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Summary record of the 32nd meeting

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

Chair: Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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

Consideration of reports (continued)

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

Fifth periodic report of Iceland (continued) (E/C.12/ISL/5; E/C.12/ISL/Q/5; E/C.12/ISL/RQ/5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Iceland joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Iceland**, resuming her delegation's replies to the questions raised at the previous meeting, said that the Government and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities had approved measures to boost purchasing power, including free school lunches and study materials for all children in compulsory schools, increased benefits for households with children and a ceiling on price rises for public services. Legislative amendments had been introduced to raise the income ceiling for benefit calculation as part of a shift in focus from inability to ability. It had risen to 200,000 Icelandic krónur per month for older persons and 350,000 krónur for persons with an assessed work capability of between 25 and 50 per cent. There were currently some 1,500 unemployed persons aged 50 years and over, of whom 45 per cent were women and 24 per cent were long-term unemployed. Support for their labour-market integration was provided in the form of tailored programmes organized by the Directorate of Labour, and through the Vocational Rehabilitation Fund and a special credit fund owned by the City of Reykjavík for businesses majority-owned by women.
3. **A representative of Iceland** said that there was no specific definition of forced labour in the General Penal Code. As part of efforts to formulate a new action plan to combat human trafficking, the Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with other relevant ministries and stakeholders, would evaluate whether the Code needed to be amended in that respect. In 2023, the authorities had investigated 14 human trafficking cases, twice as many as the year before. There had been one conviction in 2021, but none in 2022 or 2023.
4. The Act on Services for Persons with Disabilities with Long-term Support Needs, adopted in 2018, contained a chapter devoted to the rights of children with disabilities, including within the welfare system. Pursuant to the 2002 Child Protection Act, children with disabilities were entitled to the same rights as other children in Iceland. The Act was in the process of being comprehensively reviewed by the Ministry of Education and Children, which was aiming to submit a bill of amendment to Parliament by the end of 2024. The purpose of the bill would be to ensure respect for the best interests of the child, including the interests of children with disabilities within the child protection system. The Act on the Integration of Services in the Interest of Children's Prosperity, which had entered into force in January 2022, sought to ensure that children and their parents had timely access to the services they needed and did not fall between the cracks. The Act entitled all children to the support of a service coordinator. Children with more complex needs, such as those with disabilities, had the right to a case worker and a support plan.
5. **A representative of Iceland** said that, in recent years, there had been an increased awareness of violence against persons with disabilities. Emphasis had been placed on education to combat such violence, in particular through preventive measures. Educational efforts had been aimed at persons with disabilities themselves and at employees in the education and social sectors, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. Under the national plan to implement the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, a working group had identified laws and regulations in need of amendment to increase protection against violence, especially for women and non-binary persons with disabilities. Once the changes had been introduced, the services and information available to victims, perpetrators and public bodies would be updated accordingly, with a focus on accessibility.
6. **A representative of Iceland** said that, earlier in 2024, Parliament had adopted a housing strategy for 2024–2038 and an accompanying five-year action plan. The strategy was designed to increase the housing supply, promote stability in the housing market, make building regulations more efficient, improve the quality, safety and sustainability of

construction projects and ensure universal access to safe and affordable housing through targeted support. Many of the projects under the action plan were already well under way.

7. Parliament had also passed amendments to the Housing Benefit Act, increasing the number of household members eligible for basic housing support from four to six and raising the free income limit for five- and six-person households. Regarding the long-term wage agreement signed in March 2024, plans were in place to build 1,000 apartments per year during the contract period, to be funded through initial contributions of 7 to 9 billion krónur from the National Treasury and cooperative loans. Municipal authorities would provide buildable plots and capital contributions to meet development needs. Moreover, steps would be taken to extend authorizations for investment by private pension funds in residential property.

8. The basic housing benefit level for single-person households had been increased by 25 per cent, and other basic amounts had been increased accordingly. In response to high inflation, the Central Bank of Iceland had raised its key interest rate. With inflation expectations still far above the Bank's target, the interest rate was predicted to remain high in the near future. In 2024, some 5.5 billion krónur in special interest support had been paid out to households with mortgages. Immigrants were more likely to rent than own property and were often particularly vulnerable on account of their immigration status and language skills. In 2024, Parliament had passed amendments to rental legislation, including to restrict rent increases.

