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Summary record of the 44th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 18 September 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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

Consideration of reports *(continued)*

(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant
(continued)

Seventh periodic report of Cyprus (continued) ([E/C.12/CYP/7](#); [E/C.12/CYP/Q/7](#);
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1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Cyprus joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Cyprus**, resuming her delegation's replies to the questions raised at the previous meeting, said that the Human Rights Unit of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order was responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Covenant at the national level. In June 2021, the Council of Ministers had adopted the first National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights, which had been formulated by the Ministry in collaboration with various institutions. An accompanying action plan was under development. In addition, discussions had been held on the establishment of a national human rights authority.
3. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the adoption of the Civil Union Act in November 2015 had marked a historic moment for LGBTQI+ persons in Cyprus. The Act enabled same- and opposite-sex couples to register a civil partnership, which conferred similar rights to marriage, including in respect of inheritance, property and social security. In the coming days, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order would submit a proposal to the Council of Ministers for the development of the country's first national strategy for the protection and promotion of LGBTQI+ rights.
4. The Supreme Court had ruled that denying individuals multiple pensions amounted to a violation of their constitutional right to property. Accordingly, the Government was reviewing the existing pensions framework and its policies to ensure consistency with the Constitution while also seeking to address public concerns about fairness and fiscal responsibility. On 4 September 2024, the Council of Ministers had approved a review of the framework as it pertained to State officials with the aims of raising the pensionable age from 60 to 65 years and giving officials the option to waive their State pension if they held another public office, position or role.
5. **A representative of Cyprus** said that citizens employed by Cypriot companies operating in the Sovereign Base Areas were governed by domestic labour laws, whereas citizens employed by the British military bases, including police officers, firefighters and civil servants, were governed by the laws applicable to the bases. When Cyprus had obtained independence, the British authorities had committed to ensuring that the terms and conditions of employment for their employees at the bases were in alignment with those in force in Cyprus. In many labour disputes, including those concerning the enforcement of collective agreements, the bases accepted mediation pursuant to the Industrial Relations Code. Since the Social Insurance Act was applicable in the Sovereign Base Areas, the Department of Social Insurance Services followed the principle of equal treatment regardless of nationality. In cases involving residents of those Areas insured under the Social Insurance Scheme, the Department implemented Regulation (EC) No. 883/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the coordination of social security systems.
6. European Union countries were facing three major transitions: digital, green and demographic. The demographic transition, which was characterized by ageing populations and declining birth rates, represented a critical challenge to the competitiveness, economic growth and social cohesion of the Union as a whole. At the behest of the President, a task force comprising several ministers and deputy ministers had been set up to prepare a comprehensive demographic plan. Proposed long-term policy solutions to demographic issues were focused on supporting parents, empowering younger generations, enhancing the well-being of older generations and managing migration effectively. Emphasis was also being placed on ensuring full utilization of the workforce, helping younger generations to develop the right skills for future labour markets, adopting an age-inclusive approach to

upskilling and reskilling, promoting women's employment and providing universal access to affordable, high-quality childcare.

7. **A representative of Cyprus** said that, pursuant to Act No. 114(I)/2007, which regulated the conditions under which former State officials and certain former public sector employees could work in the private sector, a special independent committee had been established to examine business appointment applications. The committee was composed of one representative each from the Law Office, the Audit Office and the Treasury. Applications were processed within two months of receipt. When examining applications, the committee was required to take into account the possibility of the applicants having had access to commercially sensitive or other information concerning their prospective employer's competitors, having made decisions or provided advice in favour of their prospective employer or having been involved in undisclosed policymaking, knowledge of which might be of benefit to their prospective employer, and, in the case of former judges, the possibility of applicants having had access to privileged or other information that might lead to a conflict of interest or a situation that could objectively be perceived as such. All persons to whom the Act applied were obliged to submit an application to the committee if they intended to undertake work in the private sector at any point within two years of their retirement, resignation or termination of service. A separate application must be submitted for each proposed appointment within that period. Failure to do so was punishable by a fine not exceeding €10,000, imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or both.

