



Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

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Committee against Torture Seventy-ninth session

Summary record of the 2099th meeting*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Friday, 3 May 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Heller

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* No summary record was issued for the 2098th meeting.

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

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 19 of the Convention *(continued)*

Fourth periodic report of North Macedonia (continued) ([CAT/C/MKD/4](#); [CAT/C/MKD/QPR/4](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of North Macedonia joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair** invited the delegation of North Macedonia to continue replying to the questions posed by Committee members at the previous meeting.
3. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that, in collaboration with the Council of Europe, in 2011 the Ministry of the Interior had adopted a standard operating procedure on the treatment of persons held in police detention facilities. In 2023, the Government had adopted a code regulating the way in which police officers were to conduct interviews with arrested persons. The code was based on a number of international instruments and documents, including the twenty-eighth general report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), and the principle of non-discrimination.
4. The Director of the Bureau of Public Security had instructed the chiefs of all police stations that had detention facilities to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to any degrading or inhuman treatment of detained persons. A memorandum issued by the Director in 2024 had specified that all detainees had the right to be served a meal every six hours. All police stations were allocated a budget for the provision of meals to detainees.
5. Persons being held in police custody were informed of their right to see a doctor and their right to a lawyer of their choosing; the majority were unable to afford a private lawyer, however, and were therefore represented by one of the lawyers on a list furnished by the Bar Association. Some detainees had difficulty proving that they were socially vulnerable persons, which could make it more difficult for them to find a lawyer willing to represent them. When a detainee requested the assistance of a lawyer, all police activity regarding that person was suspended until the lawyer had arrived at the place of detention.
6. The Ministry of the Interior communicated regularly with the Bar Association as part of its efforts to ensure that persons detained in police stations had access to legal counsel. The Department for Internal Control, Criminal Investigations and Professional Standards of the Ministry monitored the conduct of police officers towards persons in detention. The Department received complaints from members of civil society and the Ombudsman's Office. It also responded to reports submitted by whistle-blowers and conducted its own investigations.
7. Over the reporting period, the Department had received 225 complaints relating to the use of physical force by police officers. Around 100 of those complaints had been unfounded, and a similar number of them had not been supported by sufficient evidence. However, 23 of the complaints had been well founded, and charges had been brought against 26 police officers as a result. Members of the public could submit anonymous complaints, including via email, to the Department. Complainants generally did not disclose their ethnicity when filing a complaint, which made it difficult to determine the number of complaints filed by members of the Roma community.
8. The Ministry of the Interior and the Department for Internal Control ran training programmes in collaboration with foreign partners. Under one such programme, conducted in collaboration with the Government of Norway, numerous training sessions on the use of physical force and the abuse of authority had been held at police stations around the country. Training sessions had also been held on other issues, such as human rights in police work, the treatment of Roma, domestic violence, mobbing, gender-responsive policing and hate crimes.
9. In 2018, the Government had adopted the Law on International and Temporary Protection, which was fully aligned with European Union directives relating to that subject. Applications for asylum were rejected only if applicants failed to meet the conditions set out in the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or if they failed to submit sufficient

evidence indicating that they would face a risk of persecution or discrimination if they returned to their country of origin. Refugees from Kosovo who had been granted asylum in the Republic of Macedonia in 1999, including members of the Roma community, had subsequently had their asylum status withdrawn when Kosovo had been recognized as an independent State.

10. In certain cases, foreign nationals entering the country were granted subsidiary protection status and housed in open asylum centres. They were few in number because the majority of them stayed in the country for a very short time before leaving via an official border crossing. The Government provided free legal aid to persons facing proceedings in the administrative courts, including the Higher Administrative Court. Some asylum-seekers received free legal aid from a non-governmental organization (NGO) such as the Jesuit Legal Service or the Association of Young Lawyers.

