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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Thirty-fourth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 11th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Monday, 2 May 2005, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BARAHONA RIERA  
(Vice-Chairperson)

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In the absence of Ms. Bonoan-Dandan, Ms. Barahona Riera, Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS:

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (continued)

Initial report of Serbia and Montenegro (E/1990/5/Add.61; E/C.12/Q/SEMO/1)

1. The CHAIRPERSON drew the Committee's attention to the written replies by the Government of Serbia and Montenegro to the list of issues.
2. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Krivokapić, Ms. Lalović, Ms. Mohorović, Ms. Nikolić, Mr. Šahović and Ms. Vujović (Serbia and Montenegro) took places at the Committee table.
3. Mr. ŠAHOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro), introducing his country's initial report (E/1990/5/Add.61), said that prior to 2000 violations of human rights had been widespread. Thereafter, with the emergence of democratic institutions, the situation had improved and the country had acceded to a number of human rights treaties, including the European Convention on Human Rights.
4. The Government had abrogated all legislation that contravened international law and had adopted the Charter of Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties, which governed all fundamental human rights. After the constitutional transition from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2003, the central Government had assumed responsibility for overall coordination of human rights. However, implementation of many economic, social and cultural rights had become the responsibility of the two member states of the union, Serbia and Montenegro. Legislation guaranteeing the individual and collective rights of national minorities had been passed, establishing their cultural autonomy. An ombudsperson's office had been established in Montenegro and in Vojvodina, and legislation on developing such an institution was under consideration in Serbia.
5. The Government could not assume responsibility for the implementation of the Covenant in Kosovo and Metohija, given that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) currently administered the province. Implementation of the Covenant in that province did not therefore form part of the initial report. While the province's Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government contained specific reference to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and to other international human rights instruments, it made no reference to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Given that many of the rights enshrined in the Covenant were being violated in the province, his delegation suggested that the Committee should call on UNMIK to submit a report on the implementation of the Covenant for review by the Committee.

6. His Government recognized that, despite significant legislative reforms, implementation of the Covenant remained a challenge because of the legacy of the 1990s, the problematic situation in Kosovo and Metohija, and the difficult economic and social transition the country was undergoing. The priority for Serbia and Montenegro was to prepare for joining the European Union. That process would develop and improve legal systems and practices and revive the network of social, educational and medical institutions that had existed previously. Those measures would assist in the effort to promote and protect economic, social and cultural rights.

7. The reports submitted by several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) formed a useful supplement to the Government's initial report.

8. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee would consider the delegation's proposal that it should request UNMIK to submit a report on the implementation of the Covenant in Kosovo and Metohija. She invited Committee members to put questions to the delegation.

I. General framework within which the Covenant is implemented

II. Issues relating to the general provisions of the Covenant

Articles 1-5 of the Covenant

9. Mr. SADI asked whether the Government had been consulted on the adoption of the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in Kosovo. It would be interesting to know whether the Government attributed the lack of a reference to the Covenant in that Constitution to the influence of the United States of America, which was not party to the Covenant.

10. Notwithstanding the Government's reply to question 2 in the list of issues, additional information on any plans to draw up a national plan of action for the protection of human rights would be welcome.

11. The delegation should be more specific about the offices of ombudsperson that had been established, and the draft legislation on the ombudsperson in Serbia.

12. It was unclear whether the Covenant could be invoked directly in the courts. If it could, it would be useful to have details of some cases in which the Covenant had been directly applied.

13. More information on the potential involvement of NGOs in the preparation of future reports would be welcome.

14. Mr. MALINVERNI said that it would be difficult to ask UNMIK to report on the implementation of the Covenant when the Covenant was not part of the Constitutional Framework for Provisional Self-Government in the province.

15. More information on the impact of the poverty reduction strategy, and any other measures to combat poverty, should be provided.

16. Reports had been received that some people from Kosovo who had been returned to Serbia and Montenegro from States such as Switzerland and Germany had been refused recognition of their status as internally displaced persons (IDPs). The delegation should clarify those reports and provide more general information on the situation of internally displaced persons.

17. It would be useful to learn what measures the Government was taking to ensure that all people found guilty of acts of discrimination, particularly acts based on ethnicity and religion, were punished adequately. Further details on the impact of the strategy for the integration and empowerment of the Roma should also be provided.