9. **A representative of Iceland** said that the biggest threat that his country faced to the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights was the ongoing volcanic activity on the Reykjanes Peninsula. Since 2021, there had been nine identified volcanic eruptions on the Peninsula, with future eruptions likely. On 10 November 2023, the town of Grindavík had been evacuated after magma had begun to flow through cracks underneath the settlement. The Government had provided residents with alternative housing, granted support to affected businesses and maintained and repaired infrastructure. The relocation of residents had placed an additional burden on the already strained housing market. Furthermore, local schools had been closed, forcing students and their parents to move to other parts of the country. Research into other disasters that had occurred around the world over the previous decade indicated that, in the long run, the social cost of a disaster greatly exceeded its direct economic cost. The biggest concern at present was that further eruptions would cut off access to water and electricity on the Peninsula.

10. Health expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) had been lower than the European average for three main reasons: Iceland had a relatively young population; it had a high GDP per capita; and welfare expenditure had been reduced as a result of natural disasters and the overheating of the economy. Nevertheless, health expenditure would no doubt increase in the near future in response to a boom in tourism and to population ageing and growth.

11. **A representative of Iceland** said that, in the provision of health services, priority was given to patients whose condition was life-threatening. For patients with less critical needs, some degree of waiting was normal on account of limited staffing, resources and operating room availability. Minimum care standards required surgery or treatment to be provided within 90 days of diagnosis. Doctors had a duty to explain delays and provide estimated waiting times and alternative options. It was also possible to monitor waiting times on dashboards and take alternative action if necessary. Patients had the right to seek care in other European Economic Area countries under certain conditions and could potentially have their costs reimbursed by the Icelandic health insurance system. Significant progress had been made in improving access to, and reducing waiting times for, joint replacements. A record 2,138 hip and knee replacement procedures had been performed in 2023, 60 per cent more than in 2022. At the National University Hospital, the average waiting time for such operations had dropped from 9.5 to 4.6 months. New funding models and agreements with private providers had enhanced efficiency, reducing the need for patients to seek surgery abroad. Overall, the number of elective surgical procedures had increased since 2023, and waiting lists were shorter. Although waiting times were not the subject of a specific action plan, they were a focus of the Health Policy up to 2030. To shorten waiting times for mental health services, mental health teams had been strengthened, and specialist teams had been set

up nationwide for groups such as prisoners. The team responsible for prisoners, which had been expanded and made permanent, cooperated with the Prison and Probation Administration and the National University Hospital to match prisoners' needs to the services available.

12. Some mental health teams offered services such as support for self-care and education about self-help. Emphasis was placed on telemedicine to ensure equal access for people in rural areas. The Government was aware that effective coordination between primary and specialist health services was essential to delivering the continuity of service required for mental health recovery. In 2023, to address that and other challenges, Parliament had unanimously approved a mental health action plan, which would make it possible to achieve the objectives of the Health Policy up to 2030. In addition, a mental health council had been founded to advise the Government on mental health issues and policy development. The council's members included individuals with lived experience and representatives of academia, the health-care system and mental health non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

13. In recent years, the focus in primary health care had been on increasing the number of professionals such as social workers, alcohol and substance abuse counsellors, pharmacists and pharmacy technicians in order to enable general practitioners to handle more patients. In 2024, the number of students admitted to the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Iceland had increased from 60 to 75. Efforts to expand training pathways included the launch of postgraduate courses for nurses, including mental health specialists, and an interdisciplinary course on the provision of counselling to persons with dementia. Workshops were being held with stakeholders to facilitate task-sharing and task-shifting in the health sector, and progress was being made in developing a policy and action plan on human resources in health care.