11. The Ministry of the Interior restricted the freedom of movement of asylum-seekers only if instructed to do so by the National Security Agency because the persons concerned were believed to pose a threat to national security. Uniformed police officers could also file a request to restrict an individual's freedom of movement if that individual was unable to establish his or her identity. Persons who were due to be extradited could file an application for asylum and be held at a reception centre for asylum-seekers for a period of up to three months, extendable by a further three months.

12. Migrants held in transit centres were regularly visited by representatives of international organizations and the Ombudsman's Office. In recent years, very few persons had been subjected to measures restricting their freedom of movement. Migrants were detained at reception centres for the shortest possible time and only in exceptional circumstances. They were usually accommodated in open facilities managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy or the Crisis Management Centre.

13. When children were held in detention, the Ministry of the Interior always took steps to ensure respect for their best interests and the principles of non-discrimination and non-refoulement. In 2023, an interdepartmental working group had been set up to draft standard operating procedures on the treatment of unaccompanied minors. The drafting process was almost complete, and the procedures were expected to be adopted very soon. If a woman with children was detained, every effort was made to ensure that her child or children remained with her. Under the law, unaccompanied minors were assigned a guardian by the social work centre in Skopje.

14. Persons could be detained at the reception centre for foreign nationals for a maximum of 12 months, extendable for a further 12 months, although such an extension had never been implemented in practice. Persons were generally not held for longer than 6 months. The facilities of the reception centre, which were continually being maintained and improved, included a quarantine room and a fully equipped gym. A new video surveillance system and an additional lounge were currently being installed. The Ombudsman's Office had issued a positive assessment of the treatment of persons held at the reception centre.

15. In 2020, 199 asylum applications relating to 212 individuals had been received. In 2023, 493 refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan had entered the country, and one Ukrainian national had been granted subsidiary protection. The International Committee of the Red Cross gave assistance to persons held at transit centres, and the Ministry of the Interior worked with representatives of the International Organization for Migration to implement a programme for the assisted voluntary return and reintegration of migrants. In 2023, 99 individuals from Morocco, Nepal and other countries had been returned to their countries of origin. Between 2016 and 2022, a total of 115 persons had been returned.

16. Following the storming of the parliament on 27 April 2017, the Ministry of the Interior had set up a task force to examine evidence relating to the event. The task force's report had been submitted to the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption, which had launched an investigation. The public prosecutor had subsequently brought charges against a number of persons, the majority of whom had been convicted and sent to prison for attempting to disrupt the constitutional order of the country.

17. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that, following the amendment of the Law on Health Insurance, persons serving prison sentences, including minors detained at educational and correctional facilities, were all covered by health insurance. The prisons with the largest numbers of prisoners had on-site health professionals who worked across three shifts. In the event of a health emergency, the emergency services were notified.

18. In order to improve health-care standards in prisons, the Government had adopted the National Strategy for the Development of the Penitentiary System and a suicide prevention strategy. In accordance with the former strategy, a standard operating procedure for the provision of health care in prisons had been developed with a view to establishing uniform procedures in all prisons and correctional and educational facilities. Training was provided to all health-care professionals in every correctional facility. Recommendations on ways of incentivising health-care professionals to work in prisons, which included a recommendation concerning higher salary levels, had been drafted.

19. In women's wings, personnel from a mobile gynaecological unit conducted examinations and screened women for cervical cancer under a programme financed by the Ministry of Health. Plans were in place to ensure regular screening of women prisoners for breast cancer. In December 2023, the Government had issued a decision to employ over 1,100 health-care professionals to alleviate staff shortages in prisons and psychiatric institutions. The recruitment process was expected to have been completed by the end of 2024.

20. The Ministry of Health had established two programmes to provide insulin therapy, methadone and buprenorphine to all persons who required such medication, including prisoners. Prisoners were screened for tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. In accordance with the standard operating procedure for the provision of health care in prisons, all places of detention kept records on injuries sustained by inmates. Health-care staff also entered information on all instances of physical, psychological or sexual violence in prisoners' medical records. Doctors reported all injuries and acts of self-harm to the prison authorities and entered them into the persons' medical records. Health-care professionals in prisons and correctional and educational facilities were required to keep a record showing whether prisoners subjected to coercive measures had been examined and if they had any injuries.