18. Mr. ATANGANA requested details of the outcome of any court rulings in which the Covenant had been directly invoked. The delegation should indicate whether reports of corruption in the judiciary were accurate. If so, information on measures to ensure the independence of the judiciary should be provided.

19. Ms. BRAS GOMES asked whether the Government planned to introduce comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, including a cross-cutting definition of discrimination. If such legislation was introduced, would the Government hold a public debate prior to its adoption? What response had the Government given to the draft legislation proposed by an NGO coalition in 2004?

20. The delegation should indicate what efforts were being made to achieve full implementation of the legislation on minority rights, particularly for the Roma. The status of the Roma population as a national minority in Montenegro needed clarification.

21. More information on the main components of the national strategy for a lasting solution to the status of refugees and internally displaced persons in Montenegro would be welcome.

22. It would be interesting to learn whether the Government planned to introduce a national strategy to coordinate the efforts currently being made to promote gender mainstreaming.

23. Mr. KERDOUN asked whether both Montenegro and Serbia had been part of the original successor State to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

24. He wished to know whether the people of Montenegro were of Serbian ethnic origin or were from a different ethnic group. More information on the treatment of minority groups in Serbia would be useful.

25. The Government should indicate whether it would accede to the optional protocol to the Covenant once it was in place.

26. Mr. RZEPLINSKI, noting that corruption had a particularly negative impact on poor people's enjoyment of economic and social rights, enquired about the existence of federal or State laws on freedom of information. If no such laws had yet been introduced were there any plans to do so? Was there any intention to guarantee the public's freedom of access to information on the salaries of judges, prosecutors, local officials and the police? What action was envisaged to secure the impartiality of the judiciary? Were non-governmental organizations

able to obtain such information? Did they have a platform to debate means of combating corruption with the Government? How many offenders had been convicted of corruption and organized crime in 2004? Was a separate agency responsible for preventing and fighting corruption? If several agencies were involved in such measures, how did they coordinate?

27. In view of non-governmental organizations' complaints that government reports to treaty-monitoring bodies were not posted on the Government's web site early enough to enable them to draw up alternative reports, he was curious to learn when the report under consideration had been put on the web site.

28. He was concerned about reports that internally displaced persons experienced difficulty in obtaining identity papers and wondered if it was deliberate government policy to keep them in a legal vacuum for years and, if so, what the reason was. Why were internally displaced persons issued only with temporary residence permits? Moreover he believed that persons with no legal status were in an even worse plight and were so poor that they ran the risk of turning to crime in order to survive. Why did the Government not offer them the possibility of regularizing their status?

29. Mr. MARCHÁN ROMERO welcomed the suggestion that the United Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) should be invited to submit a report on the fulfilment of economic, cultural and social rights in the province. He was, however, puzzled by the fact that the Federal Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities did not apply in Montenegro and that national minorities were not recognized in that State. Did federal law not take precedence in the member States?

30. Serbia and Montenegro was a melting pot of cultures and ethnic groups. Did its Constitution therefore acknowledge that it was a multicultural and multi-ethnic entity? Was that state of affairs reflected in other laws?

31. Mr. SHEN Yongxiang endorsed the proposal that UNMIK should be invited to submit a report on the enjoyment of economic, cultural and social rights in Kosovo and that a reference to the applicability of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights should be included in the Constitutional Framework.

32. He asked if the offices of the ombudspersons functioned effectively. What steps could they take when they received individual complaints of human rights violations? He would appreciate examples of their action in that respect.

33. He was unsure about the origins of the IDPs in Serbia and Montenegro. Why had they become IDPs? He understood that many of them had come from Kosovo. Had the Government therefore discussed possible solutions to the problem of IDPs with UNMIK? What were the obstacles to finding a long-term answer to the issue of IDPs? What assistance could the Committee give in that connection? IDPs and refugees were mentioned in the same breath in the report (E/1990/5/Add.61) although, in fact, a distinction should be drawn between them, because IDPs were nationals of Serbia and Montenegro. Was there any difference in the extent to which the two groups enjoyed economic, cultural and social rights?

