



# International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Distr.: General  
12 August 2025

Original: English

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## Human Rights Committee 144th session

### Summary record of the 4235th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 1 July 2025, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Soh

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

**Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 40 of the Covenant**  
(continued)

*Fourth periodic report of North Macedonia (continued)* (CCPR/C/MKD/4;  
CCPR/C/MKD/QPR/4)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of North Macedonia joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the authorities would continue to analyse existing legislation with a view to bringing it into line with European Union norms on equality and non-discrimination. The Government recognized that gender stereotyping remained widespread in the country and had therefore decreed that all public policies should integrate gender mainstreaming as a matter of course, also with a view to promoting women in leadership roles. In the face of the anti-gender movements that had emerged across the world, including in North Macedonia, in recent years, the Ministry of Education had taken action to raise public awareness about the importance of gender equality. Currently, there were three female ministers, and women accounted for 39 per cent of Members of Parliament and 8.6 per cent of mayoral candidates. Strategies to combat gender-based and domestic violence included provisions to tackle online violence.
3. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the department responsible for receiving reports concerning excessive use of force by the police treated all reports equally irrespective of the identity of the complainant; however, it did not collect data on victims disaggregated by ethnicity. Refugees and asylum-seekers were processed under the 2018 Law on International and Temporary Protection, which was consistent with European Union directives, and they were housed in open centres which they were free to leave at any time. Their situation was monitored by the country office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which had not voiced any concerns. Refugees and asylum-seekers were also free to appeal decisions to the national courts or the European Court of Human Rights. In exceptional cases, refugees and asylum-seekers could be held in detention, in facilities that were visited regularly by the Ombudsman and by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
4. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the state of emergency declared during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had entailed restrictions to certain rights which had been imposed in a manner consistent with article 4 of the Covenant. The Constitutional Court had invoked article 12 (2) of the Covenant in a 2014 ruling in which it had determined that certain provisions of the Law on Travel Documents were unconstitutional.
5. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that judges and prosecutors had received training on the use of non-custodial alternatives to pretrial detention, such as house arrest and bail, and an effective mechanism for appealing against pretrial detention orders was in place. Pretrial detention had been imposed in just 3.1 per cent of the more than 20,000 cases that had come before the courts in 2024, as compared to 3.6 per cent of cases in 2023.
6. Parliament was shortly due to consider a bill intended to curb the excessive use of force by law enforcement officials, also by removing the statute of limitations on such offences. Legal provisions intended to prevent torture and abuse of authority had recently been drafted in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Investigations into alleged violations committed by law enforcement personnel were conducted by the Public Prosecutor's Office, and the internal control department in the Ministry of Internal Affairs had no authority to interfere in such cases until the prosecutors had secured all the evidence and completed their work. Once the investigation was complete, the department could institute disciplinary proceedings. The Public Prosecutor's Office had investigated a total of 424 cases of abuse and torture committed by police and other law enforcement agencies.
7. **Mr. Carazo** said that he wished to acknowledge the progress the State Party had made in its efforts to combat trafficking in persons, particularly children. The framework for identifying, protecting and compensating victims and for punishing perpetrators had been

reinforced, notably with the enactment of the 2018 Law on Foreigners and the 2022 Law on Payment of Monetary Compensation to victims of violent crimes. However, the number of trafficking victims had apparently increased since 2021 and, although that might be due to improved identification techniques, it also highlighted the magnitude of the problem.

8. He wished to know whether action was being taken to investigate persistent reports that the police and other public officials were sometimes complicit in trafficking operations. He also hoped that the delegation could provide details about any policies in place to ensure that trafficking victims were not repatriated and describe any long-term support they received, including compensation, rehabilitation and psychosocial assistance. He would be interested to hear about any action the State Party was taking to tackle the root causes of trafficking, such as poverty and social marginalization, and he would appreciate information about procedures intended to improve the identification of adult victims of trafficking, particularly among vulnerable groups such as migrants, Roma and asylum-seekers.

9. He wished to commend the State Party for its efforts to ensure that minorities were adequately represented in public life, in accordance with the Ohrid Framework Agreement. In fact, a recent report of the Ombudsman had indicated that the level of representation of ethnic minorities had increased between 2007 and 2020. He remained concerned, however, at the persistent lack of financial and human resources for the principal institutions responsible for safeguarding the rights of minorities, and he hoped the delegation could explain what concrete action was being taken to redress that state of affairs.