21. Renovation work had been carried out in psychiatric institutions to improve the residents' living conditions. The reception infirmary and the women's ward in the psychiatric hospital in Skopje had been renovated, and a new facility had been built within the hospital with additional wards for the treatment of alcoholism and somatic disorders. Plans were in place to renovate the ward for convicted persons in that hospital. It was hoped that all construction and renovation work would be completed by early 2025. The dental clinic in the psychiatric hospital in Demir Hisar had been fully fitted out with the necessary furnishings and equipment.

22. Guidelines on voluntary and involuntary hospitalization in psychiatric hospitals had been drafted. In situations where hospitalization was voluntary, the person concerned signed a consent form. Where it was involuntary, the procedure for forced hospitalization was followed in accordance with the law. Decisions on forced hospitalization were taken by the courts on the basis of an examination conducted by an independent institution. In 2022 and 2023, there had been 1,701 voluntary hospitalizations and 250 involuntary hospitalizations in three psychiatric hospitals.

23. Under the protocol on the use of restraints in psychiatric hospitals, restraints were to be used only to control aggressive patients or to prevent self-harm. Restraints were never to be used as a form of punishment. All hospitals were required to record all uses of restraints, and their use could be ordered only by a doctor. All staff working in psychiatric hospitals received mandatory training on the use of restraints. Psychiatric hospitals were monitored and inspected by the State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate. Psychiatric hospitals were visited annually by representatives of NGOs and the Ombudsman's Office.

24. All psychiatric hospitals had complaint mechanisms, and complaints were considered by a committee responsible for monitoring the quality of services. To date, no psychiatric hospital had received any complaint from a patient about the use of restraints. In accordance with the 2018–2025 National Strategy for the Promotion of Mental Health in the Republic of North Macedonia, a number of measures were being taken to promote the reintegration of

patients into society. Those measures included reducing the number of psychiatric hospitals by building the capacity of medical and other health-care personnel in the community and establishing a sustainable funding system for community mental health services and a standardized system for evaluating mental health and taking follow-up measures. The basic goal of the National Strategy was to prevent mental illness and to promote and maintain the mental health of the entire population, especially persons in vulnerable situations.

25. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that gender-based violence against women was now defined in the Criminal Code as violence aimed at women that could give rise to psychological, sexual or financial harm or suffering. It included direct or indirect threats to carry out acts of violence and coercion, either in the public or the private sphere. The Law on Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence provided for the adoption of 10 ordinances relating to violence against women. To date, the Government had adopted seven of them, as well as a protocol on mutual cooperation between institutions responsible for preventing violence against women and domestic violence. The remaining three, relating to training, data collection and the social integration of victims, were expected to have been adopted by the end of 2024.

26. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy allocated funding to the Centre for Victims of Human Trafficking and Victims of Sexual Violence, which then transferred the funds to licensed providers of specialized services. The Ministry also funded associations of members of the public working in the field of domestic violence. In early 2024, the Ministry had set up a working group to draft a national strategy for the prevention of domestic violence and gender-based violence against women and for the protection of victims. The working group was composed of representatives of various institutions and civil society.

27. As of 2023, the 30 social work centres in North Macedonia had registered over 1,600 victims of different forms of domestic violence, the majority of whom were women. Over 1,000 victims had been afforded legal assistance, while around 80 had been accommodated in shelters. A total of 112 victims were Roma. Roma victims of domestic violence benefited from the same legal protections as other victims.

28. The Government had established specialized services for victims of domestic violence that were managed either by the social work centres or by licensed providers of social services working in the area of domestic violence. Ten centres provided counselling to victims of domestic violence, and three crisis centres and three free hotlines had been established for victims of domestic violence. Other crisis centres, operating under the Ministry of Health, carried out referrals and arranged accommodation for victims of domestic violence in Skopje, Kumanovo and Tetovo.