14. A new action plan on suicide prevention, intervention and post-suicide support for suicidally bereaved persons was expected to be unveiled by the end of 2024, replacing the current one. In 2023, permanent funding had been allocated to employing a full-time suicide prevention project manager, and the Life Bridge Centre for Suicide Prevention and accompanying Fund had been established to implement the action plan. In view of the country's small population, it was important not to interpret figures for a single year as indicative of an increase or a decline in the suicide rate. Longer-term statistics appeared to suggest that the rate was falling.

15. Earlier in 2024, a working group on obesity had presented a report containing suggested measures, which would be submitted to Parliament in May 2025 in a resolution with an emphasis on public health actions, access to healthier living, data-gathering, supervision, counselling and treatment. The National University Hospital operated a health school for obese children and their families, teaching methods for weight control and ways of implementing sustainable changes designed to improve quality of life. In 2020, the Directorate of Health, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, had presented clinical guidelines on the treatment of obesity among adults, based on international guidelines and best practices.

16. **A representative of Iceland** said that, in accordance with the Foreign Nationals Act, all applicants for international protection were provided with State-funded essential health services. In 2022, responsibility for the provision of services to asylum-seekers had been transferred from the Directorate of Immigration to the Directorate of Labour, which had hired nurses to attend to individuals in reception centres and refer them to the appropriate services. The measure had proved effective in reducing misunderstandings, missed medical appointments and incorrect referrals. The suspension of general health services for refusing to comply with a deportation order within a 30-day period was not permitted in the case of families with children or persons with disabilities or serious health conditions. Individuals who cooperated with the authorities could continue to receive services until their departure. There were currently around 20 individuals whose right to health services had been suspended. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour had an agreement with the Icelandic Red Cross to run a shelter for such individuals. Lately, around eight people had been staying in the shelter each night. The Ministry had convened a meeting with representatives of the National University Hospital, the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police and the Icelandic Red Cross in an attempt to find agreement on a means of ensuring that

asylum-seekers were safely referred to the health-care services that they needed. The Ministry also held regular meetings with the Icelandic Red Cross to monitor challenges to the provision of health care faced by users of the shelter.

17. **Mr. Windfuhr** (Country Task Force) said that he would like to know how the compensation scheme for home owners in Grindavík whose property had been damaged worked. Was it a State scheme or was it organized through private insurance companies? He was also curious to know what impact the volcanic activity would have on the State party's spatial planning policies and on the provision of services and utilities. He understood that the area had been settled for hundreds of years, which made him wonder what the cultural impact might be of such a disaster and the resulting long-term insecurity.

18. According to the latest country health profile for Iceland issued by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), smoking was a major problem in the State party. It was particularly worrisome that the number of young people addicted to e-cigarettes was higher than the OECD average.

19. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would like to know where the poverty line was set, whether the increased social security benefits were sufficient to cover basic needs and, in particular, whether they allowed for a minimum standard of living for the most vulnerable persons and families. She would also like to ask how the newly increased, transferable parental leave operated in practice. Had the system had any impact on the distribution of tasks such as childcare among men and women? She would like to hear about childcare infrastructure such as crèches, which could give women more opportunities to join the labour market, and about any socioeconomic plans in place to help counter the stereotyping that pushed many women into care roles.

20. On the right to health, recalling that Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had, in its concluding observations on the State party's ninth periodic report ([CEDAW/C/ISL/CO/9](#)), voiced concern about forced sterilization of women with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, she said that she would like to know whether the State party had addressed that issue and whether there had been any more complaints.

21. **The Chair** said that the Committee had received reports from civil society that were critical of the strict manner in which the criteria for exemption from the 30-day limit on the enjoyment of rights for persons whose application for international protection had been denied were applied in assessing individual cases. She would appreciate more information on the procedure for evaluating individual vulnerability in order to determine continued eligibility for those services.

22. **A representative of Iceland** said that individuals who owned residential properties in Grindavík had the option of selling their properties to a State-owned real estate agency by 30 September 2024, provided the property had been their registered domicile as of 10 November 2023, the day of the evacuation. The price set was 95 per cent of the property's fire compensation assessment at the date of sale. More than 90 per cent of owners had taken that option. They also had the option of buying the house back in two years' time.