10. He wondered whether the State was collecting detailed and disaggregated data, which would help to ensure that all ethnic communities, particularly the smaller ones, were able to enjoy equal rights within a multi-ethnic society. He would also be interested to hear about any action being taken to preserve and promote Macedonian culture, language and identity while, at the same time supporting the cultural and religious expressions of the other ethnic groups in the country.

11. **Mr. Yigezu** said that, while he recognized that the State Party had taken action to uphold the right to freedom of movement, notably the recent Constitutional Court ruling abrogating certain provisions of the Law on Travel Documents, he believed that further measures might be necessary in that regard, particularly for minorities such as the Roma community. He was especially concerned by reports that Roma and other minorities were being deprived of their freedom of movement at border crossings, in breach of national and international law, and he wondered whether any penalties had been imposed on the officials responsible. What action had the authorities taken to implement the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *Memedova and others v. North Macedonia*?

12. The delegation should provide further information on plans to expedite the issuance of biometric and machine-readable documents to refugees, persons with subsidiary protection and all asylum-seekers whose claims had been pending for more than three months. Lack of access to proper documentation often meant that such persons were unable to access basic rights such as healthcare, employment and education. The Committee was concerned about reports of asylum-seekers being held in informal detention and with limited access to information about their situation and prospects, and he wished to know what was being done to ensure that legal alternatives to detention were available and effectively implemented.

13. He remained deeply concerned about well-documented reports of violent pushbacks and collective expulsions of migrants and asylum-seekers, which appeared to violate the principle of non-refoulement. He wondered what steps had been taken to investigate those reports and to ensure that law enforcement officers always acted in full compliance with the principle of non-refoulement, even during pushbacks.

14. While welcoming several positive measures the State Party had taken towards reducing statelessness – particularly the accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the enactment of several new laws – the Committee continued to receive reports indicating the absence of a proper statelessness determination procedure. The delegation should therefore inform the Committee about what was being done to establish a fair and accessible procedure, applicable to all persons in the country, regardless of their legal status. It would also be interesting to know how stateless persons – including members of the

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities – had access to fundamental rights in law and in practice without discrimination, irrespective of documentation or citizenship status.

15. Shortcomings in the birth registration process seemed to leave Roma children, in particular, at heightened risk of statelessness, and he hoped that the delegation could reassure the Committee that all children born in North Macedonia had the right to a name and nationality from birth and that the authorities continued to monitor the effective implementation of national legislation in that regard while also strengthening measures to register persons with unregulated civil status.

16. **Mr. Quezada Cabrera** said that he would be grateful for an update on the status of the bill to amend the Law on Witness Protection. He also hoped to hear the delegation's reaction to reports of significant delays in court proceedings involving cases of high-level corruption and to allegations about a lack of transparency in the appointment and promotion of judges, which risked generating accusations of favouritism and undue political influence. He wondered whether the strategy adopted to improve the system of justice, covering the period 2023–2027, had improved access to the courts and to free legal aid for marginalized groups, and he wished to know what was being done to put an end to delays in the resolution of administrative disputes, which in many cases exceeded the nine-month limit envisaged in the law.

17. He would be interested to hear about the progress made by the inter-institutional body headed by the Ministry of Justice which had been charged with drafting amendments to the 2007 Law on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Communities and Religious Groups. He also hoped to hear more about the progress of a 2017 initiative intended to amend the Criminal Code to penalize antisemitism, Holocaust denial and the glorification of Nazism and Fascism. What was being done to address allegations made by certain small Protestant churches that they were effectively discriminated against by the State, which tended to privilege only the five religious communities recognized by the Constitution? He wished to know if anything was being done to address online religious hate, directed in particular against Muslims, and to identify and punish the persons responsible.

18. He would be interested to know how the composition and procedure for appointing members of the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services ensured its independence. He wondered in how many cases the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation had been applied thus far and on what grounds, and how many journalists had received penalties. In the light of reports that, between 2021 and 2024, there had been a number of attacks on media workers, he wished to know what steps the State Party was taking to ensure their security and safety. He would appreciate detailed information on any recent training given to judges, prosecutors and police officers in relation to journalism and freedom of expression.