34. Turning to the question of a national action plan, he explained that the position had changed radically since 1993, when the World Conference on Human Rights had been held. A new Government had been elected since then and his country had become a Member of the United Nations. It was actively participating in numerous multilateral activities and it attached great importance to the decisions of the Conference.

35. There were already ombudspersons in Vojvodina and Montenegro, but the draft law on an ombudsperson in Serbia was still pending because of the intense debate about the competence of such an office and on how it would fit into the whole system. He was therefore unable to predict when the draft law might enter into force.

36. Both the Constitution and the Charter of Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties envisaged the direct applicability of international treaties, including those dealing with human rights, in the law courts and it would therefore be possible to invoke the Covenant in proceedings. There was no case law to date because the inclusion of such a provision in the Constitution constituted a big departure from previous practice and for that reason, it would take time for the judicial system to adjust and for judges to be trained.

37. Mr. PILLAY commented that the numerous programmes and pieces of legislation to combat discrimination had yielded few positive results for the Roma and therefore wished to know if affirmative action was being contemplated as a means of countering the all-round discrimination faced by that ethnic group. Were the rights enshrined in the Charter of Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties legally enforceable or were they just pious declarations and aspirations? Why had certain economic, social and cultural rights been embodied in the Charter and others not? Why had the right to housing been omitted?

38. Mr. ŠAHOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that he, too, was nonplussed by the omission of any mention of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Constitutional Framework for Kosovo. The Framework was the product of long and complex negotiations between UNMIK and provincial institutions of self-government, in which Serbian representatives had not participated for political reasons.

39. UNMIK could indeed be requested to prepare a report on the implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights protected by the Covenant, since Kosovo was part of Serbia and Montenegro where the Covenant applied.

40. Ms. MOHOROVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro), explaining why non-governmental organizations had not taken part in the preparation of the initial report, said that it had been drawn up during the transformation of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. The State had taken the view that, as the report covered a very long period, it should be drawn up by the competent government departments. Since 2000, however, the activities of non-governmental organizations had intensified and ministries had run training courses on the drafting of national reports. Hence it had subsequently been agreed that, in future, reports to United Nations treaty-monitoring bodies should be prepared with the assistance of non-governmental organizations. When the report under consideration had been completed,

it had promptly been posted on the web site of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, with the result that non-governmental organizations had had enough time to prepare alternative reports. Non-governmental organizations were already involved in the drafting of four further reports on United Nations conventions.

41. Ms. VUJOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro), replying to the question regarding the impact of poverty reduction measures in Serbia, said that a national poverty reduction strategy had been adopted in 2003 and an inter-ministerial team had been established to oversee its implementation. The first conference on the application of the strategy had been held in the poorest area of the country in February 2005. During the conference, the results of the survey on the national standard of living had been presented, which indicated that the overall poverty rate had been 10.5 per cent in 2003. The “new poor” - workers made redundant during restructuring and privatization - had accounted for just over 50 per cent of Serbia’s poor in 2003. On the other hand, approximately one half of those classified as poor in 2002 had found employment and were not categorized as poor. Unemployment was the main generator of poverty in Serbia. The survey also indicated that a stable middle class would probably emerge by 2015, and that the standard of living and nutrition would rise throughout the population.

42. Child poverty was not merely economic; it could also be measured in terms of education, health care and social deprivation. One of the short-term objectives of the poverty reduction strategy was to increase social security coverage and guarantee family welfare. Amendments had thus been made to social security legislation in order to boost child allowances and other social benefits. Such allowances had been paid to 36,000 families in 2003 and 42,000 families in 2004. Approximately 50,000 families were currently receiving allowances. Another element of the national poverty reduction strategy was the fund for social innovation, a transitional mechanism for financing all programmes having to do with the rights enshrined in the Covenant. A total of 484 projects had been approved under those arrangements in 2004.

43. Some 2,800 children, including 712 recently placed children, were currently living with foster families. The size of the allowance paid to families taking in foster children had been increased.