29. The special institution in Demir Kapija accommodated persons with the most severe psychological disabilities. Of the 124 users of the institution's services, 69 had been moved to residential units, while 55 were still housed at the institution itself, although plans to transfer them elsewhere were in place. The institution currently employed 136 staff members.

30. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Law on Probation had been analysed to identify provisions that should be amended. In 2024, a task force charged with drafting the necessary amendments would be established. Before the task force could begin its work, however, it would first be necessary to determine what other pieces of legislation would need to be amended in order to maintain the coherence of the applicable legal provisions.

31. Under the National Strategy for the Development of the Penitentiary System for 2021–2025, data had been collected and an annual plan for combating corruption in the prison system had been developed, as had methods for assessing risks of corruption and procedures for receiving and acting upon whistle-blowers' reports and for dealing with public procurement processes. An annual report on measures to combat corruption had been drafted, and special training had been delivered to the prison police. Other measures relating to material conditions in prison, training, resocialization and post-release assistance were being taken in line with the strategy.

32. Ongoing training was provided to prison staff. In that connection, a strategy on training for 2023–2027 had been adopted, along with an annual plan and a programme for

initial and in-service training of the prison police. The training covered the laws and regulations governing their work, the use of coercive measures, the use of firearms and procedural protocols.

33. Training sessions on torture had been conducted with the assistance of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, and training on the work of the Ombudsman's Office had been delivered with the help of the Office. Over the past four years, the Ombudsman's Office, which was also the national preventive mechanism, had conducted a number of unannounced visits to places of detention. The Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions made every possible effort to follow the recommendations made by the national preventive mechanism. One such recommendation related to the establishment of a working group to monitor the implementation of measures arising from the Strategy for the Development of the Penitentiary System. Other recommendations related to the improvement of material conditions in prisons, the introduction of a bus service to transport young persons to educational and correctional facilities and the increased use of probation to reduce overcrowding.

34. The Law on the Execution of Sanctions had been amended in line with the recommendations received. The Government had established a national committee to combat radicalization in prisons. Strategies for countering terrorism placed particular emphasis on preventing violent extremism that could give rise to terrorism and on building institutional capacity for combating it. Those strategies and the corresponding action plans were fully aligned with the strategies for preventing violent extremism and combating terrorism of the United Nations and the European Union.

35. A special ordinance governed the work of the multidisciplinary teams established in prisons to monitor persons convicted of belonging to foreign armies or engaging in terrorism. The teams submitted monthly reports to the Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions. A tool for assessing the risks posed by different prisoners and identifying signs of radicalization had been developed, along with a manual and individual treatment programmes. A standard operating procedure for preparing prisoners for release and dealing with radicalized individuals after their release had been prepared and was currently being applied in the case of six convicts. The new prison facilities that were being readied would include a wing for high-risk prisoners. Prison intelligence units were also being developed to help prevent radicalization.

36. A rule book, a manual and a standard operating procedure governing the use of coercive measures on prisoners by the prison police had been developed. The prison police submitted regular reports on the use of coercive measures to the Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions. In recent years, criminal charges had been brought against a number of police and prison police officers. In two cases, the proceedings were ongoing, while, in another three cases, convictions had been secured for the offence of abuse committed while on duty. Six disciplinary proceedings had also been conducted.

37. Prisoners who physically assaulted other prisoners were identified and punished. The Government was planning to adopt a new strategy for combating inter-prisoner violence and a related action plan by 2025. In addition, new response teams and prison intelligence units would be established, and training in the concept of dynamic security would be delivered. As part of the suicide prevention strategy mentioned earlier, multidisciplinary teams had been set up in all prisons. Complaint mechanisms had been established in prisons and additional complaints boxes had been installed by the Ombudsman's Office.