19. Lastly, he would welcome information about the functions of the special prosecutor, a position which had been attached to the general prosecutor's office in 2022, and his or her powers to monitor cases involving threats or violence against journalists.

20. **Ms. Tigroudja** said that she would like to know what safeguards were provided to persons who were subjected to illegal surveillance, how individuals could know that they were being monitored and how judges intervened in such processes. She wondered what the legal status of evidence obtained through illegal surveillance was in trials and whether it could be excluded from consideration. She would welcome an update on the status of proceedings in the “target fortress” case concerning the alleged illegal monitoring of communications by government officials. It would be useful to hear about the status of ongoing reviews of data protection guidelines, including those to be followed by the police in relation to biological material. She would appreciate a detailed account of the extensive programme for the digital transformation of society up to 2027 that the State Party had committed itself to carrying out in the context of the UN75 campaign and related achievements thus far.

21. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she wished to know what steps the State Party would take to improve the availability of services for children with disabilities and their caregivers. Given that some 45 per cent of Roma girls reportedly married under the age of 18, she wondered what legal and policy measures were being taken to abolish child and forced marriages. In

the light of reports that almost 75 per cent of children experienced corporal punishment in the home, despite a national ban on the practice, and that, in 2020, Roma children accounted for 75 per cent of children in correctional institutions that had been accused of child abuse and that placed children in solitary confinement, she would like to know what steps were being taken to protect all children in the State Party.

22. It would be useful to hear whether electoral legislation provided for the inclusion of persons with disabilities throughout the electoral process, including the possibility of registering as candidates. She wondered what steps had been taken to ensure that persons lacking personal documentation and detained persons could exercise their voting rights. She would like to know what safeguards had been put in place to ensure that the local elections scheduled for October 2025 would not be affected by fast-track amendments to the Electoral Code of the kind that had placed an increased administrative burden on independent candidates shortly before the 2024 elections.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.50 a.m. and resumed at 11.10 a.m.*

23. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that police officers who had been accused of participation in trafficking in persons were treated in the same way as other citizens. One officer who had been convicted under article 418-b of the Criminal Code (Trafficking of migrants) had been sentenced to 4 years' imprisonment. Standard operating procedures for police officers, including the border police, had been adopted in 2023. The National Strategy and National Action Plan for Combating Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration were designed to build the capacity of State institutions involved in those efforts. Pursuant to Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA, General Assembly resolution 55/67 and the recommendations of the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, the Government applied the principle of non-refoulement to victims of trafficking in persons. It applied the same principle to members of vulnerable groups, children, LGBTI persons and women. A working group was being established with the aim of developing a new strategy for countering trafficking in persons for the period 2026–2030 and an accompanying action plan, and the 2022 Law on Payment of Monetary Compensation to Victims of Violent Crimes was being applied in practice. The Government had improved its cooperation with international anti-trafficking organizations and participated in a working group that gathered intelligence on people smuggling and migration in the Western Balkans and in the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative, which had increased the Government's capacities to recognize victims of trafficking in persons. In the period 2022–May 2025, the Government had made significant efforts in cooperation with civil society organizations to raise public awareness of the problem of trafficking in persons and help people to recognize victims. In 2024, the national commission for combating trafficking in persons had adopted guidelines for the legal representation of victims of that crime. A road map for victim support had been developed, and efforts were being made to appoint legal representation for victims and rehabilitate and reintegrate them into society.

24. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the priority areas of the recently introduced national strategy for the development of national cohesion and multiculturalism included intercultural policies, education and the media. The Ministry of Political Systems and Inter-Community Relations had adopted several funding programmes aimed at protecting communities' identity and promoting peaceful coexistence and the equal treatment of all citizens. Under one such programme, six communities in the country had each been allocated 2 million denars for the organization of cultural events to mark their respective national days in 2025. A total of 6 million denars had been allocated for marking the anniversary of the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in August 2001, and 20 million denars had been allocated for NGO activities aimed at promoting interculturalism, inter-ethnic coexistence and education in the languages of ethnic communities; 33 funding agreements had been signed with NGOs thus far.

25. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that, under North Macedonian law, primary schoolchildren were taught in Macedonian and in the languages of minority communities. In the 2024/25 school year, in addition to Macedonian, children had received schooling in Albanian, Turkish, Bosnian and Serbian. More than 64,000 children at over

300 schools were taught in their native language. As of the 2022/23 school year, new programmes for teaching Macedonian as a second language had been implemented for children between the first and ninth grades. Children in municipalities with a second official language alongside Macedonian could also learn that language with their parents' consent. Under articles 24 and 53 of the amended Law on Primary Education, children could choose to learn about the language and culture of their own community as an optional subject from the third to the ninth grade; it was no longer necessary for there to be at least 15 children from their community who wished to learn that subject for it to be offered. Pursuant to the Law on Primary Education and the Law on Secondary Education, schools received grants for conducting joint activities for schoolchildren belonging to different ethnic communities with a view to promoting inter-ethnic tolerance and a multicultural society. Minority communities were now involved in the preparation and review of textbooks that covered the languages and cultures of such communities.

26. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that, pursuant to amendments to the Criminal Code, victims of trafficking in persons were no longer held liable for secondary crimes that they had committed. Criminal procedure law provided for protections for vulnerable categories of witnesses, including asylum-seekers. The Government would soon submit draft amendments aligning criminal procedure law with the most recent directives of the European Union on victims' rights for consideration by the parliament. Non-procedural witness protection measures were governed by the Law on Witness Protection, which was aligned with relevant international standards, including two recommendations issued by the Council of Europe, while procedural measures were governed by the Law on Criminal Procedure. Former issues with provisions of that law had been addressed subsequent to a detailed analysis of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

27. Several years previously, the Government had amended the Law on Monitoring Communications, the Law on Criminal Procedure and the Law on the Operational Technical Agency with a view to delimiting the competencies of the different agencies involved in surveillance activities, since which there had been no more problems in that area.

28. Under undesirable amendments made to article 353 of the Criminal Code regarding abuse of official position in September 2022, the statute of limitations and sentences applicable in certain organized crime and corruption cases had been reduced. Proposals to reverse those amendments would soon be submitted to the parliament for consideration. According to statistics published by the Council of Europe European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice for 2024, the clearance rate for criminal cases had been 98 per cent, and the average time taken to conclude them had been 188 days.

29. Amendments to the Law on the Judicial Council had been drafted with input from the European Commission for Democracy through Law and were in the process of being adopted. Under those amendments, each member of the Council would be obliged to explain his or her position regarding each candidate in elections of judges. It was envisaged that candidates for the Council should be questioned by the parliament, with the participation of NGOs, in order to make their election more inclusive and reduce the influence of political factors on that process.

30. Steps taken to resolve the issues within the administrative judicial system had included the introduction of a limit on the number of times that a case could be returned to a court of first instance, the establishment of an electronic system to facilitate the sharing of information between State bodies and the administrative courts and the imposition of sanctions on State bodies that failed to cooperate with those courts. The Government recognized that the amount of funding earmarked for free legal aid, which had reached €280,000 in 2024, was low compared to the sums allocated by most other members of the Council of Europe. Accordingly, it was working with the Council to reform the legal aid system and was considering whether to establish a dedicated body to deal with the matter. There had been an increase in the number of training courses specifically concerning the delivery of free legal aid.

31. The Public Prosecutor's Office had appointed a special prosecutor to expedite the processing of cases involving attacks against journalists, the number of which had totalled four in 2024. The Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation provided for the

establishment of mechanisms to protect journalists from defamation lawsuits and for a decrease from €2,000 to €400 in the maximum amount of damages that journalists involved in such lawsuits, of which 15 had been filed in 2024, might be required to pay. Damages should be paid only in the event that other measures, such as the issuance of a public apology or the retraction of the contested statement, had failed to remedy the situation. The Government hoped to bring about further improvements by implementing the relevant recommendations of the Council of Europe and providing training on the matter to judges and public prosecutors.

32. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that new members of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services had been elected in June 2025. The successful candidates, two of whom were women, had been chosen based on their professional experience and skills. Candidates were required to submit an asset declaration alongside their application. One individual had withdrawn her candidacy after the Association of Journalists had raised concerns regarding her ties to a political party. The independence of the media services overseen by the Agency was protected by law.

33. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that a national action plan on children's rights, the goals of which included reducing child poverty and giving effect to the European Child Guarantee, would shortly be adopted to cover the 2025–2029 period. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was implementing a national strategy and action plan aimed at reducing all forms of violence against children and strengthening the child protection system. There were plans to amend the Law on Family to prohibit child marriage in all circumstances, and educational campaigns were being run in communities in which the practice remained prevalent. Steps were being taken to eliminate child labour and draw up protocols for handling cases of trafficking in children or child neglect. Children without parental care and children with disabilities were no longer housed in institutions. Many such children had been placed with foster families, who were entitled to receive financial support from the Government. Foster homes were inspected to check for any signs of child neglect.

34. The Government was seeking to expand the range of early intervention services available to families and had recruited experts to build the capacity of staff in preschools and primary schools to identify children with developmental disorders. Initiatives were being run to ensure that children from marginalized communities and those with disabilities had access to an inclusive education. As part of such efforts, educational materials had been developed for pupils with visual or hearing impairments. Parents of children with disabilities were entitled to receive child benefits, and the children themselves enjoyed free access to public transport. A number of rehabilitation centres for young people with disabilities were being refurbished.

35. With regard to the rights of persons with disabilities more generally, substantive steps had been taken to fulfil the country's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. One such step had been the implementation, in 2023, of a national strategy and action plan on the rights of such persons and their family members. The Government had signed agreements with the authorities in almost 30 municipalities in order to guarantee the delivery of disability services. Some 60 families of persons with disabilities had been assigned a personal assistant to support them.

36. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that, in early 2023, the Basic Criminal Court of Skopje had opened the retrial of the "target fortress" case. While the Court had decided to close the proceedings against six defendants accused of abuse of authority, it had upheld the case against the individuals who had been charged with the destruction of equipment. Information on the penalties handed down to those individuals was contained in paragraph 187 of the periodic report. The former Minister of Internal Affairs had been acquitted owing to a lack of evidence against her.

37. In 2018, the Criminal Code had been amended to incorporate provisions on violence against children, which covered psychological abuse, online violence and bullying. The involvement of children in trafficking constituted an aggravating circumstance and led to the imposition of tougher prison sentences on the perpetrators.

38. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Government collected a range of data on the situation of Roma communities, covering aspects such as employment, housing

and education. All parents, regardless of whether they possessed identity documents, had the right to register any children born in the country. Some 100 cases involving unregistered children, most of whom had been born to foreign mothers and Macedonian fathers, were yet to be resolved. A conference on statelessness had been held in 2023, following which a number of legislative amendments had been adopted in order to support efforts to eradicate statelessness in North Macedonia.

39. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that no migrants or asylum-seekers had been forcibly expelled. The authorities worked closely with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), which had never expressed any concerns relating to that matter. Asylum-seekers had to wait just 15 days to obtain identity documents. Regulations on the storage of biometric data had been amended to incorporate restrictions on the amount of time for which such data could be held.

40. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that prisoners had the right to vote in elections and renew the identity documents they needed to do so. Each prison drew up a list setting out the name, surname and national identification number of the inmates who wished to vote, and that list was then used by the State Election Commission to establish an official voting list. Between 60 and 70 per cent of prisoners had exercised their voting rights.

41. **Ms. Tigroudja** said that she would be grateful for more detailed information on the law enforcement authorities' collection and handling of biometric data. In view of concerns regarding the human rights record of Frontex, she wished to know more about what was being done to ensure compliance with the principle of non-refoulement, in particular at the Greek border.

42. **Mr. Quezada Cabrera** said that information on the amendments to the Law on Witness Protection would be welcome, as would a response to his earlier question on the legal status of religious groups that were not formally recognized in the Constitution.

43. **Mr. Yigezu** said that he would appreciate a response to his earlier questions on the implementation of the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *Memedova and others v. North Macedonia* and the steps taken to guarantee the enjoyment by members of the Roma community of their right to freedom of movement and ensure that any border officials who denied that right were brought to justice. The delegation might also wish to provide statistical data on the compensation awarded to Roma individuals who had filed lawsuits against the Ministry of Internal Affairs on grounds of discrimination.

44. **Mr. Carazo** asked what elections were scheduled in the State Party in 2025 and 2026, whether there would be quotas of women candidates and candidates from ethnic minorities in those elections and, if so, how they would be enforced, what voter turnout had been in the last national elections and what government mechanisms were in place to encourage voter turnout. It would also be interesting to learn whether the State Party was in the process of acceding to any international human rights treaties.