23. In terms of spatial planning, it had been estimated that up to 10 per cent of residential housing in Iceland could be at risk from the volcanic activity and that there could be long-term consequences. The last time an eruption had hit a town had been five decades earlier and, although it had been possible to rebuild a thriving community, fewer people lived there now than previously. The Prime Minister was due to report to Parliament on the possible 10-year scenario.

24. **A representative of Iceland** said that daily tobacco users accounted for 6 per cent of the population, one of the lowest figures in Europe. Although she could not give figures for daily use in the under-18s age group, a 2023 survey had found that 10 per cent of 15-year-olds used e-cigarettes at least twice a week. While action would be taken to address that problem, the main concern was currently nicotine pouches, which were in daily use by some 30 per cent of young people aged 18 to 29.

25. Under the 2019 Act on Sterilization Procedures, such procedures were permitted only at the request of an individual over the age of 18. For persons not of age, sterilization could be performed only if continued fertility was believed likely to have a serious impact on their

life or health, and the procedure was subject to confirmation from two doctors and the consent of a specially appointed legal guardian. While, under the law, hysterectomy was not deemed a sterilization procedure but a health service, the procedure required the consent of the patient or legal guardian. For a person with a disability who had been deprived of legal capacity, the consent of the legal guardian was required. It was also mandatory to involve the patient in the decision-making process to the extent possible and to respect the individual's right to assistance from a personal advocate. No one was forced to undergo sterilization procedures.

26. Turning to the questions on poverty and social benefits, she said that in Iceland there was always a safety net. If a person was not eligible for benefits from one of the State systems, other social benefits were provided by the municipalities, which were legally obliged to adjust such payments in accordance with the minimum cost of living in that location. Municipalities were also obliged to make up any shortfall where benefits from another system did not match their own minimum benefits. That domicile-dependent system had been in place since 1991. In addition, the legislation on municipal social services also covered people not legally domiciled in Iceland, with financial support being granted to foreigners whose own embassy had refused to provide such assistance; board and lodging could be provided while repatriation was being organized and financial support was available for repatriation, including flight costs and assistance in obtaining travel documents.

27. Following changes to the pension system, child allowances were payable to parents on disability benefit, while the cap on most benefits had been raised, partly to meet needs and partly to enable people to participate, even if only part-time, in the labour market without having their benefit cut.

28. Parental leave had been extended to 12 months. With the aim of ensuring that the child had contact with both parents, each parent, regardless of gender, was entitled to six months' leave. However, each could also transfer part of their leave to the other parent, giving a possible maximum, for one parent, of seven and a half months and a minimum, for the other, of four and a half months with the child. In addition, the maximum benefit received, which was calculated based on income before parental leave, had recently been raised in order to improve the gender balance by encouraging more fathers to take longer paternity leave. Statistics for recent years showed a gradual change in the number of fathers as compared to mothers who had exercised their right to parental leave, and it was believed that the recent changes would further improve the balance.

29. Foreigners denied asylum were assessed by various professionals, principally health-care workers, and any findings on vulnerable status should be in the person's file before any negative decision was taken. The Directorate of Labour, as the agency providing services during the asylum procedure, transmitted information on any situation of vulnerability detected during that period to the National Police Commissioner, the agency responsible for deportation and voluntary return. It was also possible to review the situation of vulnerability after a given service had been cancelled.

30. As previously mentioned, the Ministry of Social Affairs ran a shelter for persons no longer eligible for services. In addition, a working group had been set up to look into housing for asylum seekers from when they first arrived in the country to when they left, and was shortly expected to present proposals on steps to be taken in accordance with the State's international responsibilities.

31. **A representative of Iceland** said that the comprehensive law on gender equality that had entered into force in 2021 contained a new provision on compulsory courses in equality and gender at all levels of schooling, covering gender stereotypes and gender-based choices in education and work. The Directorate of Equality was responsible for implementing the legislation and had taken several steps aimed at eliminating gender stereotypes, including a 10-episode television series challenging such stereotypes. In addition, upper secondary school teachers and the Federation of Icelandic Industries had been conducting a special campaign on women's work, using social media to spotlight gender stereotyping in work choices.

