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Chair: Mr. Soh

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* No summary records were issued for the 4185th and 4186th meetings.

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

Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 40 of the Covenant

Second periodic report of Montenegro (CCPR/C/MNE/2; CCPR/C/MNE/QPR/2)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Montenegro joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Montenegro**, introducing his country's second periodic report (CCPR/C/MNE/2), said that Montenegro attached great importance to upholding the values enshrined in the Covenant, particularly in the context of its application for membership of the European Union. The prevention and suppression of corruption was at the top of the Government's policy and law enforcement agenda. Recent legislative amendments had strengthened preventive mechanisms such as the Anti-Corruption Agency and eliminated shortcomings in enforcement practices. In 2025, the Agency would be given direct access to public officials' accounts in order to verify their reporting on income and assets, thus further reinforcing the anti-corruption framework. The latest legislation on lobbying had brought Montenegro into line with the highest international standards and best practices in the prevention of undue influence in legislative processes, encouraging the certification and registration of lobbyists and thereby forestalling corruption, increasing institutional transparency and ensuring effective law enforcement. As to the prosecution of corruption, the jurisdiction of the Special State Prosecutor's Office had been narrowed, restricting it exclusively to high-level corruption cases involving the most senior State officials, a decision that had reduced caseloads not only in that Office but also in the Special Department of the High Court and the Special Police Unit.
3. In line with the recommendations of the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) on the independence and professionalization of the judiciary, improvements had been made to the legal provisions on the functioning of the Judicial Council, on judges' ethical and disciplinary responsibility and judicial appointments, and on the evaluation of judges. The autonomy, accountability and efficiency of the State Prosecutor's Office had also been enhanced through legislative amendments, while the regulations governing the selection, secondment and posting of State prosecutors, and their ethical and disciplinary responsibility, had been reinforced. In May 2024, the Government had adopted its latest Judicial Reform Strategy, which, with the accompanying action plan, was a key policy document for the justice sector. It set out three strategic goals, namely strengthening independence, impartiality and accountability; enhancing expertise and efficiency; and improving access to justice, transparency and public trust in the judiciary.
4. Montenegro had worked for many years to bring its legislation on violence against women, domestic violence, violence against children and trafficking in persons into line with international standards. The goal of zero tolerance and maximum protection of vulnerable groups was reflected in a legal framework providing for protective, preventive and punitive measures. He was pleased to announce that, only the previous day, the parliament had agreed that femicide needed to be established as a separate offence in order to demonstrate the Government's firm intention to eradicate all forms of violence against women. Legal aid legislation had been amended to guarantee the right to legal aid for victims of torture or sexual offences and for children taking legal action to protect their rights, without prejudice to the provision of legal assistance by other relevant services. The law on domestic violence was to be aligned with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). The definition of violence and the scope of the concept of family member would be reworked and victims would be granted additional rights. The protective measures provided for by law would be more precisely defined. In order to strengthen interdepartmental cooperation on protection against violence, the operational team of the Ministry of the Interior that dealt with related issues had been upgraded to become a national interdepartmental team.
5. The Criminal Code had been amended to define abduction as one of the methods of committing the offence of trafficking in persons, and an aggravated offence had been defined to cover cases involving serious bodily harm to a child. Additionally, with the introduction of a non-prosecution clause for victims, the law had been aligned with European Union Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and

protecting its victims. For the first time, child trafficking had been established as a distinct criminal offence. Those amendments had been made in follow-up to the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which had underscored the need to harmonize the law with the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

6. In recognition of the fact that trafficking in persons was one of the most serious crimes against fundamental human rights and dignity, Montenegro had gradually developed a comprehensive system covering the entire process for dealing with trafficking, from victim identification to full integration or reintegration into society; the system was reinforced by close and effective cooperation between competent State authorities and civil society organizations. The key document in that area was the Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2019–2024, which had given rise to six annual action plans. Work on the strategy for the period 2025–2028 had already begun. An operational team to combat trafficking in persons had been set up in the State Prosecutor’s Office and its jurisdiction now covered illegal border crossings and migrant smuggling. The system of identification of victims had been improved with the establishment of a specialist team operating under the National Plan for the Formal Identification of Trafficking Victims.

7. Turning to the continuing reform of the prison system, he said that the primary focus of the Strategy for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions was to strengthen prevention of and protection against abuse and inhumane and degrading treatment, uphold human rights, enhance the institutional capacity of the Directorate for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions and of the Directorate for Probation and promote the re-socialization of detainees and convicts.

