



# International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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## Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination 115th session

### Summary record of the 3151st meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 30 April 2025, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Balcerzak

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article 9 of the Convention (*continued*)

*Tenth periodic report of Gabon*

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*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

**Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States Parties under article 9 of the Convention** (*continued*)

*Tenth periodic report of Gabon* ([CERD/C/GAB/10](#); [CERD/C/GAB/Q/10](#); [CERD/C/GAB/QPR/10](#))

1. **The Chair**, welcoming the delegation and the Permanent Representative of Gabon to the meeting, explained that some members of the delegation would be participating via video link.
2. **A representative of Gabon**, introducing his country's tenth periodic report ([CERD/C/GAB/10](#)), said that the report had been prepared by the National Committee for the Drafting of Human Rights Reports in accordance with an inclusive and participatory process. Following a national consultation, the report had been adopted by the Council of Ministers before being submitted to the Committee.
3. Since Gabon had gained independence in 1960, the country's Constitution had ensured equal dignity for all citizens by prohibiting any distinction based on race, origin or religion. The fight against all forms of discrimination was a priority of the current Government as it sought to fulfil its commitment to building a State governed by the rule of law that respected and protected human rights for all. That commitment was reflected in the measures and programmes outlined in the report under review.
4. Since the liberation coup of 30 August 2023, the Government had engaged in a process of democratic transition led by the Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions, under the President of the Transition, Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema. Structured around comprehensive institutional reforms, the process involved the participation of all the prominent groups in society, including traditional leaders, young people and representatives of the diaspora, Indigenous Peoples and civil society organizations. The process had laid the foundations for more transparent and democratic governance.
5. To date, the transitional Government had held an inclusive national dialogue; adopted the new Constitution under the Referendum Act (No. 2 of 19 December 2024); adopted Organic Act No. 1 of 19 January 2025 on the Electoral Code, which provided for several innovations, including the creation of two parliamentary seats for representatives of the diaspora and the granting of voting rights to citizens in prison; and held a presidential election on 12 April 2025. Following that election, the President would be inaugurated on 3 May 2025, bringing the transition to an end. The constitutional review had been complemented by decisive action by the transitional authorities to modernize and strengthen the administration of justice and update the legal framework to bring it into line with international treaties.
6. The gathering of statistical data represented a major challenge for the country. In order to address the issue, the Directorate General for Statistics had conducted the seventh general population and housing census. To that end, a decree had been issued, a technical body set up and data-collection tools developed, taking into account the information that would be needed for the monitoring and evaluation of national and international programmes. The questionnaires used in the census would yield data on the size and distribution of the population, broken down by age, sex, ethnicity, nationality and language, among other characteristics. Statistics would subsequently be compiled covering the whole population, including Indigenous Peoples, ethnic minorities and migrants. Efforts were being made to reform the national statistical system, including by establishing a statistical institute. The project entitled Harmonizing and Improving Statistics in West and Central Africa would also contribute to the production of reliable, up-to-date statistics.
7. The Convention could be applied directly by the courts. Article 166 of the Constitution of 2024 established that duly ratified treaties took precedence over the Constitution and other national laws. A number of measures had been taken to raise awareness of the Convention, including the organization of capacity-building workshops and the dissemination of informational materials. The human rights modules of a number of training institutions covered the Convention. Radio and television broadcasts in French and national languages were used to raise awareness of the Convention among the general public.

8. Gabonese law did not contain a definition of racial discrimination corresponding to that set out in article 1 of the Convention. However, the main principles of that article were enshrined in the Constitution of 1991, the Transition Charter of 2 September 2023 and the Constitution of 2024. The new Constitution differed from earlier instruments in that those principles were set out in the body of the text rather than in the preamble. Organic and ordinary laws, deriving from the Constitution, gave effect to the various principles and rights provided for in the Convention. Plans were in place to draw up a national action plan to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and training sessions on that subject had been organized.

9. Act No. 23/2024 on the Reorganization of the National Commission on Human Rights had been promulgated on 21 November 2024. The reorganization process would be completed in the coming weeks with the selection of new commissioners. The Commission had been staffed since 2012 and provided with premises in 2014. Between 2016 and 2025, its budget had increased from 12 million to 592 million CFA francs (CFAF).