32. **Mr. Shen** (Country Task Force) said that he would welcome the information that the Committee had requested in the list of issues ([E/C.12/ISL/Q/5](#)) on dropout rates among

students with immigrant backgrounds and on mental health problems among those from disadvantaged families.

33. He noted that the State party had taken steps to address the gap between immigrant and Icelandic students in terms of school performance, enrolment rates and dropout rates, including the creation of welcome plans for students whose mother tongue was not Icelandic. However, it seemed that the welcome plans were not implemented equally effectively in all municipalities. He would therefore appreciate any information the delegation could provide on the outcomes of the State party's action plan for 2021 to 2024 to support students whose mother tongue was not Icelandic. Had the State party identified any other, non-linguistic, difficulties encountered by immigrant students? If so, what measures had been taken or were planned?

34. According to information received, children with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children were more likely to suffer from bullying both at school and online. He would like to know the outcome of the State party's measures to prevent bullying.

35. The Committee had received reports that the resources allocated to inclusive education were not sufficient and that students with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, had few opportunities to continue their education after upper secondary school. He would like to know the delegation's views on the matter. What measures had been taken to address the problem?

36. According to an OECD report, the participation rate of immigrant students in vocational education and training remained low, and a lack of flexibility in such services had been identified as a particular problem. He would appreciate the delegation's comments on the remedial measures proposed in the report, including part-time, evening and distance learning, with free child care provided, in order to accommodate the varying situations of migrant workers. In general, what measures had been taken or were planned to make vocational education and training more attractive and accessible to immigrant workers?

37. He noted that the State party had published an action plan addressing the right of everyone to take part in cultural life. Its five objectives were very relevant and he would appreciate details on how they were to be achieved, particularly on measures to help socially and economically disadvantaged and marginalized groups, and people with disabilities, gain equal access to participation in cultural life.

38. He would welcome the delegation's views on the recommendation made by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in its concluding observations on the State party's ninth periodic report ([CEDAW/C/ISL/CO/9](#)), to the effect that it should "promote women's equal representation in academic positions, including by adopting temporary special measures, such as statutory quotas and preferential recruitment and promotion of women in academia and by finalizing and adopting the programme on action to halt the withdrawal of women from academic work." He was also curious about the scale of the withdrawal of women from academic life and wondered whether it involved only isolated cases or was more widespread.

39. **A representative of Iceland** said that the education policy for the period to 2030 provided for the establishment of a new directorate of education and school services and the revision of the national curriculum guide, with a view to promoting the academic achievement and overall well-being of all children in Iceland. In 2021, Iceland had become a party to the Convention against Discrimination in Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and Icelandic legislation also clearly prohibited discrimination in education. The concept of education for all was emphasized in the national curriculum guides for all school levels. According to a survey conducted by Welfare Watch – the special committee set up following the economic crisis in 2008 – about 2 per cent of children in Iceland struggled with school avoidance. Steps taken to address that issue included the creation of a new database, to become operational by the end of 2024, that would contain information about school attendance across all schools, school levels and regions, which was expected to help the Government grasp the scope of the problem and to determine an appropriate response. In addition, changes had been made to the national

curriculum for elementary schools in early 2024, including clear guidelines on which absences were considered acceptable and how they should be justified.

40. Specifically regarding the immigrant dropout rate in upper secondary school, the Government allocated additional funds to institutions with a significant proportion of at-risk students. The allocation was determined based on models developed by the Ministry that were extensively backed by research and that had demonstrated high efficiency in identifying and ranking students at increased risk of dropout. Schools receiving such funds had flexibility in deciding how to use them, but they were most often spent on targeted actions, such as additional tutoring, mental health services or parental engagement programmes, or to create smaller class sizes.

41. Students with disabilities had the right to study in a special four-year programme in upper secondary school. Because demand for such programmes had grown over the years, often exceeding availability, the Ministry of Education and Children had gradually expanded access to them. Only 3 of the 30 upper secondary schools did not currently offer any such special programmes, and the Government aimed to ensure that all such schools would offer them within a few years. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour had formed a group of stakeholders and NGOs to draft recommendations on how to increase access to vocational training for students with disabilities who had completed their upper secondary school education.