8. The Criminal Code had been amended in 2023 in line with recommendations made during the third cycle of the universal periodic review, such that the criminal offence of torture was no longer subject to the statute of limitations. In addition, sentencing guidelines had been toughened, particularly for offences committed by officials. A range of measures had been carried out to improve prison capacity, living conditions and infrastructure.

9. Efforts to combat all forms of discrimination had been stepped up, particularly in relation to vulnerable and marginalized groups such as women, children, persons with disabilities, minorities, older persons and LGBTIQ+ individuals. Further legislation in that area was expected to be adopted in 2025. The implementation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2025 and its accompanying action plans was progressing well, with a focus on strengthening the legal framework for gender policies and preventing discrimination based on sex and gender.

10. The Government remained firmly committed to improving conditions for the full realization of freedom of expression. The Ministry of Justice had significantly reinforced criminal law protections for journalists by introducing more severe penalties for attacks on media professionals.

11. Coming to terms with the past was crucial in fostering good-neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans and advancing his country’s integration into the community of Western democracies, particularly in the light of the region’s recent history of ethnic conflict. The Ministry of Justice had adopted key amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code, allowing for the unimpeded use of evidence gathered within the framework of the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals in The Hague. The Supreme State Prosecutor’s Office had adopted a strategy for investigating war crimes, accompanied by a biannual action plan. Negotiations were under way with Croatia and other countries on the investigation of cases with some bearing on Montenegro.

12. **Ms. Tigroudja** said that she would like to know more about how the State Party’s report had been prepared. According to information received by the Committee, civil society had not been consulted, a situation that seemed to reflect a general reluctance to include civil society in the process of reform in respect of human rights and the rule of law that had been under way for some years.

13. Given that the institution of the Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms (Ombudsman) had been granted B status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights

Institutions, and in the light of European Commission reports that the Ombudsman's recommendations were not always implemented, she would be interested to know what measures were envisaged to increase the human and financial resources allocated to that Office in order to boost its independence, impartiality and effective functioning.

14. On the question of access to justice, truth and reparation for victims of serious human rights violations committed during the armed conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, she would appreciate an explanation for the persistent legal obstacles that, according to information received, were hampering or slowing the prosecution of crimes against humanity and war crimes. She would like to know what measures were in place to combat the reported increase in negationist discourse and the glorification of soldiers who had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. It would also be useful to learn what was being done to preserve memory, an important pillar of transitional justice.

15. She would welcome information on the measures taken to strengthen the Special State Prosecutor's Office in terms of staffing and infrastructure in order to expedite enquiries and proceedings. She would like to know whether judges received any specialized training in international human rights law and humanitarian law.

16. It would be interesting to hear about the efforts being taken to locate victims of enforced disappearance. Was enforced disappearance criminalized in line with the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which the State Party had ratified?

17. **Mr. Ndiaye**, referring to awareness-raising and dissemination of the Covenant, said that he would be interested to hear about the content of the specialist courses offered to judges and prosecutors at the training centre for the judiciary and the prosecution service. He wondered whether they included special modules on the enforcement of the Covenant under domestic law. He would like to know how many judges, prosecutors, lawyers and parliamentarians had attended such training programmes and whether they were compulsory. It would be useful to know how the State Party evaluated the impact of the training on judicial practice and ensured that the knowledge acquired was used to effectively enforce the covenant. He would welcome examples of cases in which the domestic courts had directly referred to the Covenant in decisions and of instances in which the Covenant had provided a framework for legislative debate in the parliament.

18. More broadly, he would like to hear of any initiatives aimed at raising awareness of the Covenant among the general public, civil society and law enforcement officials. It would be interesting to learn whether the State Party coordinated with any international human rights bodies in the organization of such training.

19. The State Party was to be commended for its efforts to set up a comprehensive reparations programme for victims of war crimes, under which financial compensation had been paid out in over 250 cases. It would be interesting to learn whether a reparations programme was in place that also provided for non-financial measures such as restitution, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition and, if so, whether such measures would be proposed retroactively to victims who had to date received only financial compensation.