10. During the reporting period, measures had been taken to bring the Criminal Code and other laws into compliance with article 4 of the Convention, including by condemning all acts of racial, religious and ethnic discrimination and all regionalist propaganda; banning secular or religious associations established with the object of undermining public security and inciting hatred between ethnic groups; banning defamatory speech and statements during election campaigns; banning racist, ethnic or regionalist hate speech in the audiovisual, print or digital media; and banning threats or insults of a racist, regionalist or religious nature disseminated by electronic means.

11. In recent years, amendments had been adopted to strengthen the legal framework for combating hate speech and hate crimes. The Criminal Code established penalties for any person who incited racial hatred or engaged in racist hate speech, defamation or insults, and provided for an aggravating circumstance of racial motivation, irrespective of the medium used. Any media outlet that published or broadcast hate speech or racist propaganda would be liable to criminal or administrative penalties. On a number of occasions, the High Authority for Communication had imposed penalties on media outlets. However, no convictions for hate speech had yet been handed down by the courts.

12. Other measures to tackle hate speech included a digital campaign called “Gabon against Hate”, which had been launched in December 2023 with the support of United Nations agencies. In December 2024, the Government, in collaboration with United Nations agencies, had organized a workshop to raise awareness of the regional strategy and action plan for the prevention and combating of hate speech and incitement to violence in Central Africa, which had been developed by States members of the Economic Community of Central African States. Following that workshop, which had been attended by representatives of Governments, media regulators and civil society organizations, a draft national action plan had been drawn up and approved by technical experts.

13. Under the new Constitution, civil society organizations were recognized as a component and an expression of a pluralistic and participatory democracy. The protection of human rights defenders was addressed in a bill put forward in September 2024 by a member of the Transitional Parliament who was himself a human rights defender. Civil society organizations had been closely involved in the transition process.

14. In order to bring national law into line with international standards on the protection of migrants’ human rights, the Government had drafted a bill to amend Act No. 5/86 on the Entry and Stay of Foreign Nationals. The bill was currently being reviewed by an ad hoc committee attached to the Ministry of the Interior. Plans were in place to incorporate the treatment of migrants into the curricula of training academies, including the Legal Service Training College and the Police Training College. In February 2025, over 230 trainees had studied the module on trafficking in persons at the Police Training College.

15. The Government was committed to combating trafficking in persons through its own initiatives and in cooperation with international partners. The various measures outlined in the report had been reinforced in 2023 by the publication of a decree on the establishment, powers, organization and functioning of the National Commission to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Persons. The Commission’s mandate included strengthening the capacities of

actors involved in combating trafficking, and establishing coordination mechanisms for the identification, support and protection of victims in each province. The Commission did not have a separate budget for the current year; its activities and operations were funded from the budget of the Ministry of Justice, which oversaw its work. A proposal to develop a strategy and action plan to combat trafficking in persons during the period 2025–2029 had been put forward with four objectives: to prevent trafficking in persons, protect and support victims; prosecute traffickers and establish partnerships. The measures taken under the strategy would benefit all victims equally, irrespective of their nationality, gender, race, religion, ethnicity or any other consideration.

16. **Ms. Esseneme** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would be interested to know why article 1 of the State Party's new Constitution, which enshrined the equality of all citizens before the law, did not include all the elements of the definition of racial discrimination contained in article 1 of the Convention. Given that, under article 173 of the new Constitution, the instrument would enter into force after the election of the President, she wished to know whether the new Constitution had indeed become law following the presidential election held on 12 April 2025. She wondered by what mechanism the Convention could be invoked or applied before the judicial or administrative authorities or other dispute settlement bodies. It would be useful to have examples of cases in which the Convention had been invoked by the national courts or other bodies.