42. The Government had set up various initiatives in respect of the rapidly growing population of immigrant children; for example, starting in the autumn of 2024, a team of educational counsellors would begin working within the directorate of education and school services to provide guidance and tools to support learning at all three school levels. There was a strong focus on publishing supportive educational materials, developing appropriate language assessment tools for Icelandic as a second language, offering professional development opportunities for teachers and providing support for interaction between schools and families who spoke the most common languages spoken by immigrants in Iceland, namely Polish, Spanish, Ukrainian and Arabic.

43. **A representative of Iceland** said that Iceland had the fastest-growing immigrant population of all the OECD member countries, and that the proportion of immigrant children in the country now matched the proportion of native Icelandic children. Such drastic demographic changes presented a number of interesting changes, not least of which the need to teach the Icelandic language. Iceland was in the process of adopting the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages in respect of the teaching of Icelandic as a second language. Of course, the onus was not on immigrants alone to learn the Icelandic language; the Icelandic-speaking population also must facilitate the learning process. Various initiatives to promote the use of the Icelandic language in formal and informal settings had thus been introduced, and the national broadcasting service, together with three ministries, had launched a learning platform that provided language training based on its programmes in Icelandic.

44. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Icelandic Government did not currently see a reason to introduce gender quotas, given the high level of gender parity achieved in the country, including the strong level of female representation in elected public office. It did, however, acknowledge a certain imbalance in academia, where women made up the majority of part-time lecturers and therefore had less job security than men in the field, who tended to have tenure or at least fixed-term appointments. It was possible that the problem was a generational one and would disappear with the retirement of currently tenured professors. A parliamentary resolution had been adopted in 2023 to address that issue. Interestingly, the same resolution sought to encourage young men to pursue higher education, as they did so to a much lesser degree than young women.

45. **A representative of Iceland** said that, since the adoption in 2021 of an action plan under the cultural policy, one of whose objectives was to promote equal access to art and culture throughout the country, several schemes had been rolled out for specific art forms, including film, literature and the performing arts. Each scheme emphasized inclusiveness and open access to culture, especially for young persons, older persons and persons with

disabilities. The participation of immigrants in artistic life had grown significantly, especially in the fields of literature and drama.

46. **A representative of Iceland** said that there continued to be disparities in access to learning for students of foreign origin, especially in secondary schools. For the first time, a team had been assembled to determine how best to support such students. The Government had allocated funds to municipalities for the provision of family services for refugee children and asylum-seekers, with a focus on trauma-sensitive approaches and support for the teaching of the Icelandic language and culture. Efforts had recently been made to supply information and support materials for all educators on how to work with refugee children.

47. Although implementation of the first action plan under the education policy had started out slowly, owing to a reorganization of government offices in 2021, the results were quite satisfactory overall. Related actions currently under way included comprehensive legislation on school services and inclusive education, and school development grants. The next action plan, to cover the period 2024–2027, would be submitted for consideration in October. It would include measures on educational materials, artificial intelligence, climate issues and mental health, as well as an increase in the number of teachers at all levels.

48. **Mr. Abdel-Moneim** said he hoped that the State party would devote increasing efforts to incorporating human rights education into all levels of schooling, not only in higher education. He also urged the State party to respect and fulfil academic freedom in the broadest sense within academic institutions.

49. Regarding immigration, he recalled that there was a global obligation under international law to adhere very strictly to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, regardless of the developing status of a country.

50. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he would appreciate additional information on the status of the Icelandic language, especially given the strong influence of English in a globalized world, and on the related opportunities and threats as seen by the Government.

51. **The Chair** said that it would be interesting to learn how the State party planned to manage the cultural diversity that had only recently become a reality for Icelandic society. She wondered, for example, whether the Government might offer classes on the issue of diversity for the general population, so as to facilitate smooth interactions between native Icelanders and newcomers.

52. **A representative of Iceland** said that the national language was an integral part of the nation's culture, and much was being done to protect and promote it, particularly in light of the broad availability of media content in other languages. Neologisms were developed in Icelandic in response to the international language of information technology and communications, and around 400 new books were published in Icelandic each year, notably in the months before Christmas, when the gifting of a book was a long-standing tradition.