44. Ms. KRIVOKAPIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that the Government of Montenegro had prepared three strategies targeting vulnerable population groups, namely a poverty reduction strategy, a strategy for resolving the problem of refugees, and an action plan for the Roma minority. Montenegro had been flooded with refugees on two occasions in the 1990s, and at one point the country’s population had risen by 15 per cent. There were still 8,400 refugees and 18,000 internally displaced persons in Montenegro. The two categories were quite distinct: the former were from third countries and the latter were Serbian citizens. Both categories had the right to food, shelter, security and education, and the exercise of those rights was verified in the context of reporting to international human rights bodies. The strategy for resolving refugee problems provided for the integration of some refugees into local communities. Internally displaced persons would be given the opportunity to return to their homes, or otherwise be granted Montenegrin citizenship.

45. The Roma population in Montenegro had increased in the 1990s from 3,500 to approximately 20,000 as a result of the exodus from Kosovo. Most lived in the developed part of the country and the coastal zone. They were concentrated in suburban areas and derived most of their income from the grey economy. Although they had access to drinking water, their standard of hygiene and sanitation was very poor. Settlements had been built for them with contributions from foreign donors and international organizations. The Roma enjoyed the same social security rights as the rest of the population. Immunization coverage in the Roma community was 95 per cent and 87 per cent of Roma women gave birth in hospital. The Roma were entitled to use the public health service. There were insufficient numbers of Roma children in formal schooling, although the Government's efforts to encourage school attendance were slowly bearing fruit. On average, the Roma were four or five times poorer than the rest of the population. To stimulate their employment, the Government had encouraged Roma workers to take part in public works programmes.

46. Ms. NIKOLIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that there were still 235,000 internally displaced persons in Serbia and Montenegro. The poverty reduction strategy envisaged a series of measures to assist them in the fields of documentation, pensions, social security and education. In 2004 the Serbian Ministry of the Interior had decided to allow internally displaced persons to change their place of residence, but to date only a fraction of the displaced persons had elected to do so, a reluctance attributable to a desire not to forfeit certain property rights if and when they returned to Kosovo. Administrative formalities had been simplified for them, and the cost of obtaining certain official documents had been waived. Between 120,000 and 140,000 refugees and internally displaced persons were officially categorized as poor. A total of 65,000 able-bodied Serbs displaced from Kosovo were currently in receipt of compensation.

47. Ninety-five per cent of Serbs displaced from Kosovo wished to return there, but the number of returnees had dwindled to a trickle since the violent events of March 2004. The Serbian Government looked forward to a normalization of the situation in the near future. Roma accounted for 11 per cent of the total internally displaced population in Serbia. They benefited from humanitarian assistance and publicly funded health care. In order to improve health care and social security coverage, a detailed analysis had been conducted of the situation of all categories of the Roma population. Together with the World Bank, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other international agencies, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of Serbia and Montenegro had developed a special strategy to integrate and empower the Roma, in addition to a series of action plans in the fields of education, employment, health care and social security aimed at internally displaced persons and returnees in general.

48. Mr. ŠAHOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that there was no confusion about the status of internally displaced persons in Serbia and Montenegro: they were currently citizens of Serbia and Montenegro. If the status of Kosovo and Metohija were to change in the future, then it was conceivable that their status might change also. The question as to why so few internally displaced Serbs were returning to Kosovo should be addressed to UNMIK. Suffice it to say that security and housing conditions currently did not encourage mass returns.

49. The Committee had alluded to the evil of corruption, particularly as it affected the judiciary. The Serbian Government fully acknowledged the problem, which was endemic in all countries undergoing transition. Both Serbia and Montenegro had anti-corruption commissions with specific instructions to tackle the problem. For the first time ever, some 10,000 public officials had been required to declare their property interests and thus expose their financial affairs to public scrutiny.

50. Ms. KRIVOKAPIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that, pursuant to the law on conflicts of interest, applicable in both Serbia and Montenegro, all politicians and public officials were required to submit an annual declaration of their property and income. All data received were accessible to the public at large.

51. Mr. ŠAHOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that the relationship between Serbia and Montenegro was more in the nature of a confederation than a federation. The central authorities simply exercised a coordinating role, with the most important decisions being taken by the two countries' respective parliaments. The central authorities were empowered to make certain decisions within the limits of their competence, but solely with the consent of two Governments.

52. Ms. KRIVOKAPIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that Serbs and Montenegrans were separate nationalities. According to the 1991 census, Serbs comprised 9.6 per cent of the population of Montenegro. Montenegrans accounted for over 47 per cent, and 26 per cent of those were Muslims. The results of the most recent census had still not been processed in full, but Serbs were nevertheless regarded as being distinct from Montenegrans.