17. Given that no national law contained a comprehensive definition of racial discrimination, she would be grateful for information on the constituent elements of an act of racial discrimination that would be punishable by law. She wished to know whether the State Party planned to adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation that contained a clear definition of racial discrimination, including its direct, indirect, multiple and intersectional forms, covering all areas of law and public life and all the grounds of discrimination set out in article 1 (1) of the Convention. As the State Party's common core document did not contain any specific information on equality and non-discrimination, she wondered whether the State Party intended to provide an up-to-date, comprehensive and relevant core document in accordance with the harmonized guidelines on reporting under the international human rights treaties.

18. In the light of reports that law enforcement agencies carried out racial profiling of foreign nationals residing in the country, it would be interesting to know what measures the State Party had taken to prevent, prohibit and punish the use of racial profiling by law enforcement, in line with the Committee's general recommendation No. 36 on preventing and combating racial profiling by law enforcement officials. The Committee would be interested to know whether any national laws explicitly prohibited the use of racial profiling and stop-and-search practices by law enforcement officials.

19. She was grateful for the information concerning the various legal provisions on hate speech and incitement to hatred, as listed in the State Party's report and in the delegation's opening statement. She would be glad to receive specific examples of their application by the courts. It would be interesting to know whether the Government planned to undertake any further amendment of the Criminal Code, in line with article 4 of the Convention. She would like to hear about any measures that had been taken to halt the increase in hate speech, particularly against persons of non-Gabonese origin and Hausa origin, that had been reported since the events of 30 August 2023. Had the public prosecutor's office received any complaints of discriminatory acts against Gabonese Hausa?

20. She would be interested to know what consequences would ensue if a member of an ethnic minority was subjected to violence or the destruction of property by a member of the dominant group. In that connection, she wondered whether the delegation was aware of a recent incident in which 500 vehicles owned by non-nationals – which they had received from a Gabonese taxi company in the context of a social project to create jobs for disadvantaged people – had been impounded. More detailed information on the incident, which might amount to racially motivated violence, would be appreciated.

21. It would be useful to know what was being done to improve the reporting and monitoring of racist and xenophobic hate crimes and hate speech, for example by setting up

a data collection system. She would appreciate detailed information on the Gabon against Hate campaign, including its goals, the activities undertaken, and its impact.

22. **Mr. Diaby** (Country Task Force) said that, while the compilation of statistics disaggregated by racial or ethnic origin might be contrary to the Constitution, the Committee was nevertheless concerned about the lack of such data, which impeded its efforts to monitor the State Party's progress. He wondered whether any statistics at all were available on the demographic composition of the population, or on economic and social indicators for groups such as migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons. He wished to know whether the State Party planned to set up a comprehensive data collection and reporting system in accordance with the provisions of the Convention.

23. **A representative of Gabon** said that he regretted being unable to attend the meeting in Geneva in person but, as Minister of Justice, he had certain obligations in connection with the forthcoming swearing-in of the new President. The fact that he and many members of his delegation were participating remotely in no way reflected a lack of commitment to the review process on the part of the Government; on the contrary, the resumption of the dialogue with the Committee was a sign of its desire to fulfil its international obligations.

24. **A representative of Gabon** said that the Constitution would enter fully into force following the swearing-in of the Head of State, due to take place in a few days. The Convention prevailed over domestic law, and in the event of a conflict with the Constitution, the court could recommend the amendment of the constitutional provisions concerned. The Convention had rarely been invoked in judicial proceedings, which could be related to the fact that racial hate speech, for example, was deemed a personal offence and could be prosecuted in the courts only on the basis of a complaint from the aggrieved individual. However, victims of racism could directly invoke the Convention and the court should base its decision on the provisions cited. There had been a case the previous year in which the public prosecutor's office had received a complaint concerning comments made by a political party leader against an ethnic group; the police had made inquiries and the procedure was under way. The Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions had made clear in its communiqué No. 62 that racist discourse had no place in Gabon.

*The meeting was suspended at 4.05 p.m. and resumed at 4.20 p.m.*

25. **A representative of Gabon** said that the Criminal Code had been adopted in 2019 and revised in 2020, and further draft amendments were currently under consideration. Various separate articles of the existing version of the Code contained elements of article 1 of the Convention and they would be consolidated for the sake of clarity.