45. **A representative of North Macedonia**, stressing that there were no pushbacks or forced expulsions of migrants, said that North Macedonia was not in a position to determine whether Frontex respected human rights. If there had been an issue, the Greek authorities would have reacted. Legislative amendments establishing maximum periods for the storage of biometric data had been adopted pursuant to the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *Trajkovski and Chipovski v. North Macedonia*.

46. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that witness protection was addressed in the Law on Witness Protection and the Law on Criminal Procedure, both of which were in line with international standards, Council of Europe recommendations and the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights. Under the Law on Witness Protection, the witness protection unit implemented the measures set out by the witness protection council. There were four types of measures, the most drastic of which – change of identity – could involve cooperation with other countries, although information in such cases was always kept strictly confidential.

47. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Government had issued a report on the implementation of the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *Memedova and others v. North Macedonia*, which had not required any legislative

amendments because the applicable legal framework already allowed for freedom of movement and it had been deemed that, broadly speaking, Roma were not denied that right. The over 100 civil lawsuits brought against the Ministry of Internal Affairs claiming discrimination in the exercise of freedom of movement had been concluded. The Law on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Communities and Religious Groups, which had been developed taking into account the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights, made it possible to appeal denials of registration. North Macedonia was a secular country, and the authorities were not aware of any cases of hate speech against Protestants, although mechanisms were in place should such cases arise.

48. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the action plan under the Justice Sector Reform Strategy dealt with, inter alia, the independence of the judiciary and the legal aid system and that a new series of amended laws on the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors Offices was expected. The amendments would not be adopted until the European Commission for Democracy through Law had provided its opinion.

49. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that no cases of discrimination or segregation of Roma at border crossings had been recorded. From 2022 to 2024, all persons whose travel documents were damaged or expired and parents seeking to cross the border with children without the other parent's authorization had been prohibited from leaving the country. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Internal Affairs would take all measures necessary to establish the responsibility of police officers who allegedly violated the rights of any citizen and would institute disciplinary proceedings where appropriate.

50. Asylum-seekers awaiting a decision on their application or subject to a decision limiting their freedom of movement, along with any minor children, were housed in reception centres. Unaccompanied minors, to whom a guardian from the nearest social work centre was automatically assigned to represent their best interests, were also held in reception centres but for the shortest period of time possible. At reception centres, asylum-seekers had access to sanitation facilities, healthcare, interpretation in a number of languages and free legal aid provided by the national bar association or NGOs. The authorities cooperated with the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) when verification of asylum-seekers' identity proved difficult, including in cases where the countries of origin failed to respond to inquiries.

51. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the ratification process for the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance was under way, while ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure was nearing completion.

52. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Law on Enforcement of Sanctions had been amended in 2019 to prohibit the placement of minors in solitary confinement.

53. **Mr. Yigezu**, noting the State Party's views on Frontex, asked whether it examined and responded to reports issued by NGOs working with refugees and asylum-seekers according to which migrants were being pushed back at the border.

54. **Ms. Tigroudja** asked whether the Covenant or the Committee's jurisprudence had been cited by the national courts during the reporting period.

55. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that further training was needed for judges and public prosecutors regarding the country's human rights obligations, as neither the Covenant nor the Committee's jurisprudence had been invoked before the courts. It could be said, however, that the provisions of the Covenant were being implicitly applied through the application of the Constitution.

56. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the authorities examined all reports of pushbacks, irrespective of their provenance, and that any related allegations would be investigated.

57. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Committee's observations and recommendations would serve as valuable guidance in enhancing the country's legal, institutional and policy frameworks and building a more just, equitable and human-rights-

centred society. Furthermore, North Macedonia took extremely seriously its role as an elected member of the Human Rights Council and reaffirmed its determination to engage proactively with the United Nations human rights apparatus and support multilateral efforts aimed at promoting human dignity, equality and justice.

58. **The Chair** said that the State Party had made commendable progress in several areas, including the ratification of international treaties, legal reforms on gender-based violence and abortion, national strategies on Roma inclusion and gender equality and the establishment of new oversight bodies. Concerns remained, however, about issues such as hate speech, prison conditions, inadequate implementation of protective legislation and limited protections for stateless persons and asylum-seekers. The Committee's thorough assessment of the situation of civil and political rights in the State Party would be reflected in its concluding observations.

*The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.*