8. **A representative of Cyprus**, referring to the activities of the Social Welfare Services, drew the Committee's attention to paragraphs 124 and 125 of the periodic report (E/C.12/CYP/7) and said that, in January 2022, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare had signed a memorandum of cooperation between the police and the Services for the referral, handling, protection and briefing of potential and recognized trafficking victims. In February 2023, a memorandum of cooperation on issues pertaining to trafficking in persons had been signed between the police and the Department of Labour Inspection. In October 2023, through a project co-funded by the European Union, the Services had set up a unit tasked with providing personalized support to victims of trafficking in persons at all stages of identification, reporting and protection, including repatriation. Furthermore, the Service had created an electronic system for receiving reports and referrals of trafficking cases. Victims were identified through an independent procedure followed by members of the Office of Combating Trafficking in Human Beings on the basis of a written complaint and relevant evidence. Between 2020 and 2023, a total of 82 victims had been identified, and 22 perpetrators had been convicted. While there was no specific national action plan concerning child victims of trafficking, such victims were covered by provisions of relevant domestic laws and by the Strategy for the Prevention and Tackling of Human Trafficking and the Protection of Victims 2023–2026 and the National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography.

9. Flows of unaccompanied minors into Cyprus continued to grow. The Social Welfare Services prepared a tailored care plan for each minor and cooperated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the International Organization for Migration and relevant national authorities to ensure access to accommodation, medical services, education, and sport and leisure activities. Special emphasis had been placed on expanding the semi-independent living programme for minors aged 16 years and over, the main focus of which was to facilitate the transition to adulthood and independent living. Approximately 60 per cent of the unaccompanied minors in Cyprus were currently receiving support through the programme. Unaccompanied minors could be reunited with family members pursuant to the Regulation (EU) No. 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 (the Dublin III Regulation). Upon arrival in the country, unaccompanied minors aged 15 years and over were transferred to a safe zone at the Pournara Reception Centre, where they remained for a short period of time before being placed under a support programme of the Social Welfare Services. According to the most recent statistics, the average stay for minors at the Centre was six days, with a maximum stay of 20 days.

10. The National Coordinating Body for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women had been established in 2022 by a decision of the Council of Ministers and

included representatives of State entities and NGOs. The Body had drawn up the first National Strategy and National Action Plan on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and was responsible for monitoring their implementation. Specific provisions on femicide were in force but had not yet resulted in any convictions. The State-funded Home for Women, which had opened in December 2020, was staffed by trained professionals who provided services to female victims of violence and their families on the basis of a multidisciplinary, multi-agency approach. There had been 1,298 recorded cases of violence against women in 2021, 1,304 in 2022 and 1,250 in 2023. The Ministry of Justice and Public Order was drafting a bill on the provision of independent assistance and legal aid to victims of gender-based and domestic violence. The Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family operated three shelters with support from the Government. There were 17 rooms at the shelters, and the Association could rent additional accommodation if necessary.

11. Policies were being implemented to provide accessible, affordable and quality social care services at the local level. The Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare ran a State aid scheme through which it granted compensation to NGOs and local authorities that provided relevant services. In 2023, €7.4 million had been spent on 109 programmes covering the long-term care needs of older persons and persons with disabilities. In February 2023, a new State aid scheme had been launched under the Recovery and Resilience Plan to fund 24-hour community-based care centres providing long-term support to up to 10 adults per centre.

12. The rights to a decent standard of living and to social protection were enshrined in the Constitution. The Guaranteed Minimum Income Act provided for housing benefit for eligible persons and individuals in extraordinary need who did not otherwise meet the eligibility criteria. Under the Constitution, the Roma were considered to be citizens belonging to the Turkish Cypriot community and thus enjoyed the same rights and access to the same services as other citizens.

13. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the universal healthcare system, which had been introduced in 2019, allowed patients to choose their healthcare providers and was based on a financing model that aimed to reduce out-of-pocket expenses. The system was funded primarily by contributions from employers, employees, pensioners and the State, reducing the financial burden on individuals and families, especially those from low-income groups. The establishment of a robust healthcare delivery network with the participation of over 90 per cent of the country's healthcare providers had resulted in a dramatic decrease in private healthcare expenditure from around 50 per cent to 12 per cent of total healthcare spending. Steps were taken to ensure access to healthcare for vulnerable populations, including asylum-seekers and pregnant women. Roma individuals residing in Cyprus who were European Union citizens or third-country nationals with legal status were entitled to full access to the universal healthcare system. The Health Insurance Organization monitored the performance of the system to ensure that services were delivered equitably and efficiently across the country. The Gregorios Clinic, which was part of the system, offered specialized HIV care and treatment, including confidential testing and diagnosis, psychological support and counselling.

14. In 2018, abortion had been legalized under certain conditions. The cost of legal abortions, whether medical or surgical, was reimbursed within the universal healthcare system, and pre- and post-abortion counselling services were provided upon referral. Oral contraceptives and intrauterine devices were available free of charge if medically indicated. A gender equality action plan was being formulated to address access to modern, effective and affordable contraception, among other issues. Information on family planning was provided under the National Strategy for the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Young Persons 2018–2025. Moreover, the Ministry of Health was implementing sex education programmes in primary and secondary schools.

15. Deinstitutionalization was one of the goals of the Department of Mental Health Services, which had opened its first supported living home in 2023. The home, which had 10 beds and offered 24-hour care, had taken in patients from the Athalassa Psychiatric Hospital. There were plans to build similar community-based facilities under the strategic plan of the State Health Services Organization for the period 2025–2027 and the proposed national strategy for mental health. In addition, the Department ran community-based

rehabilitation facilities staffed by interdisciplinary teams and vocational rehabilitation units to promote the social inclusion of individuals with mental health conditions. The units prepared patients for employment by focusing on psychological readiness and social and work skills. As part of the second phase of a project to construct a new mental health centre, there were plans to establish social cooperatives to promote the labour market integration of individuals with mental health conditions and help them to gain experience and skills. Mental health professionals had received training in managing patients with dementia and Alzheimer's disease. The establishment of a psychogeriatric clinic was in the pipeline, and the National Action Plan for the Treatment of Dementia was being updated.

16. The Cyprus National Addictions Authority was responsible for coordinating the implementation of the National Strategy for Addressing Addictions 2021–2028, which covered licit and illicit substances and pathological gambling. The Authority promoted relevant legislative measures, carried out campaigns and authorized and funded programmes. It undertook activities aimed at prevention, treatment, social reintegration, harm reduction and supply reduction. In 2013, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the Pancyprian Anti-Drug Association, had launched a harm reduction programme approved by the Authority. In 2020, a mobile unit had been set up under the programme to provide information and perform diagnostic tests for infectious diseases, among other measures. The Department of Mental Health Services provided substance abuse services to minors at the Perseas Addiction Counselling Centre for Adolescents and Families and the Prometheus Prevention and Counselling Centre for Adolescents and Families. Legislation had recently been passed to impose harsher penalties on individuals caught dealing drugs near schools. Substance abuse prevention programmes were also implemented in school settings.

17. **A representative of Cyprus** said that health education was taught as a separate subject in primary schools and as part of related subjects in secondary schools. The health education curriculum was designed to develop students' decision-making and civic skills, enabling them to make healthy choices. The use and abuse of substances was one of the thematic units of the curriculum. Its objectives included encouraging a critical and democratic outlook among students and promoting health and sustainable development. The Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, in compliance with its obligations under the National Strategy for Addressing Addictions 2021–2028, cooperated closely with the Cyprus National Addictions Authority on a range of initiatives with a focus on prevention, treatment, social support and research, education and evaluation. A protocol of cooperation had been developed for the prevention and treatment of illegal substance addiction at school. The protocol sought to foster a positive school environment, provide practical assistance to vulnerable groups and empower students through a network of programmes.

18. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the minor children and adult dependants of beneficiaries of international protection enjoyed the same civil, political and socioeconomic rights as their parents. Should a child have one parent who was a beneficiary of international protection and another who was a national of a third country, then the child's residence status would be determined by his or her nationality. Thus, children who had taken the nationality of a parent who was a beneficiary of international protection would usually enjoy the same rights as that parent. The residence status of children with one stateless parent would depend on the nationality of the other parent and on the legislation of the stateless parent's country of origin. The principle of family unity was applied in all cases. Family reunification in the case of third-country nationals was regulated by the Aliens and Immigration Law and other legislation, which allowed foreign nationals legally residing in Cyprus to be reunited with their families under certain conditions. The Aliens and Immigration Law provided for the right of refugees to reunification with specific family members. Unaccompanied children who had been granted refugee status could apply for family reunification with their parents or legal guardians, including family members who were guardians under customary law.

19. **Ms. Rossi** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee would welcome further information on the scale of homelessness in the State party and measures taken to address it. Information might also be provided on problems in the housing market.

20. She would appreciate clarification as to the availability of medical services for asylum-seekers and undocumented migrants. As the number of HIV diagnoses had reportedly

increased over the previous decade, she would be grateful for information on measures and policies to combat the disease, and especially to address the needs of at-risk populations.

21. The Committee had been informed that persons residing in northern Cyprus faced difficulties in obtaining access to financial services in the Republic of Cyprus, including the opening of bank accounts. The delegation might describe any steps that had been taken to address the problem.

22. Lastly, she would also be interested to know how the Government had enlisted the support of farmers for climate change adaptation and mitigation measures. What had been the impact of climate change on the fishing industry, and what measures had been taken to support the sector?

23. **Ms. Lee** said that, according to the European Committee of Social Rights, the minimum levels of unemployment benefit, sickness benefit, old-age benefit and maternity benefit were inadequate. She would be grateful for up-to-date information on the minimum levels of those four benefits, with reference to the poverty threshold. She wondered how the State party ensured that social security benefits were sufficient for a decent standard of living.

24. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** (Country Rapporteur) said that the Committee had been informed of problems related to the right to housing, such as the illegal subletting of Turkish Cypriot properties and the obstacles that Turkish Cypriot owners faced in gaining access to their properties. He would be grateful if the delegation could describe the safeguards that were in place to protect ownership of private property by minorities.

25. As the State party had relatively high rates of tobacco consumption and related deaths, he wished to know what steps had been taken to encourage people to quit smoking. He would be grateful for details regarding the gender gap in healthy life expectancy and efforts to improve women's health and living standards.

26. **A representative of Cyprus** said that, under the Guaranteed Minimum Income Law, immediate support was provided to persons in situations of extraordinary need, including those who faced a temporary situation of homelessness. The support provided to such persons included immediate short-term accommodation, financial assistance to cover immediate basic needs and assistance in finding a new home. The Social Welfare Services of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare referred temporarily homeless persons to the employment, health and other services in order to prevent their social exclusion.

27. **A representative of Cyprus** said that there was no blanket ban on Turkish Cypriots opening a bank account in the Republic of Cyprus. Indeed, a number of accounts had been opened by such persons. However, Cypriot banks did not accept proof of residence issued by any authority of the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, nor did they accept addresses located in the area under Turkish military occupation. As an alternative to proof of address, an affidavit made before a Cypriot court would be accepted. In accordance with European anti-money-laundering regulations, banks were required to perform due diligence before opening accounts. If it was found that a customer's source of funds related to illegal activities, such as farming on illegally occupied land, or activities that were susceptible to money-laundering, then a bank might refuse to open an account. In any case, alternative options were available, such as the use of credit cards issued by Turkish banks, transfers to and from Turkish bank accounts and e-money transactions. Banks were under no obligation to open bank accounts for Turkish Cypriots, Greek Cypriots or persons of any other nationality.

28. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the benefits afforded by the Cyprus Social Insurance Scheme exceeded the minimum standards set by the European Code of Social Security and the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) of the International Labour Organization. Social insurance contributions were determined as a percentage of earnings, meaning that the level of benefits depended largely on the wages of the insured person. The monthly rate of the social pension was equal to 81 per cent of the full basic statutory pension paid by the Social Insurance Fund and was in conformity with the minimum standards set by the European Code of Social Security.