26. The Act on the Protection of Personal Data prohibited racial profiling. If biometric data was required, the individual concerned was allowed to express an opinion. The police acted only on the basis of information and evidence in their possession and anyone disrupting public order would be apprehended regardless of origin, nationality or ethnicity.

27. With regard to hate speech against members of minority groups, the Government strived to ensure social harmony among all ethnic groups and communities. Gabon was a mix of various ethnicities and actions such as the issuance of communiqué No. 62 were designed to remind activists and Internet users that it was a welcoming country where everyone could live in peace.

28. **A representative of Gabon** said that, whereas the previous major population survey, conducted in 2013, had not covered the variable of ethnic origin, the census of 2023 had included questions on age, gender, ethnic origin, nationality and language spoken and the statistics now being compiled would reflect the answers. The Government was well aware of the shortcomings of the national statistical system and had launched an overhaul to address them. The aim was to make the Directorate General for Statistics more independent, in part by allocating greater resources to it. In addition, a statistics office would be created in each ministry in order to facilitate access to specific information on each sector. The new configuration would allow for improved data collection for the purposes of monitoring implementation of the Convention.

29. **A representative of Gabon** said that it was government policy to integrate all ethnic groups into Gabonese society and regularize their administrative status. It was true that the

major reform of the country's institutions launched by the Committee for the Transition and Restoration of Institutions was causing some friction, but the exercise was necessary in order to ensure equality for all under the Constitution. The incident concerning taxi drivers had not been officially corroborated and appeared to be a rumour spread through social media.

30. **Ms. Esseneme** said that she would appreciate clarification regarding the status of the Constitution and whether it had entered into force. She would also appreciate clarification of the procedure followed in order to bring domestic law into line with the Convention, in particular when a provision of the Constitution conflicted with the Convention.

31. In addition, she would welcome an explanation of the measures taken to ensure that victims of hate speech or discrimination were familiar with complaints procedures. She wondered whether persons responsible for hate speech or racist statements in the press or politicians who uttered such statements in public might be prosecuted in the absence of a complaint. She would be glad to receive further information on the provisions in the Act on the Protection of Personal Data that prohibited racial profiling.

32. **Mr. Guissé** said that he would like to know what measures the State Party was taking to combat ritual crimes against children. Such practices targeted mainly disadvantaged children and were so widespread that 28 December had been proclaimed a day of commemoration of victims. How many children were affected and what was the State Party's policy on the matter?

33. **A representative of Gabon** said that the Constitution contained a small number of transitional provisions that would come into effect only after a certain period of time had passed. Those provisions included articles 170–172, relating to the transitional National Assembly and Senate, which would remain in place until the bureau of each chamber had been elected, and provisions relating to the transitional Constitutional Court. All the other provisions of the Constitution were in force.

34. **A representative of Gabon** said that victims of hate speech could file a complaint with a court. When the offence was committed in the press, it was dealt with by the High Authority for Communication, which was authorized to act on its own initiative to impose administrative sanctions on media outlets. Victims of hate speech disseminated in the media could also file a complaint with the media outlet concerned.

35. Certain bills, including those relating to organic laws and laws ratifying an international convention, could not be enacted until they had been reviewed by the Constitutional Court to ensure that they were in compliance with the Constitution and the international treaties to which Gabon was a party. If the Court identified any provision that was not in line with the Convention, it would draw the Prime Minister's attention to it so that it could be amended.

36. Gabonese law did not contain any provisions that specifically related to ritual crimes. Such acts were treated under the offence of murder, or murder for the purpose of removal of organs, and the perpetrators were brought before the courts. The Government did not have any statistics on cases that specifically involved children. Such crimes had also been committed against adults.

37. **Ms. Tlakula** said that, in paragraph 84 of the periodic report, the State Party made the surprising claim that Gabon was virtually free of racial discrimination. She invited the delegation to explain why that was so, and why there had been no rulings by the national courts relating to racial discrimination.

38. **Ms. Esseneme** said that she wished to know whether any measures were being taken to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and, if so, what the outcome of those measures had been. She wondered whether the National Commission on Human Rights had been assessed by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions to determine whether it was in compliance with the Paris Principles. She would welcome information on the procedure for filing complaints with the Commission and the number of complaints that it had handled since its establishment, including complaints relating to racial discrimination. It would be useful to know what the Commission was doing to raise awareness of human rights and to tackle racial discrimination and xenophobia. Information

on any steps being taken to strengthen the Commission's mandate and its ability to prevent racial discrimination would be appreciated.