53. **A representative of Iceland** said that the right to education was taken extremely seriously, as was reflected in the country's very high literacy rate. Gender parity in higher education was recognized as a challenge; the effects of the 2023 legislation were being closely monitored. Like all freedoms and rights, academic freedom was viewed as essential, and legislation adopted in 2023 guaranteed, *inter alia*, freedom for students in their choice of courses and for academics in their studies and writings.

54. **A representative of Iceland** said that, in the policy framework for preschools, compulsory schools and upper secondary schools, human rights and democracy were considered as one of the six fundamental pillars of education in Iceland, together with literacy, sustainability, health and welfare, equality and creativity. In June 2021, Parliament had adopted a resolution on the implementation of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with a scheduled and funded action plan for their translation in both education and leisure activities for children. In particular, schools designated as "child rights schools" aimed to build a democratic environment by purposefully nurturing the knowledge, skills and attitudes that helped children become critical, active and competent participants in modern society, including through education on human rights.

55. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Government's forthcoming strategy on immigration would include education on human rights and combating discrimination, with the aim of creating an inclusive society, which required openness on the part of all, whether immigrants or native Icelanders. Participation in decision-making was an important part of such inclusion: one project was aimed at encouraging the participation of immigrant parents in parents' associations in primary schools and kindergartens, supporting the associations in finding ways of involving the immigrant parents in their activities and the parents in learning about the associations and the role of education and cultural life in Iceland. A second example was the children's elections, which taught young people about participation and the value of democracy and human rights by encouraging them to take an interest in municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections. They were allowed to vote for the candidates, with the result of the youth vote being announced after the result of the general vote.

56. **A representative of Iceland** said that the Minister of Culture and Business Affairs put particular emphasis on preserving the Icelandic language in the modern world. It had been chosen as the first language other than English to feature in the development phase of the most recent version of the GPT4 model developed by the OpenAI software company. Recognizing the huge competition the language faced from English in all types of media, particularly those watched by children and young people, Parliament had, in May 2024, approved a two-year action plan for Icelandic. In response to the conclusions of the OECD report, which had highlighted the need to promote integration through language acquisition, the plan included a number of measures to try to make Icelandic more accessible for foreign residents. A ministerial committee on the Icelandic language established to follow up progress on the action plan was considering ways of fostering the language among both foreign-born and native speakers.

57. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would welcome details of the State party's policy on illegal drugs, including possible legislative changes on the possession of small quantities, and whether the problem was considered as a public health matter or a criminal issue. She would also like to hear about any system used to reduce drug-related harm and its impact.

58. **A representative of Iceland** said that a working group set up the previous year to develop a harm reduction policy and action plan was considering possible routes, such as a lower threshold for access to care, drug analysis services, education on the safe use of drugs, wider use of opioid antagonists and, possibly, changes to legislation on the possession of small quantities of drugs. It would submit a draft policy to the Minister of Health by the end of 2024.

59. **Mr. Amarti** (Country Rapporteur) said that the delegation's attitude to the dialogue with the Committee had been commendable, as were the efforts made to address issues such as discrimination, wage inequality and gender-based violence and improve the lives of vulnerable categories of the population. He had been pleased to learn about the recent creation of the country's national human rights institution. He nevertheless encouraged the Government to put additional effort into improving the integration of the country's immigrant population. It should also work towards including the Covenant provisions into domestic legislation and ratifying the Optional Protocol.

60. **A representative of Iceland** said that the process of submission of the State party's report and the dialogue with the Committee had provided the delegation with invaluable guidance on its future work. Iceland remained firmly committed to promoting and protecting the human rights of all, and the Government would strive to find adequate solutions and responses as new human rights challenges arose.

61. **The Chair** said that the country's recent adoption of a new Act on the establishment of a national human rights institution offered an opportunity to ensure that economic, social and cultural rights were given protection alongside civil and political rights. The Government's stated intention of pursuing human and ecological well-being rather than simply material growth was praiseworthy.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.