20. Referring to the State Party's report (para. 53), he said that he would appreciate an explanation of the legal basis for the rejection, annulment or withdrawal of certain compensation claims. He would like to know whether victims were able to obtain legal assistance in claiming reparation and, if not, whether the Government was considering introducing such an option. He wondered what measures were in place to guarantee comprehensive support to victims and their families and whether witnesses of war crimes were provided with psychological, medical or social support. Over and above financial compensation, he would appreciate information on any symbolic measures of reparation, such as public apologies, memorials and monuments, or official recognition of atrocities committed in the past. He would be interested to know what guarantees were in place to prevent a recurrence of such crimes, including the provision of educational and awareness-raising programmes. He would like to hear about any mechanisms enabling victims who considered that the reparation awarded was inadequate, or that reparation had been unjustly denied, to seek reconsideration of their claim. What measures were in place to

ensure that victims from vulnerable groups, such as internally displaced persons and minorities, had equal access to justice and reparation?

21. **Mr. Carazo** said that he would like to know what measures had been taken to ensure that corruption among high-level officials resulted in convictions and appropriate punishment. He wondered whether and how the shortage of judges had been resolved. He was interested to hear about steps taken to enhance the independence and effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Agency. It would be useful to receive data on the amounts recovered in corruption cases and to learn whether the recovery and return processes were transparent. He wondered whether 13. Jul – Plantaže had paid all the compensation due for its employees' abuse of office in business operations. He wished to hear about efforts to raise awareness on the identification and prevention of corruption, including with regard to cooperation with civil society and press freedom to report on corruption cases.

22. He wondered whether the housing programmes aimed at the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities were effective and whether they included measures to ensure the long-term availability of decent housing with adequate living conditions and access to essential services. He wondered what additional measures were being taken to ensure more sustainable and widely available employment opportunities for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian persons and to address the factors leading to school dropout in those communities. He wondered whether measures were being taken to increase Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian representation in decision-making roles and whether those groups were represented in the State Party's delegation. He would appreciate information about women's representation in leadership positions. Lastly, he would like to know what measures the State Party was envisaging to prevent and punish hate speech.

23. **Mr. Quezada Cabrera** said that he wished to know what action had been taken since the end of the period covered by the Strategy for the Improvement of the Quality of Life of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Persons 2019–2023 and the outcomes of the strategy's implementation. He would appreciate an update on the status of the bill on legal gender recognition based on self-determination, especially given the current requirement for sterilization before recognition of a gender change and reports that the Government had blocked passage of the bill. He would welcome the delegation's comments on reports that the legislative amendments needed for proper implementation of the Law on Life Partnership of Persons of the Same Sex had not been made. He would like to know what measures had been taken to prevent, investigate and punish hate crimes against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, including any perpetrated by the police, and the number of convictions for such offences.

24. It would be interesting to know more about the implementation, scope and outcomes of the Strategy for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions 2023–2026. He wished to know whether the definition of and penalties for torture in the Criminal Code had been amended to bring them into line with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It would be useful to learn what measures were being taken to ensure the effective investigation, prosecution and punishment of officials accused of torture and ill-treatment. He would like to know whether the Istanbul Protocol was correctly applied in places of detention and, if not, whether the cause was a shortage of doctors or their lack of impartiality. He would welcome the delegation's comments on reports that police officers accused of ill-treatment were not suspended from their functions during lengthy preliminary investigations, a situation that left the victims at risk of reprisals or allowed perpetrators to block investigations. He wished to receive up-to-date statistics on criminal investigations into torture and ill-treatment during the reporting period, including the number of officials convicted.

25. **The Chair** said that it would be helpful to receive updated data on the classification and prosecution of offences relating to violence against women, distinguishing between minor and major offences. He wished to know what measures had been taken to ensure that the recent legislative reforms to address such violence resulted in effective enforcement and proportionate penalties. He wondered what steps had been taken to eliminate harmful confrontation techniques and ensure that mediation in family law proceedings involving domestic violence was used only on a voluntary basis and with all the necessary safeguards in place.

26. It would be useful to learn more about the planned introduction of femicide as a separate offence in the Criminal Code and any measures being envisaged to ensure that the amended Code would be enforced. He would appreciate updated statistics on the capacity of domestic violence shelters and an explanation of measures taken to ensure sustainable funding in all regions. He would like to know what steps were being taken to streamline the licensing of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and expand specialized support services for domestic violence victims.