39. Given that the Commission and civil society organizations had participated in the preparation of the State Party's report, she was curious to know whether they produced their own reports on the human rights situation in Gabon and what the impact of their activities had been in terms of the realization of human rights in the country. As the Committee had not received any alternative reports, she wondered whether the registration procedure for non-governmental organizations was too costly, and what the State Party was doing to promote a dynamic civil society that worked with the Government to promote equality and non-discrimination. She would be grateful for information on the outcome of the discussions concerning the establishment of a formal framework for consultation between the State and civil society organizations that defended human rights. It would be interesting to know whether any progress had been made towards the adoption of a law on the promotion and protection of human rights defenders, and to know the status of the bill put forward by the member of the Parliament who was also a human rights defender. She wished to know what measures had been taken to ensure the protection of human rights defenders in the exercise of their activities.

40. Noting that the State appointed lawyers for accused persons who could not afford one, she said that she wished to know whether the appointment process was governed by Decree No. 253/PR/MJGSDHRIC of 10 June 2012 on the organization and functioning of legal aid offices or by the Code of Criminal Procedure. It would be interesting to know how many persons had benefited from legal aid over the past two years and how many of those persons belonged to vulnerable groups or ethnic minorities.

41. She would be interested to hear what training and awareness-raising on the Convention had been provided for the general public, human rights defenders, lawyers, law enforcement officials, judges and other public officials. She would be grateful for detailed information on the human rights training courses organized by the Directorate General for Human Rights for members of the security and defence forces and the judiciary. In particular, it would be useful to know whether those courses covered the Convention and the Committee's general recommendations No. 31 on the prevention of racial discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system and No. 36 on preventing and combating racial profiling by law enforcement officials; how many persons had received that training; and what its impact had been on their work and the realization of human rights among the groups targeted. What measures were being taken to facilitate the filing of complaints and claims for redress in cases of racial discrimination, particularly for members of ethnic minorities, Indigenous Peoples and non-nationals who were required to provide security for costs in civil cases?

42. The lack of case law relating to racial discrimination could be explained by the reluctance of victims to bring their cases before the courts because of the difficulty they faced in proving the facts against perpetrators who generally held positions of authority, such as employers. In view of that situation, she would like to know whether the State Party planned to reverse the burden of proof in favour of victims of discrimination. She would appreciate information on any steps being taken to bring the administration of justice closer to the people, particularly in rural areas inhabited by Indigenous Peoples, and to remove linguistic barriers to justice. She would like to know whether the State Party had taken any steps towards making the declaration under article 14 of the Convention, recognizing the competence of the Committee to receive and consider individual communications.

43. She would be interested to know what progress had been made towards incorporating human rights education into school curricula and whether that education would cover the Convention and the fight against racial discrimination, racism and xenophobia. Given that the initiative to teach human rights education at the Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences of Omar Bongo University had been discontinued after one year, she wondered whether any alternative measures had been taken to promote human rights education at the tertiary level. She wished to know what activities were carried out by the Student League for Human Rights established at Omar Bongo University in 2019 and how the State Party regulated the functioning of that organization.

44. Furthermore, she would like to know whether the initial and in-service training of judges, criminal investigation officers and other public servants included modules on international human rights treaties, including the Convention. She would be grateful if the delegation could provide details of the capacity-building activities organized for law enforcement officials with the assistance of United Nations agencies. It would be useful to know whether any steps had been taken to integrate endogenous knowledge, particularly aspects of it linked to the history, culture and traditions of different ethnic groups and Indigenous populations, into educational curricula. She would appreciate details of any difficulties encountered in introducing national languages into the education system, particularly in secondary schools.