53. Mr. ŠAHOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) confirmed that Serbia and Montenegro was a multi-ethnic society with approximately 20 national minorities and some 12 national minority councils representing their interests.

54. Mr. SADI said that, on the face of it, many of the problems currently affecting Serbia and Montenegro were connected with the country's multi-ethnic background. Given that diversity, what long-term projects or campaigns had been devised to encourage national reconciliation, especially between the Serb and Muslim communities?

55. Ms. NIKOLIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro), regarding the status of women in Serbia and Montenegro, said that councils for gender equality had been set up and a national action plan for women had been prepared with input from NGOs, to the extent that all national commitments under the 1995 Beijing Conference on Women had already been fulfilled.

56. Ms. LALOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that Montenegro's office for gender equality, established in March 2003, had already started work on a national action plan to achieve gender equality and had signed a memorandum of cooperation with 10 NGOs. New school textbooks written in gender-sensitive language had been published, and standard job descriptions had been reworked to eliminate gender bias. The authorities had commissioned a sociological analysis of women in public office at all levels of government and administration in the period 1990-2003. A gender equality bill which included definitions of discrimination and measures to prohibit it was currently being debated. The newly adopted law on political parties stipulated that the statutes of political parties must include affirmative action clauses enabling women to be elected to a party's decision-making bodies.

57. Mr. ŠAHOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that the Charter of Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties contained provisions that prohibited discrimination, but he could not confirm whether the Government planned to adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination law. Draft legislation concerning NGOs was under consideration in Parliament and was among the pieces of legislation being given priority, but no firm date for its enactment had been set. Generally speaking, Serbia and Montenegro was in favour of enabling individuals to submit petitions to international human rights bodies. He could therefore see no reason why it would not ratify an optional protocol to the Covenant. He did not know how many persons had been convicted the previous year on corruption charges, but would supply the Committee with that information at a later date.

58. Ms. NIKOLIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that the right to housing had not been included in the Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties because no consensus had been reached on the matter. Nevertheless, many steps had been taken in the past 18 months by the Ministry of Capital Investment with the assistance of the European Commission, including a project for social research into the 592 identified Roma settlements and a study of the housing sector. A draft law on social housing would be debated publicly in May 2005. A series of projects had been envisaged to address the housing problems of the Roma, particularly in Belgrade, where more than 100 Roma settlements were to be found. With the assistance of the international community, during the first cycle of projects, some 5,000 housing units would be built for the Roma, including internally displaced Roma.

59. Mr. ŠAHOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said that what had once been issues of national reconciliation had now become cross-border issues. However, Serbia and Montenegro's reconciliation with the past 10 or 15 years of its history was the subject of ongoing public debate, although no special body had been established to deal with it.

#### Articles 6-9 of the Covenant

60. Mr. MARTYNOV said that despite programmes established by the Government to reduce unemployment, there were still large numbers of unemployed persons, relatively few of whom were taking advantage of such programmes. The Government should consider placing greater emphasis on vocational training in programmes to fight unemployment and increasing the number of persons enrolled in them. He asked whether there were any special requirements that internally displaced persons had to meet in order to secure employment.

61. The delegation should explain what new incentives the Government planned to incorporate into draft legislation on the employment of disabled persons in order to encourage employers to hire them. He asked what the Government planned to do about the fact that there were few provisions in existing laws on enhancing the physical accessibility of facilities for disabled persons.

62. It would be interesting to learn whether the fact that only 4 to 6 per cent of employees in the private sector were members of trade unions was attributable to the requirement for new unions to be approved by both the employer and the Ministry of Labour. He wondered whether the Government planned to ratify International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions No. 117

concerning Basic Aims and Standards of Social Policy and No. 118 concerning Equality of Treatment of Nationals and Non-Nationals in Social Security. He wished to know whether the minimum old-age pension was sufficient to provide a decent living and what percentage of the minimum cost of living it covered.

63. The delegation should explain whether the system of social protection was financially sustainable and whether the new Law on Pension and Disability Insurance, which had been in effect for two years, had resulted in increased contributions to the system. Unemployment coverage in Serbia and Montenegro was relatively low and he wondered what steps the Government planned to take to provide broader coverage. Elderly internally displaced persons had reportedly not received pension benefits for several years. He would welcome clarification of the current situation.