29. **A representative of Cyprus** said that regular migrants could register with the national health system, provided that they made social insurance contributions, and therefore have

access to comprehensive healthcare services. Undocumented migrants had access only to emergency medical care and some basic health services. However, vulnerable asylum-seekers and migrants, such as children and pregnant women, were given priority and received full healthcare.

30. An uptick in HIV diagnoses, observed in 2022, had been driven mainly by increased migration flows. However, the preliminary data for 2023 and 2024 showed a gradual decrease as a result of efforts to limit migration flows and to achieve the 95-95-95 targets. Measures taken to combat HIV/AIDS included the adoption of the national strategy on the sexual and reproductive health of youth 2018–2025, whose key action pillars included the prevention and management of sexually transmitted diseases. Secondary education students were taught about reproduction and sexually transmitted diseases, including a class focusing specifically on HIV/AIDS.

31. The National Addiction Authority of Cyprus was tasked with enforcing stricter tobacco control laws. There were programmes to support smoking cessation, especially among young people. According to the Ministry of Health, life expectancy at birth stood at 83.4 years for women and 79.7 years for men in 2022. Further statistics would be provided to the Committee in writing.

32. **A representative of Cyprus** said that monitoring was carried out in support of the national strategy on adaptation to climate change, and an annual report was prepared in which the effectiveness of the strategy was evaluated. The Government met with stakeholders from all sectors, including agriculture and fisheries, to assess the status of climate change adaptation activities. In agriculture, key adaptation measures included providing incentives for farmers to irrigate selected crops using recycled water and improving efficiency in irrigation. In fisheries, measures included the protection of the spawning grounds of selected species and research on the impact of climate change. All stakeholders, including farmers and fishers, would be consulted as part of the ongoing review and update of the national adaptation strategy.

33. **Ms. Lee** said that, in fact, the European Committee of Social Rights had concluded in 2021 that the minimum levels of four social security benefits were manifestly inadequate. She would therefore be grateful for a response to her request for updated information on the level of social security benefits in comparison with poverty thresholds. Such information could be provided in writing.

34. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** (Country Task Force) said that he was satisfied to note that the State party maintained a level of spending on education comparable and in some cases superior to that of other European countries. Nevertheless, Cypriot students had performed below average in the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the country's ranking had slipped by several positions, notably in science and reading literacy. He wondered what was the reason for the comparative decline in educational performance and what plans the State party had made to reverse the trend.

35. Although school dropout rates had improved in recent years, the Education and Training Monitor of the European Union had detected a wide gap between the rates for Cypriot-born students and students born outside the European Union. He would be interested to know what steps had been taken to address the problem.

36. The Committee had addressed the right to education of persons with disabilities in its previous concluding observations (E/C.12/CYP/CO/6), while, in 2022, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had recommended that all children with disabilities should have access to inclusive education in mainstream schools. He would be grateful if the delegation could provide up-to-date information on the progress made, including information on measures and plans to promote inclusive education.

37. Considering that the political situation on the island of Cyprus should not undermine the right to education, the Committee would be interested to know why Turkish Cypriot students reportedly encountered difficulties when seeking the recognition or accreditation of qualifications awarded by Turkish or Turkish Cypriot academic institutions. In particular, the Committee wished to know what was being done to expedite the recognition of certificates issued in other languages, especially Turkish. It would be interesting to know how public

education institutions treated students from the Turkish-, Armenian- and Arabic-speaking minorities. How did the State party ensure respect for the linguistic rights of students in public education, as required by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages?

38. Noting that history was an important subject in countries that had experienced conflict, he said that he would be interested to know what approach the State took to the teaching of history and whether school textbooks instilled a view of history that was compatible with article 13 of the Covenant. It would be useful to know how human rights education was imparted to students and teachers in the school system, and whether it was extended to professionals in sectors such as law enforcement, the military and the judiciary.