38. The Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions, in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, produced leaflets and information posters in the Macedonian, Albanian and Roma languages to inform prisoners of their right to file complaints. Complaints forms had also been drawn up, and prisoners were encouraged to file them when they had reason to do so. When legal proceedings were brought against members of the prison police as a result, prisoners realized that their complaints could have a tangible effect. The prison officer who had beaten the prisoner Zuher Ibrahimov had been sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment and dismissed from his post. The proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights relating to the deaths of four Roma had been completed, and compensation of €12,000 had been awarded in each of the four cases.

39. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Government had acted upon almost all the recommendations issued by CPT in 2021. In that connection, a number of prisons had been closed and demolished, and new prisons had been built with a view to improving prisoners' living conditions. A juvenile prison in the municipality of Brvenica, with 110 beds, had been opened in 2020 and was currently accommodating 17 minors. A number of other prisons had been expanded and reopened, including Idrizovo Prison, which was the largest in North Macedonia.

40. All prisons and correctional and educational facilities had been equipped with solar panels for heating water and photovoltaic panels for generating electricity. In cooperation with the Council of Europe, 33 facilities had been built, and wards for juveniles had been added to the ones in Shtip, Prilep and Kumanovo. The Council of Europe had donated funds for the installation of a bakery at Shtip Prison so that the prisoners could make their own bread. Kumanovo Prison also had a bakery. The Government had purchased 15 new vehicles for transporting prisoners to attend court proceedings.

41. The Government had allocated €48 million to construct a new central detention centre, which, with its increased capacity, expert staff and improved cooking and washing facilities, would allow all the remaining CPT recommendations to be addressed. There were also plans to build a facility for high-risk prisoners and a prison infirmary, which would reduce the need to transfer inmates to ordinary health-care institutions. The newly constructed facilities would include gates with the latest entry control technology. The State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate had investigated allegations that juveniles in Ohrid prison had been overmedicated and found that all medicines had been prescribed by specialist doctors and administered in line with official procedures.

42. In 2023, the Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions had made a one-off payment to compensate for the previous underpayment of health insurance premiums for prisoners and, since then, had made regular payments in the amount of €1.5 million per month. It had also recruited almost 200 new prison officers to address staffing shortages in the system. A new law on the execution of sanctions had been adopted under which new prison service investigative units had been established and tasked with addressing issues reported by inmates and staff. The Directorate would sign memorandums of understanding with the prosecution service and the Ministry of the Interior to facilitate the use of evidence collected by the units in relevant investigations. The new law mandated the use of body cameras by prison staff, which would help to prevent misconduct and ensure that an objective record of events was available. Further provisions improved the benefits and working conditions of prison staff, ensured that only staff members of the prison system were eligible for promotion to senior positions within it, and strengthened the role of the Director for the Execution of Sanctions.

43. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Supreme Court had initially decided to publish non-final judicial decisions in 2022. The Council for an Open Judiciary had adopted a second action plan with a view to enhancing the accessibility of information on the work of the judiciary and the quality of data available. In 2024, a communication strategy would be adopted that would be based on proactive communication with the general public to strengthen trust in the judiciary. The main focus of the Judicial Sector Development Strategy and its related action plan was judicial transparency. No changes had been made to the authentic interpretation of the Law on Amnesty adopted in 2011 regarding crimes committed during the 2001 conflict. Although psychological violence was not a separate offence in the Criminal Code, acts of gender-based psychological violence could be prosecuted under a number of other offences. The recommendations of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence would be taken into account in the ongoing preparation of the new Criminal Code.

44. **Ms. Racu** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would appreciate clarification on the national laws and regulations relating to access to medical examinations for persons in police custody, including with respect to the documentation and reporting of injuries and potential acts of torture and ill-treatment. She wondered why there was such a large discrepancy between the high number of complaints of the excessive use of force, torture and ill-treatment by police officers and the low conviction rate and wished to know whether police officers suspected of such abuses were suspended from duty during the ensuing criminal

investigations. Any additional information on investigations and the disciplinary sanctions imposed on police officers would be welcome.