64. Mr. RZEPLINSKI wished to know why police officers did not have the right to form a trade union. It was not clear why the approval of employers was required before setting up new trade unions. He enquired whether employees had the legal right to contest a refusal by the Ministry of Labour to register a new trade union. The delegation should explain why some professions were restricted in their ability to strike. Such restrictions did not seem necessary and could, in fact, create tension between employers and employees. He asked whether the Government had any plans to provide assistance to poor farmers who could not rely upon help from relatives.

65. The delegation should provide information on the legal rights of refugees - in their capacity as pensioners - from outside Serbia. He asked whether such persons were entitled to receive benefits from the Serbian Government and whether there were any intergovernmental agreements to regulate such an arrangement.

66. Ms. BRAS GOMES said that the age of access to employment in Serbia and Montenegro, which currently stood at 15 years, was too low and was not consistent with international recommendations. She wished to know whether the Government intended to raise that age and whether it planned to ratify ILO Convention No. 102 concerning Minimum Standards of Social Security.

67. The delegation should provide statistics disaggregated by sex on the number of workers who were paid minimum wages. The Committee would be grateful for statistics that would help it to assess whether women in Serbia and Montenegro enjoyed just and favourable working conditions and equal pay for work of equal value. She asked whether the minimum wage was reviewed every six months and when the last review had been performed. She wished to know whether the minimum wage was sufficient to provide a decent living for a worker and his or her family.

68. Referring to the Government's written reply to question No. 24 in the list of issues, she enquired whether in decentralizing responsibility for social protection, resources had been allocated from the central budget to the municipalities and towns and, if so, whether that had improved access to benefits.

69. With respect to the reply to question No. 25, she wondered whether changes to the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance, which were intended to guarantee the financial sustainability of the pension system, had resulted in eligibility conditions that were too strict, making them inaccessible to some persons. Considerable improvements had been made in terms of pensions and disability insurance for refugees owing to the signing of bilateral agreements. More than 6,000 pensioners in Serbia apparently received Croatian pensions, but there were still many problems relating to pensions where supporting documentation had been destroyed prior to ratification of the bilateral agreements. She wondered what steps the Government might take in order to expedite exchanges between the pension funds of Serbia and Montenegro, on the one hand, and Croatia, on the other. It was unclear why no more than 557 families had claimed the infant care allowance granted to parents of newborns.

70. Mr. KOLOSOV said that the situation of internally displaced persons depended on political considerations. If internally displaced persons from Kosovo were to become fully integrated in Serbia and Montenegro, the argument for their return to Kosovo would be lost. In that connection, he wondered whether the Government might consider taking some intermediate measures to alleviate the hardships of such persons pending their eventual return to Kosovo, while at the same time maintaining pressure on the international community to allow Kosovo to remain part of Serbia.

71. Mr. RZEPLINSKI, referring to a case in which several workers striking for wage increases were injured by dogs released by private security forces, asked how the public authorities had reacted to the case, whether a criminal investigation had been instituted and what its outcome had been.

72. The CHAIRPERSON, speaking in her capacity as a member of the Committee, enquired whether provisions aimed at ensuring gender equality had been incorporated into labour legislation. She wished to know whether there was any draft legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace and whether measures had been taken to promote the advancement of women to positions of responsibility. She would be grateful for additional information on the two social security systems in Serbia and Montenegro, including indications as to whether they were managed separately and how they interacted with one another.

73. Mr. ŠAHOVIĆ (Serbia and Montenegro) said he wished to make it very clear that the Government did not, as a matter of policy, use the situation of internally displaced persons to pressure the international community in any way.

74. The large numbers of strikes in Serbia and Montenegro mostly concerned State-owned enterprises, which had largely been destroyed during the 1990s. That had previously made it difficult, if not impossible, to pay wages and pension contributions for many employees. Although the Government had begun making such payments once more, constraints imposed by the International Monetary Fund to reduce Serbia and Montenegro's public spending had kept wages to unsatisfactory levels from the employees' perspective. Information concerning the incident in which striking employees had been injured by the actions of private security staff and the Government's reaction to that incident would be supplied in due course.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.