39. The State party had been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Europa Nostra for best practices in which cultural heritage had been used to promote understanding between different communities; however, it had been reported that such practices were in decline and that fewer resources were being set aside for them. He would therefore be grateful for information about specific initiatives to promote peace and understanding through cultural heritage, and the budgets set aside for them. He would like to know, too, how the State party ensured access to cultural heritage without discrimination.

40. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the so-called universities in the area of the country that had been under Turkish military occupation since 1974 were operating unlawfully: they had not been established under and were not operating pursuant to the laws of the Republic of Cyprus. Rather, they operated under the purported laws of the so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which was not recognized by the international community and, under international law, was an illegal entity. Therefore, the Republic of Cyprus recognized neither the institutions nor the qualifications that they awarded. Furthermore, many of the so-called universities had been built on the property of Greek Cypriot displaced persons who had been forced to flee their homes in 1974 because of the Turkish invasion.

41. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the country's unsatisfactory PISA results had been a subject of discussion in the Government over the preceding years. To improve learning outcomes, the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth planned to modernize teaching methods and create the infrastructure needed to support high-quality education. The availability of all-day schools had been increased, compulsory pre-primary education was being expanded, a pilot remedial teaching programme that involved the presence of a second teacher in classrooms was under way and teachers were being encouraged to engage in formative assessment starting from primary school with a view to the early identification of any problems. New regulations on primary schools had recognized students' rights and included measures intended to help students become responsible individuals. Updated primary and secondary school curricula were being rolled out and incorporated digital skills development and, at some levels, financial literacy. An alternative school would be opened on a trial basis for students engaging in extreme delinquent behaviour. To support inclusive education, differentiated teaching, where teachers adapted their materials to the needs of each pupil, was being promoted. Efforts were also under way to launch a dialogue with stakeholders on the development of a new teacher evaluation system.

42. A comprehensive programme to address student disengagement and early school leaving, informed by the experiences of other European Union countries, had been implemented. The apprenticeship system, open to students between 14 and 18 years of age, offered alternative ways of learning to adolescents who left the educational system. Evening schools were also available to them.

43. The Ministry had designed and implemented a policy intended to foster the smooth integration of students with a migrant background into the Cypriot education system, focusing on the teaching of Greek as a second language, teacher training, the collection and analysis of data on the needs of such students and the inclusion of an intercultural approach in the updated curricula. Guides to the reception of students with a migrant background had been provided to primary and secondary school teachers, school forms had been translated into several languages and useful material, such as survival language cards and pictures depicting basic classroom instructions, had been made available. Awareness-raising on

countering racism and intolerance and promoting equality and respect had been included in the curricula for various school subjects.

44. Turkish Cypriot and Roma students and students who were members of the Armenian, Maronite and Latin religious groups could attend the public or private school of their choice. The Government fully subsidized the tuition fees for those who chose to attend private schools in government-controlled areas, something it did not do for Greek Cypriots. The right of all children to an education was safeguarded under article 20 of the Constitution, and the equality of all children enrolled in schools was guaranteed by the law. The School and Social Inclusion Actions programme continued to be implemented in schools with a large number of Turkish Cypriot and Roma students. Under the programme, students were given extra help in languages and mathematics, extracurricular activities such as sports and dancing were offered both during school hours and after school, and Turkish-speaking teachers were made available. Under a special programme, psychological support was regularly provided to Roma children and their families. Children could stay at school until 4 p.m. and take lessons in music and Greek as a foreign language. Activities had been held to raise awareness of gender discrimination and inclusive education among teachers and parents.

45. Schools provided computers and Internet access at home to students who lacked them. Turkish was an elective subject in certain grades. The study of two foreign languages, English and French, was compulsory. Human rights education was included in health education coursework and under thematic areas of the curriculum focused on diversity, interculturalism and human rights. Some of the success indicators for the curriculum related to human rights and peaceful coexistence; for example, the showing of respect for the rights of others at school.