45. She would appreciate more information on the complaint mechanism available to minors in remand centres and prisons and the number of complaints received. She would like to hear more about the measures taken by prison administrators to ensure access to health care, including psychiatric care, for juvenile inmates. An update would be welcome on the numbers of staff working with juvenile inmates and the training they received concerning the specific needs of children in detention.

46. She would be interested in learning about the reasons for the lack of complaints filed regarding ill-treatment in psychiatric institutions. She would appreciate an update on the measures taken to reintegrate institutionalized persons with intellectual disabilities and mental health disorders into society and to provide them with community-based services.

47. It would be helpful to receive comprehensive data, disaggregated by the numbers of victims, investigations and prosecutions, on allegations of violence committed against members of ethnic and religious minorities or on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation, including cases of hate crimes and hate speech. She would also appreciate more information on the relevant legal provisions or practices, including whether the State party's Criminal Code contained a comprehensive definition of hate speech.

48. She wished to know whether it was possible to initiate an investigation into suspected cases of torture or domestic violence without the victim having filed a complaint. She would like to know more about the measures taken to address the underreporting of gender-based and domestic violence and to put an end to impunity for such offences. She would welcome a response to concerns raised about anti-gender movements and technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

49. **Mr. Rouwane** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would like to hear the delegation's comments on the case of Memet Kamber, who had died after being refused treatment because he lacked identity documents, and the subsequent recommendation to amend the legislation preventing Roma persons living in informal communities from obtaining such documents. He would also be interested in the delegation's comments on the case of Fatmata, who had been shot and killed by the police near the border with Greece while travelling by car with her husband, an alleged people smuggler. He would like to know what would be done to end the routine pushback of migrants to Greece, from where they risked a further pushback to countries where they might face torture and ill-treatment, in violation of the principle of non-refoulement.

50. He would like to hear about the admission criteria for the Academy for Training of Judges and Public Prosecutors and the duration of the training provided. He would like to learn more about how the information system established as part of recent judicial reforms would be used to gather and systematize information on cases of torture and ill-treatment handled by the prosecution service and courts. It would be helpful to know if any of the non-final decisions published since the Supreme Court decision to do so concerned torture or ill-treatment. Lastly, he wished to have clarification on the State party's position regarding the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and acceptance of the Committee's competence to consider individual communications.

51. **Mr. Contesse** said that he would like to know exactly how many persons had been charged, convicted and sent to prison for excessive use of force following the events of 27 April 2017. He wondered why the Law on Amnesty had not been amended in an effort to put a stop to impunity for torture and ill-treatment and whether the State party would consider doing so.

The meeting was suspended at 11.55 a.m. and resumed at 12.20 p.m.

52. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that persons in police custody were informed of their right to request a doctor. When necessary, the police called the emergency medical services, and those calls were duly documented. Doctors called by detainees themselves, usually to treat chronic conditions, could also produce their own reports.

Following recommendations from international organizations, close attention was paid to monitoring the medical care provided to persons in police custody, including the correct administration of medicines.

53. Seventeen complaints of abuse in the course of the exercise of official duties, including one case of torture or ill-treatment, had been filed against 26 police officers. All of those officers had been suspended during the corresponding internal investigations, which had resulted in 34 disciplinary measures, including 3 dismissals, 2 transfers, 10 fines and 12 compulsory retirements.

54. Under the law on domestic violence, police action could only be taken in response to complaints from victims. Within 12 hours of such complaints being filed, the police were required to submit a report to the prosecution service on the action taken, which included a risk assessment for the victim. Victims were provided with health care and accompanied to collect belongings from their homes. Any weapons that had been used were confiscated. Restraining orders could be issued. While the police had a general power to enter private homes after receiving calls for assistance, thus far action had been taken only as provided for by the specific law on domestic violence in response to a complaint.