45. Given that most of the policies and programmes relating to human rights education appeared to be either under review or to have been abandoned, she wondered what was being done to raise the general public's and stakeholders' awareness of human rights, equality and non-discrimination. It would be interesting to know whether any community radio stations broadcast programmes in local languages, including languages spoken by Indigenous Peoples. Were there any radio programmes that promoted different cultures and ethnic traditions and fostered coexistence and social cohesion?

46. **Mr. Diaby** said he understood that Act No. 1/2017 of 3 August 2017 on Public Assemblies and Demonstrations stipulated that public meetings might be held freely, but the organizers must submit a declaration three days before the event. Under the new Constitution, however, assemblies, demonstrations or marches in public places must be authorized, subject to the conditions set out in law. Given that the new constitutional provisions represented a shift from a declaration system to a system of prior authorization, he was curious to know why that change had been made, whether any steps would be taken to bring the rules governing freedom of assembly into line with the international obligations of Gabon, including those established in article 5 of the Convention, and whether any legal remedies were available to demonstrators facing a ban on their activities. He would also like to know why tear gas and grenades had been used in Libreville and Port-Gentil to disperse crowds demonstrating against restrictions imposed during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, how the State Party justified the use of such force against the protesters and whether any investigations had been carried out to identify the persons responsible for the repressive measures.

47. The delegation might comment on reports that the Act on Public Assemblies and Demonstrations was being used illegally to ban private meetings on the grounds of failure to give prior notice. It would be useful to know how the State Party ensured that persons belonging to Indigenous Peoples, ethnic minorities and non-nationals could exercise the right to freedom of assembly without discrimination, including in order to demonstrate against infrastructure projects or in favour of environmental protection.

48. **A representative of Gabon** said that the Act on the Reorganization of the National Commission on Human Rights had been prepared with the support of OHCHR, and the Government was confident that the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions would, in accordance with its procedures, recognize the Commission as compliant with the Paris Principles. The new Act, like its predecessor, set forth the procedure and conditions for the referral of alleged human rights violations to the Commission. The Commission had not received any complaints of racial discrimination, which was likely due to a lack of public awareness of the problem. For that reason, the Commission carried out awareness-raising campaigns and other activities with a view to the prevention and punishment of racial discrimination.

49. The fact that members of civil society organizations and the National Commission on Human Rights sat on the National Committee for the Drafting of Human Rights Reports did not prevent them from preparing alternative reports. In 2020, for example, civil society organizations had drafted and submitted an alternative report to the Human Rights Committee. Capacity-building workshops on the drafting of alternative reports had been organized, most recently in 2024, and civil society organizations had received training from the Subregional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa.



50. **A representative of Gabon** said that access to justice was a key issue at the heart of the Government's efforts to rebuild the country's institutions, in particular its justice system. Court-appointed lawyers were provided for defendants in both criminal court sessions and correctional hearings. The Ministry of Justice had requested additional resources for that purpose, as a lack of lawyers limited the number of sessions and hearings and contributed to overcrowding in the prison system. Consequently, the budget for criminal court sessions had increased threefold in 2025.

51. The Government was in the process of setting up a legal aid office, in keeping with Decree No. 253/PR/MJGSDHRIC of 10 June 2012, which called for the establishment of legal aid offices in various courts but had never been formally implemented. The new office would be funded from the State budget and supported by multilateral partners. The Ministry of Justice already had a department that provided legal aid to vulnerable persons, including those of limited means, who were parties to trials and other court proceedings.

52. **A representative of Gabon** said that, during criminal court sessions, accused persons would be assigned a lawyer from such time as they were required to appear in court, without distinction as to their origin, nationality or the offence of which they stood accused, in accordance with the Code of Criminal Procedure.

53. The Code of Civil Procedure contained a provision requiring foreign nationals to provide security for costs in order to file a civil suit. That provision had become obsolete, as all parties, regardless of nationality, were now required to provide security in the amount of CFAF 10,000 in order to institute civil or commercial proceedings.

54. Regarding the reversal of the burden of proof, the law as it stood provided that in cases related to racial discrimination, it was up to the aggrieved party to provide evidence in support of the complaint. However, the Government was working to bring the Criminal Code into line with the Convention and would examine the question of how the burden of proof could be shouldered not by the victim but by the person accused of racial discrimination.