46. Under the law on compulsory attendance and the provision of free education, all children between the ages of 4 years and 6 months and 15 years were required to attend school and entitled to a free education. Most children with disabilities were educated in either mainstream classrooms or special units of their local schools. Assistive technology was made available and teaching arrangements were modified to ensure that education was accessible. The Ministry also ensured that schools had suitable infrastructure to accommodate the needs of their pupils and arranged transportation for all children attending a school outside their district. In October 2023, the President had announced the future launch of a dialogue on modernizing special education, with the ultimate aim of transitioning to inclusive education. The Ministry was drafting legislation on reasonable accommodation.

47. The Deputy Ministry of Culture, established in July 2022, comprised the Department of Antiquities, the Department of Contemporary Culture and the Cyprus Handicraft Service. The Deputy Ministry's main areas of focus included the upgrading of museums and archaeological sites, including through the integration of digital technologies, and the provision of financial and institutional support for the creation and exhibition of contemporary art. On 16 September 2024, during a summit held in Cyprus, the ministers of culture of the nine European Union member States in the Mediterranean basin, known as MED9, had issued a joint declaration reaffirming their commitment to upholding cultural rights in times of crisis, protecting cultural diversity and promoting intercultural dialogue. Special attention had been given in the declaration to the cultural rights of marginalized and vulnerable groups, and artistic freedom had been affirmed as a cultural right.

48. **A representative of Cyprus** said that cultural and archaeological sites had been restored in both the government-controlled and occupied areas. Cyprus applied a human rights perspective to the preservation of cultural heritage, as reflected both in its role as penholder for a relevant Human Rights Council resolution and in the Council of Europe Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property, known as the Nicosia Convention.

49. **A representative of Cyprus** said that many programmes at the Cyprus Police Academy addressed human rights-related topics, such as respectful communication in a multicultural society, the role of law enforcement agencies in enforcing human rights, police ethics, the prohibition of torture and other forms of inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, racial discrimination and other forms of discrimination, the investigation of racism-related offences, the combating of xenophobia and racism and trafficking in persons.

50. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he wished to know what steps the State party took to safeguard teachers' academic freedom, whether teachers' salaries were competitive, how they compared to the minimum wage and average salaries in Cyprus, whether there was a set career plan for teachers and whether they ever worked on an *ad honorem* basis.

51. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** (Country Task Force) said that he wondered whether human rights education was available in lower school grades as well as in the upper ones.

52. He was interested to note the shift towards private education in the State party, which was also a growing trend in the rest of the world, fuelled by the financial rewards to be gained by private institutions. It should not, however, come at the expense of quality in the public education system, which served the whole population.

53. As to possible conflicts in obligations between the provisions of the international treaties and those of European Union regulations, the delegation might keep in mind that the Covenant and its provisions had been accepted throughout most of the world for half a century.

54. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that he would be interested to learn whether the State party was considering decriminalizing the use of illicit drugs and if it intended to expand harm reduction measures, for example through increased use of opioid antagonists or syringe exchange programmes to reduce HIV transmission.

55. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** said that he would like to discover in greater detail what was hindering proper implementation of the bill on the right to education of persons with disabilities. While legislation would be the most formal way of introducing the necessary improvements, other measures could also be taken. As to recognition of qualifications awarded by certain universities, while it was not the Committee's role to comment on the political aspect of the issue, he wondered whether the system might be made more flexible, so as to respect the right to education of the persons concerned.

The meeting was suspended at 12.15 p.m. and resumed at 12.30 p.m.

56. **A representative of Cyprus** said that, in respect of the precedence given to the different international instruments to which the State party had acceded, it should be noted that, subsequent to a 2005 amendment, article 1 (a) of the Constitution provided that the Constitution could not be deemed to annul any legislation or measures resulting from the State party's membership of the European Union. However, there had never been any instance of the European Union adopting legislation that conflicted with the provisions of the Covenant or any other treaty body instruments.

