the report that comprehensive criminal laws against racism were in place, and he commended the addition to the Criminal Code of a provision on racist motives that permitted an increase in the severity of the penalty. Yet it appeared from paragraphs 126, 127 and 138-140 that criminal matters were rarely pursued: that situation could be remedied if more information on existing legislation and the means of seeking redress were communicated to victims, and if the police and the judiciary paid greater attention to racist crimes so that they were effectively dealt with. There seemed to be difficulty in establishing proof in the case of racist crimes and he wished to ask whether Finland would consider a system that would reverse the burden of proof in civil cases of that kind. The police and NGOs in some countries had been known to resort to carrying out tests to determine whether an organization or individual adopted a racist approach and he wondered whether Finland had considered adopting that practice.

38. He endorsed the questions of previous speakers regarding the Sámi and their land rights and the situation of the Roma. He wished to draw attention to the problem of branding immigrants with racist or xenophobic stereotypes in the media and in society.

39. Mr. PETER commended the State party for its progress in implementing the Convention in recent years, although he noted that many of the efforts made had targeted the potential victims of racial discrimination; he asked what efforts had been made to sensitize the people of Finland to the dangers of discrimination. The introduction of programmes to encourage diversity and teach human rights in schools outlined in paragraphs 85-92, 235 and 236 of the report had certainly been positive, but discrimination was usually practised by adults rather than children. Turning to paragraphs 45-47, which dealt with foreign-language broadcasting, he asked whether programmes combating racial discrimination itself were also subsidized by the Government. The fact that, in the first 10 months of 2008, there had been over 650 reports of race-related crimes and that over 70 per cent of the victims had been immigrants highlighted the importance of awareness-raising among the Finnish population.

40. Noting the tasks of the advisory board on Sámi affairs detailed in paragraphs 63 and 64, he wished to learn whether the Board coordinated with other countries, such as Norway, Sweden and the Russian Federation, where the Sámi people also lived.

41. Paragraph 37 of the report stated that there had been an increase in the number of applications for naturalization following introduction of the new Nationality Act; he asked whether the otherwise laudable practice of allowing immigrants to be educated in their mother tongue might reduce their chances of achieving a good command of Finnish and/or Swedish and thus obtaining Finnish nationality.

42. Mr. ABOUL-NASR asked whether the delegation could provide information that more clearly defined the Sámi community. Concerning paragraph 5 of the report, he wished to know why nationals of Somalia had been listed and not those of other Arab or foreign countries. He queried whether the practice of returning children only to European Union countries, as opposed to countries outside Europe, outlined in paragraph 100, was discriminatory. He wished to know whether the housing problems of the Roma, described in paragraph 177, were also experienced by other communities.

43. Mr. THORNBERRY, referring to page 7 of the written replies and noting the relatively low absolute numbers of Sámi language-speakers, asked whether the language was spoken outside the Sámi Homeland. He wondered what prospects there were for the language in the longer term; there could come a tipping point when the number of speakers of the language was so low that its continuance would be unsure. He wished to learn more about the report on the Sámi language submitted to the Sámi parliament at the end of 2007. He reiterated the question by Mr. Peter concerning cross-border cooperation on Sámi affairs. It was important for majority populations in all countries to gain a better understanding of the minorities on their territories and, in some cases, to have the opportunity to learn a minority language as a means of improving interaction and mutual respect.

44. He sought further information concerning the education of Roma children and the provision of special facilities based on the linguistic capabilities of children in the Finnish language; it was a matter of considerable sensitivity and one of great interest to the Committee on which it appeared that the Finnish authorities were taking the right approach.

45. While acknowledging the delegation's extensive answer given in its written replies on the question of ILO Convention No. 169, he was puzzled that Finland had not ratified that Convention, given the many experts on the rights of indigenous peoples present in the country.

46. Referring to the written reply on the employment of the Roma, he said that one of the problems for Roma populations throughout Europe was that the traditional trades they plied had been superseded by the advance of the electronic age; he wondered whether Finland might give consideration to upgrading their skills in order to improve their chances of finding employment.

47. He was not in favour of testing as a means of identifying racist attitudes; it was his perception that people did not like being tricked through the use of fake customers. The benefits of criminal law in promoting an environment of anti-racial discrimination could not be overestimated.

48. Concerning mother-tongue and official-language education, there was educational research from various countries which showed that, in principle, there was no incompatibility between them; indeed, the ability to gather knowledge in the official language was enhanced by working first from the mother tongue.

49. Mr. KOSONEN (Finland), responding to questions raised, said that his introduction to the report had been brief in response to comments on the length of the introduction received from the Committee in 1996.

50. The Ombudsman for Minorities was functionally located within the Ministry of the Interior but enjoyed complete autonomy in her activities.