55. **A representative of Gabon** said that the process of establishing a non-governmental organization was not a costly one. The Associations Act of 1962 did not establish any pecuniary requirement. Apart from a CFAF 10,000 fee payable to the Official Gazette, the establishment of an association was free of charge.

56. The right of all Gabonese citizens to freedom of assembly was explicitly enshrined in article 22 of the Constitution and given legal effect through the Act on Public Assemblies and Demonstrations and the Electoral Code. Moreover, Gabonese law provided effective administrative and judicial remedies for individuals and legal entities that might be refused permission to assemble freely. Under article 93 of the new Electoral Code, a declared assembly would be deemed to be authorized unless the authorities notified the organizers of a refusal of permission a minimum of 12 hours before the event. It was therefore clear that Gabon continued to apply a declaration system, limited only by the need to respect public order.

57. **A representative of Gabon** said that schools taught human rights education from the primary level as part of civic education. A human rights module with particular emphasis on the rights of the child had been introduced. Discussions were taking place with a view to the resumption of the initiative for human rights education at Omar Bongo University.

58. Although the Government had launched several initiatives for the teaching of national languages, not all of them had come to fruition. As the periodic report indicated, some languages had been integrated as school subjects in denominational schools. Since December 2023, the Ministry of Education, the department of language sciences of Omar Bongo University and education experts from the National Pedagogical Institute had been considering ways of introducing the teaching of national languages in primary and secondary schools.

59. The Student League for Human Rights at Omar Bongo University was a diverse group of students committed to the defence of human rights. With the support of OHCHR, the Government had provided them with training, and they carried out activities to promote human rights in schools and universities.

60. **Ms. Esseneme** said that she would be grateful for an answer to her question on initial and in-service training for judges and police officers. She would also like to know how the State Party used the media, including community radio stations, to promote a culture of human rights.

61. **Mr. Diaby** said that the Committee had been informed that forests that were home to Indigenous Peoples were threatened by logging, agribusiness activities and deforestation, often undertaken without the consultation or consent of Indigenous communities and resulting in the loss of their land and natural resources. In that context, he wished to know what measures had been taken to ensure that persons belonging to Indigenous Peoples, as well as members of ethnic minorities and non-nationals, could exercise their right to freedom of assembly.

62. **Mr. Yeung Sik Yuen**, observing that 26 years had elapsed between the submission of the ninth and tenth periodic reports, said that he welcomed the resumption of the State Party's reporting to the Committee. Noting that legal aid was provided during criminal court sessions, he said he would welcome clarification of whether those sessions were similar to assizes, in that they were convened for the trial of persons accused of serious offences, whereas cases of ordinary and minor offences would be heard by the permanent courts.

63. **Ms. Tlakula** said that she would be grateful for further information on measures to strengthen the independence of the National Commission on Human Rights. In particular, she wished to know whether the Commission was accountable to the legislature or the executive and how its members were appointed. She wondered whether the Government intended to ratify the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

64. **A representative of Gabon** said that the criminal court sessions were indeed somewhat similar to assizes, in that they heard cases of serious offences. Correctional hearings, on the other hand, dealt with ordinary offences and took place more regularly.

65. **A representative of Gabon** said that a transparent process had been put in place for the appointment of members of the National Commission on Human Rights. The Ministry of Justice would issue a call for candidates and receive applications, which were then forwarded to the National Assembly. An ad hoc committee would be set up and tasked with making an initial selection, and the Bureau of the National Assembly would make the final selection. The list of names would then be adopted and transmitted to the Government by means of a decree, formalizing the members' emoluments and permanent status. The Commission reported to the National Assembly and the President of the Republic, as well as preparing reports addressed to specific institutions in its capacity as national mechanism for the prevention of torture.

66. The Legal Service Training College planned to strengthen the initial and in-service training provided to judges and prosecutors, which currently covered only basic human rights notions. In 2023 and 2024, with the support of OHCHR and the International Organization for Migration, in-service training had been provided for judges and prosecutors on the issue of trafficking in persons. The training modules in question would be integrated into the initial training programme in time for the next intake of officials.

*The meeting rose at 6 p.m.*