57. According to legislation, vacant properties belonging to Turkish Cypriots should be protected for as long as the abnormal situation created by the Turkish invasion persisted – the end of which would be notified by the Council of Ministers. The properties could, in line with specific criteria, be allocated to Greek Cypriot refugees displaced from the areas under occupation in order to meet their housing and professional needs; the rights of the Turkish Cypriot owners were safeguarded in the event that they wished to return to the unoccupied areas of the country. Allocation was based on the relevant legislation and, if the terms were found to have been violated, the necessary action would be taken. The management of such properties had been examined in a number of court cases and no violations of the owners' constitutional rights had been found.

58. **A representative of Cyprus** said that she wished to point out that, according to the Constitution, Turkish Cypriots formed one of the two communities of the Republic of Cyprus, the other being the Greek Cypriot community. They were thus not a minority group.

59. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the harm reduction measures implemented in the country included a ban on the advertising of tobacco products, a ban on indoor smoking in public places, obligatory warning labels on tobacco products and the imposition of taxes. The National Addictions Authority of Cyprus supported smoking cessation programmes and aimed to reduce harmful alcohol consumption, especially among young people. Intravenous drug use had always been low in the country, but there were needle exchange programmes and take-home naloxone programmes, and rapid tests for HIV, hepatitis B and C and syphilis

were available. The national strategic plan on HIV infection was being revised, to include, inter alia, the provision of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) services for drug users.

60. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the country's first detailed climate change risk assessment had been conducted in 2016 for the period to 2100, and its findings had been used to inform the Government's adaptation plans. Agriculture was one of the sectors likely to be most affected, particularly by the reduced availability of water resources due to drought and competition for them with other sectors, which would have a huge impact on crop yield. Extreme weather events such as heatwaves and heavy rainfall would exacerbate damage to crops. The quantity and diversity of fish stocks, including in aquaculture, would be affected by increasing water temperatures and sea level rise, impacting fishing communities and their livelihoods. The climate change adaptation plan was undergoing revision, and a new risk assessment would be conducted to take all concerns into account and ensure better monitoring with quantifiable performance indicators and strong links to funding.

61. **A representative of Cyprus** said that there were grant schemes for artists, projects were funded in the areas of literature, music, dance, visual arts, traditional culture, theatre and cinema, and targeted financial support amounting to €10 million was available to both organized groups and individuals. The Department of Antiquities had a budget of over €4 million to finance excavations, archaeological surveys, conservation and restoration projects, and the management and operation of archaeological museums. It aimed to use the monuments and museums for educational purposes and cultural activities and to promote cultural tourism. Under the UNESCO Associated Schools Network, public and private primary and secondary schools organized conferences and participated in events hosted by schools in other countries. In collaboration with the National Commission for UNESCO and the NGO Junior Achievement Cyprus, the Network organized an annual Innovation Day in Cultural and Creative Industries, during which participants proposed ideas to contribute to the sustainability of the handicraft sector, as part of the country's intangible cultural heritage. The Innovation Day gave the students an opportunity to develop creative and innovative thinking, enhance entrepreneurial skills and promote communication, teamwork and problem-solving.

62. In line with the career programme for teachers, developed over 50 years previously, promotion was awarded on the basis of years of service; discussions were ongoing to develop a new system. The Government considered public education to be a human right for all the country's children and was working to empower the public education system.

63. The legislation concerning special education and the right to education of children with disabilities was also more than 20 years old and required updating. Current discussions focused on whether such children would be better catered for in separate units or within their local schools. Different groups of parents favoured different options and the Ministry was endeavouring to find a solution that would meet both the wishes of the parents and the right of the children to quality inclusive education.

64. As to the recognition of university diplomas, the authorities abided by national and European Union standards and did not discriminate against graduates of Turkish Cypriot institutions.

65. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that the Committee greatly appreciated the quality and concise nature of the delegation's responses and its willingness to provide specific details.

66. **A representative of Cyprus** said that her Government remained committed to respecting the rights enshrined in the Covenant and was proud of the successes achieved since the Committee's review of its previous report. It looked forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations.

67. **The Chair** said that the Committee would look forward to hearing from the State party in respect of the three issues that would be identified for immediate action and hoped it would be able to ratify the Optional Protocol in the near future.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.