51. Ms. MAKKONEN (Finland) said that her Government attached great importance to the independence of the Office of the Ombudsman for Minorities. That was reflected in the legislation establishing the Office, the fact that it was housed in a separate building from the Government and that the Ombudsman had full responsibility for hiring staff. The Office was affiliated to the Ministry of the Interior but was in no way subordinate to it.

52. Mr. CORTÉS-TÉLLEZ (Finland) said that the Government had begun collecting data to measure attitudes towards ethnic minorities in 1987. At that time, the average Finn had little experience of immigrants, and showed a positive attitude to welcoming more refugees and foreign workers to the country. During and after the recession of the 1990s, attitudes had become markedly more negative, particularly among the unemployed. But in recent years, public opinion had become more positive.

53. Bullying in schools had been adequately addressed in the previous five years only. Guidelines on tackling bullying had been provided for all school staff, including advice on identifying the signs, how to intervene and what preventive measures to take. The National Board of Education had also introduced an anti-bullying programme in 2006; it had already been brought to the attention of some 30,000 school students.

54. Data on the ethnic composition of the population were not available from the census. The term “immigrant” was not used in official statistics, but data on immigrants were easily obtainable using indicators such as nationality, mother tongue and country of birth. Obtaining reliable statistics on the size of the Roma population in Finland was almost impossible, as most Roma declared themselves Finnish citizens and their mother tongue was Finnish. The data currently quoted were based on studies carried out in the past. However, as it was illegal to request information on Roma ethnicity, there was no other solution.

55. Immigrants were provided with language training in Finnish or Swedish in order to expedite their integration. In parallel, they were encouraged to maintain and develop the use of their own language and culture.

56. Ms. JALKANEN (Finland) said that working groups had been established with the cooperation of the Ministry of the Interior to examine ways to obtain more and better statistics on ethnic minorities.

57. The number of immigrants in employment had risen in the previous few years. There were currently some 130,000 immigrants in Finland, about 105,000 of whom were employed. At the end of 2008, about 12,000 foreigners had been seeking work. In the light of the current demographic crisis in Finland, the Government was examining ways of attracting migrant workers, such as nurses from the Philippines and Viet Nam, to Finland. Those measures included providing courses on the Finnish language and culture prior to the migrants’ departure from their country of origin.

58. Mr. FREDRIKSSON (Finland) said that, since the 1970s, Finnish housing policy had taken the innovative approach of mixing owner-occupied, tenanted and other types of residences.

While that policy remained in place, its success was currently under threat owing to the rapid increase in immigration. Segregation remained a minor problem in terms of scale, but there was a clear trend whereby members of the non-immigrant population were choosing to leave some districts. In order not to leave apartments empty, they were allocated to immigrants, a practice which had resulted in a degree of concentration in some areas. The Government was examining ways to prevent the problems inherent in such segregation and to stop its spread.

59. Mr. CORTÉS-TÉLLEZ (Finland) said that the majority of the Roma population in Finland were not travellers. They were integrated into mainstream society in many respects, including in terms of housing. The Ministry of Education had announced that subsidies would be available in 2009 and 2010 to municipalities and schools that developed good policies on ways of integrating support for basic education for Roma children into the daily routine of their schools.

60. Mr. MAKKONEN (Finland) said that there had been an increase of 40 per cent in the number of racist crimes reported to the police between 2003 and 2007. That was possibly due to a greater willingness to report such crimes on the part of the victims. Since 2004, the National Discrimination Tribunal had received over 100 submissions, and it had developed important case law in that regard. A study of the reasons why more racially-motivated cases were not brought to court had noted that the figures for such crimes were the same as those for non-racially motivated assault. The report had concluded that the reasons included the victims' inability to identify the perpetrators, insufficient evidence, and the fact that some cases involved acts over which public prosecutors had no jurisdiction.

61. Mr. KOSONEN (Finland) said that, while his Government had indeed ratified Protocol No. 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Court of Human Rights had not yet addressed any questions to the Government in that context.

62. Coordination between the different advisory boards and human rights mechanisms was ensured at the policy level, and by virtue of the fact that many of the same people worked on several boards.

63. NGOs had been requested to submit information in the course of the process of preparing the periodic report. The public had the opportunity to address the Government, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the relevant websites. Government officials were instructed to respond to all questions and comments within a certain deadline.

64. Mr. CORTÉS-TÉLLEZ (Finland) said that, while assessments for special educational needs were conducted on a purely objective basis, the Ministry of Education had noted that a higher proportion of Roma children and children from certain ethnic groups were identified as having such needs. The Ministry had commissioned a study on that phenomenon, which would be carried out in 2009. The Government would include details of the results of that study in its next periodic report.

65. Ms. JALKANEN (Finland) said that each ministry was responsible for disseminating information on all new legislation introduced. Details were published on the Internet and in printed form as part of national awareness-raising campaigns.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.