27. He would welcome an update on the roll-out of the sex offender registry and the enforcement of post-sentence monitoring measures. It would be useful to hear about the challenges in implementing the Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence 2017–2021 and to learn how they were being addressed under the strategy adopted for the period 2025–2029. He would like to know what legislative and policy measures were in place to combat online grooming and the digital exploitation of children and how the data collection method would be improved to track and prevent such crimes. Lastly, he would like to know what mechanisms were in place to ensure that child victims of violence received comprehensive legal, psychological and social support.

The meeting was suspended at 4.05 p.m. and resumed at 4.40 p.m.

28. **A representative of Montenegro** said that a new criminal offence of enforced disappearance had been introduced in the Criminal Code, on the initiative of an NGO and in line with international standards and the recommendation of the Committee on Enforced Disappearance. In its ongoing review of the Law on Prevention of Corruption, the Government had accepted over two thirds of the recommendations received from civil society actors. Civil society organizations were consistently consulted on proposed legislation. However, successive changes of Government had resulted in a backlog of legislative amendments, which had shortened consultation periods. The Government included members with a civil society background.

29. High-level government officials marked the International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica and visited the locations of the massacre to pay their respects. A previous Minister of Justice had been removed from office for his unacceptable comments on the subject. He hoped that such inappropriate statements would not be repeated in the future or would be punished at the ballot box. The parliament had adopted a resolution condemning the genocide.

30. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in 2024, the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office had adopted a strategy and related action plan for the investigation of war crimes with a view to ending impunity by reopening cases to analyse new evidence. Pursuant to the strategy, four cases with final judgments would be reopened, including the Bukovica case, the Morinj case, the deportation of Muslims case and the Kaluđerski laz case. A 2024 amendment to the Criminal Procedure Code had improved the resources available to the prosecution services, including by allowing for cooperation among regional services and facilitating the identification of victims and witnesses. It also allowed the prosecution service to use evidence obtained by the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals, which had already resulted in an indictment for crimes against humanity. Witnesses were currently being heard in that case, while the indictment in a second case was being reviewed.

31. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the two criminal cases involving Montenegrin nationals suspected of committing war crimes in Bosnia and Herzegovina had been made a priority, as per instructions from the Supreme Court. All victims of war crimes and their families had guaranteed access to reparations through claims for pecuniary and non-pecuniary damages, which the courts awarded in accordance with the Law on Obligations and the Law on Civil Procedure. Over 100 final judgments had been handed down in the Morinj case. Some civil cases were still pending and were being prioritized by the courts. Since 2023, €1.5 million had been awarded in non-pecuniary damages.

32. **A representative of Montenegro** said that joint training sessions on war crime prosecution before the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals were being organized for Montenegrin judges and prosecutors. The Government cooperated with other countries in the signing of extradition orders, including for Montenegrin nationals. In 2024, Montenegro had signed the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention on International Cooperation

in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and Other International Crimes.

33. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in December 2023, the Criminal Code had been amended to define the actions that constituted the criminal offence of domestic violence and clearly distinguish it from a misdemeanour, broaden the scope of individuals protected by the law's guarantees and impose stricter sanctions for domestic violence. The Supreme State Prosecutor's Office had adopted a mandatory instruction that called on prosecutors to submit any misdemeanour orders that might require reclassification as a criminal offence. The instruction also stipulated that victims should be heard separately from offenders to avoid secondary victimization and that they should be heard by a prosecutor who could provide legal advice and facilitate access to legal aid. A coordinator had been appointed in the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office, in addition to focal points in all prosecution offices, to ensure uniform action among all State prosecutors.

34. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in 2024, there had been 364 applications for legal aid, 80 per cent of which had been granted. Among the 108 cases related to domestic violence and trafficking in persons, 92 per cent of legal aid applications had been approved. Information on legal aid services was publicly available on dedicated web pages, and a campaign was being conducted to raise awareness of the availability of legal aid for all victims of domestic violence. Information bulletins on trafficking in persons were available in five languages at legal aid clinics, crisis shelters, courts and prosecution offices. In 2024, 629 domestic violence cases had been received, with 167 cases carried over from previous years, and 222 final judgments had been issued on domestic violence charges. In the same year, the misdemeanour courts had admitted 247 domestic violence cases.

35. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the monitoring of femicide and its establishment as a separate criminal offence would constitute key challenges for Montenegrin institutions in the near future. Special attention would be paid to victims, survivors and surviving family members.