55. The border police acted in line with the highest professional standards, and no pushbacks or violations of the right to asylum had been recorded. Posters explaining that right in various languages were displayed at all border crossing points and reception centres for asylum-seekers. The Department for Internal Control of the Ministry of the Interior had investigated the case of Fatmata and found no breach of laws or regulations by the police officer responsible for firing the fatal shot. A report had been filed with the prosecution service, where proceedings were ongoing. Following the events of 27 April 2017, seven senior police officers had been convicted and were serving custodial sentences for offences of terrorism and attempts to overthrow the constitutional order. None had been disciplined for use of excessive force.

56. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that only two complaints had been filed by juveniles in correctional facilities between 2021 and 2024. Since their transfer to a new facility in November 2020, juvenile inmates had been afforded improved conditions, particularly with regard to health care and education. With the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and partner countries, a programme to improve the life skills of children in conflict with the law had been implemented.

57. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Children's Justice Law guaranteed the right of children in detention and their legal representatives to file complaints, either directly or through the Ombudsman. Over 80 per cent of complaints filed through the Ombudsman had resulted in actions to restore the violated rights of the children concerned.

58. Although the Criminal Code did not define hate speech as a specific offence, such incidents could be prosecuted under a number of other provisions, such as article 394 (d) on spreading racist and xenophobic material via computer systems. Although sexual orientation and gender identity were not expressly included as protected characteristics, the national courts had recognized them as such in a case concerning a person who had posted anti-LGBTQI content on Facebook. Article 39 of the Criminal Code provided that the motives of persons who were guilty of discrimination must be taken into account during sentencing for all offences. The courts had handed down decisions in one case dealing with the dissemination of racist and xenophobic material and in one case concerning violence against members of the LGBTQI community. In the new Criminal Code, the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity would be incorporated into the definition of the offence of spreading racist and xenophobic material.

59. Applicants to the Academy for Training of Judges and Public Prosecutors were required to have obtained a law degree, passed the Bar Association examination and exercised their profession for at least two years. The training lasted two years, with nine months of theoretical instruction on civil, criminal and international law followed by practical exercises.

60. The National Information and Communication Technology Council had been established to oversee digitization across all government bodies, which was also foreseen

under the Judicial Sector Development Strategy. A number of digital courtrooms had been established, most recently in Idrizovo Prison. Under a new law on civil registration adopted to ensure that persons not recorded in the civil registry could obtain identity documents, 460 persons had been registered or issued with birth certificates. Efforts to eliminate statelessness in the country would continue.

61. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the number of complaints concerning involuntary hospitalization or the use of restraints filed at the national level from all three of the country's psychiatric hospitals had decreased. The laws on mental health and patients' rights provided for the establishment of complaint mechanisms in individual hospitals, and any complaints of ill-treatment that were made were recorded on a daily basis in an information system managed by medical personnel. An external company had been engaged to conduct testing with a view to improving patient safety. Additional staff had been recruited and shift patterns changed to ensure that at least two psychiatrists were on duty at all times.

62. Under the national strategy on mental health, measures were being taken to promote deinstitutionalization by decentralizing care, reducing the number of psychiatric hospitals, building the capacity of medical personnel, ensuring sustainable funding and establishing a standardized system for monitoring and evaluation. A community-based mental health service was to be established that would include 30 new centres. It was expected that staffing shortages in psychiatric hospitals and prison medical services would be resolved by the end of 2024.

63. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that a social media campaign to raise awareness of violence against women which had been conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy had reached hundreds of thousands of persons. Posters, flyers and stickers with information about how to report domestic violence and the available services would be distributed to all police stations, social work centres and health-care facilities. A study on the ethical reporting of gender-based violence had been conducted and used as a basis for guidelines aimed at all national print, online and broadcast media outlets.

64. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the ratification process for the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance was ongoing. The Government was considering ratification of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. It was her understanding that North Macedonia had already accepted the Committee's competence to consider individual communications.

65. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the delegation would answer all remaining questions in writing.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.