36. **A representative of Montenegro** said that three cases relating to femicide were being heard before the Court of Appeals, and a further three cases were being heard before the High Court in Podgorica. A sentence of 40 years' imprisonment had been issued for the murder of Šejla Bakija; however the duration of the sentence was currently under review by the Supreme Court.

37. Since August 2021, 124 judges had been removed from office and 138 new judges had been appointed. Each year, the Judicial Council adopted a plan of vacancies to respond to the high turnover of judges and ensure that the judiciary remained adequately staffed. The duration of mandatory training for judges had been reduced from 18 to 12 months and the position of the President of the Supreme Court had been filled.

38. In 2025, the Supreme Court would oversee the work of the Special Department of the High Court in Podgorica on corruption cases, and any proposals for improvement would also be referred to the Judicial Council. The Council had recently appointed 10 judges to the High Court in Podgorica, demonstrating the importance of direct cooperation between the two bodies.

39. The implementation of guidelines for managing cases of serious and organized crime, adopted in October 2024, was being monitored. Steps were being taken to streamline judicial procedures and promote the use of plea bargaining agreements. In 2024, the High Court had handled 17 cases of high-level corruption and admitted 70 more cases than in 2023. However, it had resolved 4.4 per cent fewer cases in 2024 compared to the previous year.

40. **A representative of Montenegro** said that legislative amendments had been adopted in 2023 with a view to reducing the workload of the State Prosecution Service and improving its efficiency. Amendments made to provisions relating to anti-corruption measures had significantly enhanced the impartiality and independence of the Anti-Corruption Agency. The recruitment process for new officers in the Anti-Corruption Agency had been simplified, and further steps were being taken to strengthen the Agency's financial independence.

41. At present, there were 16 prosecutors in the Special State Prosecutor's Office out of a maximum of 20. Institutions such as the training centre for the judiciary and the prosecution

service designed their training programmes in accordance with the Covenant. Through the harmonization of domestic legislation with the Covenant and the ratification of other international instruments, the State strove to adhere to the highest international standards.

42. **A representative of Montenegro** said that a strategy to support and protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons had been adopted for the period 2024–2028, with a particular focus on legislative reforms. NGOs were members of all governmental working groups, including those working on draft legislation and strategic documents. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights had allocated around €2 million to projects run by NGOs in 2024.

43. Work was under way to implement four key laws that would improve the quality of life of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons: an anti-discrimination law, designed to prevent discrimination against such persons and to define hate speech, punishable actions and protection mechanisms; a law on the protection of human rights and freedoms; a law on gender identity recognition, which would allow for the recognition of gender identity based on self-determination; and a law on same-sex partnerships, which sought to provide legal recognition and equal treatment for same-sex partnerships.

44. The law on the protection of human rights and freedoms, specifically, would ensure that the Ombudsman's Office could independently investigate human rights violations and enforce compliance with its recommendations. Specialized deputy ombudsmen would focus on specific areas of human rights and freedom, such as discrimination, the rights of children and vulnerable groups and prevention of torture.

45. **A representative of Montenegro** said that one person had been sentenced to 6 months' imprisonment and two persons to 4 months' imprisonment in a case involving an attack against a transgender victim. Thirty-three training sessions on the matters addressed by the Covenant had been delivered to members of the judiciary in the past year. Although there had been no specific references to the Covenant in legal judgments, the courts often referred to other international instruments, and such instruments had primacy over domestic legislation and were applied directly when their provisions differed from Montenegrin law, which was nevertheless aligned with international standards to the greatest extent possible.

46. **A representative of Montenegro** said that past tensions surrounding events such as the capital city's annual gay pride parade had dissipated in recent years.

47. **A representative of Montenegro** said that, in 2024, the courts had received just three cases in which the victims were members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. The charges in one case had been dropped, while in another they had been downgraded to misdemeanours. The third case related to a hate crime and was therefore being heard by the court. Specially trained prosecutors worked with civil society to assist victims from the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

48. **A representative of Montenegro** said that work remained to amend existing legislation, particularly in the area of civil registers, to allow for the full implementation of the law on same-sex partnerships.

49. **A representative of Montenegro** said that the Istanbul Protocol was applied in prisons and remand prisons. All existing injuries were recorded when detainees arrived at a remand prison, and a record was also made of any injuries occurring during their detention. There was zero tolerance of torture, and all police officers accused of that crime were prosecuted. Between 2018 and 2022 there had been 30 cases involving 59 officers. The courts had handed down 14 judgments, including 7 convictions and 7 acquittals; one case had been dismissed. In 2024, there had been 21 cases involving 38 officers, and 4 of the 5 cases heard so far had resulted in convictions.

50. **Mr. Carazo** said that he would like to know what measurable progress had been made in addressing gender stereotypes through the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2021–2025, whether any particular efforts were planned for the final year of the Strategy and whether a subsequent strategy had been prepared. He would also like to know whether the State Party's awareness-raising and education efforts in the area of child marriage had led to a documented fall in the number of such marriages and whether the legislative changes aimed at improving women's political participation had increased their representation in

high-ranking political positions and in the parliament. It would be useful to know how many women had been elected during the 2020 and 2023 elections, when the next parliamentary elections would be held and what effort would be made at the next election to increase women's political representation.

51. The Committee would welcome information on the specific steps taken to monitor and prevent sex-selective abortion, including any investigations or awareness-raising campaigns. Lastly, he would welcome details of the quantitative results of the strategy to increase the number of women police officers, as well as information on policies or budgetary allocations to ensure gender-responsive budgeting.

52. **Mr. Quezada Cabrera**, noting that the bill on the legal recognition of gender identity was to be adopted by the Government, said that he would welcome clarification as to the executive branch's power to adopt legislation and the differences between such laws and those adopted by the parliament. More information on the restrictions contained in the bill and the reasons for them would be appreciated. He would welcome the delegation's response to allegations that medical reports issued in detention centres failed to document signs of torture or ill-treatment as required under the Istanbul Protocol.

53. **Mr. Korkelia** said that he would like to know whether the State Party had established a national mechanism in follow-up to the concluding observations made by the human rights treaty bodies and, if so, what role the parliament played in overseeing such follow-up actions.

54. **Ms. Tigroudja** said that she would like to know what legal measures were planned to strengthen the Ombudsman's Office.

55. **The Chair** said that he would welcome more specific information relating to violence against children.

56. **A representative of Montenegro** said that efforts were under way to amend electoral legislation to increase women's political representation, and the Government was considering introducing a 50 per cent quota for women in public bodies. The next parliamentary elections were planned for 2027.

57. **A representative of Montenegro** said that patriarchal views in the judiciary were combated through training programmes, including on domestic violence, trafficking in persons and sexual violence against children. The judiciary had traditionally comprised more women than men; indeed, around 65 per cent of judges were women, while men made up less than 12 per cent of judges in the Supreme Court. Women also held the majority of leadership positions in the judiciary. An association of women judges had recently been established with the aim of, among other things, promoting gender equality. All courts kept records of discrimination cases, which were entered into a database, and work was ongoing to improve the quality of those entries.

58. An analysis had been conducted of data, policies and practices relating to the sexual exploitation of children, particularly online. As a result, the Supreme Court planned to adopt guidelines on assessing whether appropriate arrangements had been made for children involved in such court cases. For example, the Supreme Court had recently granted a request for protection of legality in the case of the rape of a minor because the arrangements made for the victim had not met the required standards. Good practice in place in that regard included allowing victims to give testimony away from the main hearing with the support of experts and social workers, for example by using audiovisual equipment, and avoiding secondary victimization. Guidelines on the legislation governing arrangements for children in court cases had been issued to professionals providing support in that context.

59. There were almost 150 judges in the juvenile courts, and a large number of other judicial officials, as well as law enforcement officers, had undergone training on juvenile justice, including under the Judicial Reform Strategy 2024–2027. The Strategy also provided for the creation of specific child-friendly facilities in courts and at the premises of the State Prosecution Service, as well as the improvement of existing facilities. Legislative gaps had been identified and addressed in preparation for the adoption of the *barnahus* model. All victims of crime, including children, were entitled to compensation for material and non-material damages, which were awarded by the criminal courts to avoid retraumatizing victims by forcing them to bring separate compensation proceedings.

60. **A representative of Montenegro** said that parliamentary committees had discussed a number of the matters raised by the Committee. For example, the conclusions of a discussion on violence in education facilities had been shared with the relevant institutions, while a discussion on peer violence among children had led to recommendations for ongoing multidisciplinary action to address the problem. Three action plans to achieve a gender-responsive parliament had been implemented with the aim of, *inter alia*, raising awareness of gender equality and promoting inclusiveness in political representation.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.