

ESTONIA

CRC CRC/C/124 (2003)

23. The Committee considered the initial report of Estonia (CRC/C/8/Add.45), which was received on 7 June 2001, at its 836th and 837th meetings (see CRC/C/SR.836 and 837), held on 14 January 2003, and at the 862nd meeting (CRC/C/SR.862), held on 31 January 2003, adopted the following concluding observations.

A. Introduction

24. The Committee notes that the initial report (which was regrettably submitted eight years after it was due) follows the guidelines for reporting and appreciates the detailed and informative written replies which were submitted. The Committee acknowledges that the presence of a well-qualified and cross-sectoral delegation contributed to a better understanding of the process of implementation of the Convention in the State party.

B. Positive aspects

25. The Committee welcomes:

(a) The adoption of new legislation, such as the Juvenile Sanctions Act 1999, the Social Benefits for Disabled Persons Act 1999, the new Penal Code 2002, the Amendment to the Basic and Upper Secondary Schools Act 2002, and Regulation No. 209 of 2002 on the procedure for creating conditions for learning the mother tongue and studying the national culture for students in Estonian-language schools whose mother tongue is not Estonian;

(b) The system of family benefits and child allowances supporting parents and children in general and providing extra support for especially vulnerable families such as single-parent families, and families with many children and/or with unemployed parents;

(c) The programme called “Integration in Estonian Society, 2000-2007”;

(d) The introduction of comprehensive health-care insurance;

(e) The school meal programme and school milk campaign;

(f) The ratification of international treaties relevant to the protection of children’s rights (including the ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour; the Hague Conventions on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption and on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction; and the European Convention on Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions concerning Custody of Children and on Restoration of Custody of Children).

C. Factors and difficulties impeding the implementation of the Convention

26. The Committee acknowledges that the State party continues to face socio-economic difficulties with the prolonged period of economic transition having led to a deterioration of living standards, high unemployment rates, poverty and regional disparities, thereby affecting negatively the welfare and living standards of vulnerable families with children.

D. Principal subjects of concern and recommendations

1. General measures of implementation

Legislation

27. While noting the adoption of various legislative measures with respect to child rights, the Committee is concerned at the weak implementation of legislation in some instances. Noting that the 1992 Child Protection Act reflects some principles and provisions of the Convention, it remains concerned that many of the provisions have not been fully implemented through detailed regulations, in accordance with article 68 of the Act, and with adequate budgetary allocation. The Committee is concerned that there is no process of harmonization between the existing legislation and the Convention and between the various legislative acts.

28. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Establish a process of harmonization and bring laws into conformity with the Convention;

(b) Ensure that the necessary regulations are made for the effective implementation of those legislative measures, including adequate budgetary allocation;

(c) Ensure that children's rights impact assessments are performed on proposals of relevant legislation and policies.

Co-ordination

29. The Committee notes that the Social Welfare Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs is responsible for the coordination of child welfare policy and that a permanent commission for the child and family has been established with an advisory capacity. However, the Committee is concerned that the mandate of the Department is not sufficient for effective coordination of the activities relevant to the implementation of the Convention throughout the State party.

30. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Ensure that the mandate of the Social Welfare Department is sufficient to permit it to coordinate the implementation of all areas of the Convention, both among ministries as well as

among national, regional and local authorities. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that financial and human resources be provided to allow for the effective implementation of the coordination role;

(b) Enhance efforts to strengthen the networks relating to the various children's rights initiatives;

(c) Create a multisectoral platform for developing policies and standards for the implementation of the Convention throughout the State party.

Data

31. The Committee welcomes the statistical information provided in the written replies; however, it notes the insufficiency of data in some areas and is concerned at the insufficient evaluation of data to devise policies and programmes.

32. The Committee encourages the State party:

(a) To consider the publication of annual statistical surveys on the rights of children, as the Statistical Office currently does in other fields;

(b) To continue its efforts to collect disaggregated data on all persons under 18 years of age for all areas covered by the Convention, including the most vulnerable groups (e.g. victims of abuse and ill-treatment), and to use these data to assess progress and design policies to implement the Convention.

Monitoring structures

33. The Committee welcomes the existence of various mechanisms for filing complaints, such as the Legal Chancellor, also mandated to serve as Ombudsman. Nevertheless, it is concerned that this is not a specialized body with an explicit mandate to address effectively violations of children's rights and to monitor and regularly evaluate progress in the implementation of the Convention.

34. The Committee recommends that the State party consider the establishment of a unit, or a specialized body, within or outside the Legal Chancellor's Office, in accordance with the Principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights ("The Paris Principles") (General Assembly resolution 48/134, annex) and the Committee's general comment No. 2, to monitor and evaluate progress in the implementation of the Convention at the national and local levels. This body should be adequately resourced, accessible to children, and empowered to receive, investigate and address effectively complaints of violations of children's rights in a child-sensitive manner.

National plan of action

35. The Committee notes that the State party is in the process of elaborating various strategies for implementing parts of the Convention; however, it is concerned at the absence of a rights-based comprehensive plan of action for all children.

36. The Committee encourages the State party to develop a comprehensive rights-based plan of action for the full implementation of the Convention that includes, inter alia, strategies that are under consideration by the State party and the goals and objectives of the outcome document “A World Fit for Children”, and to provide the mechanisms and regulations for the effective implementation of this plan of action.

Resource allocation

37. The Committee is concerned that the increase in public expenditure on children is not commensurate with the State party’s overall budget increase and is not “to the maximum extent of ... available resources”, as stipulated in article 4 of the Convention. Furthermore, the Committee is concerned that legislation, strategies and policies are not linked to detailed resource allocation.

38. In the light of article 4 of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Ensure implementation of the economic, social and cultural rights of all children, to the maximum extent of available resources;

(b) Continue to prioritize and target budgetary allocations for children belonging to the most vulnerable groups;

(c) Systematically assess the impact of budgetary allocations on the implementation of child rights;

(d) Ensure resources for sufficient numbers of qualified professionals working with and for children;

(e) Provide adequate support to local authorities for the implementation of the Convention.

Cooperation with civil society

39. Recognizing the important role played by civil society, the Committee is concerned that insufficient efforts have been undertaken by the State party to facilitate the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the implementation of the Convention in a more structured and sustainable manner.

40. The Committee encourages the State party to strengthen cooperation and make greater efforts towards structured and sustained involvement of civil society groups, NGOs and community-based organizations in the implementation of the Convention.

Training/dissemination of the Convention

41. The Committee notes that some efforts have been made by the State party to raise awareness of the Convention, including through pre-school education and university courses. Yet, the Committee remains concerned that the level of awareness among children, professionals and the general public remains low.

42. The Committee encourages the State party to continue:

(a) To strengthen, expand and ensure continuity of its programme for the dissemination and implementation of the Convention, including in Russian and other minority languages, among children and parents, civil society, and all sectors and levels of Government;

(b) To develop systematic and ongoing in-service and pre-service training programmes on human rights, especially children's rights, for all professional groups working for and with children (e.g. judges, lawyers, law enforcement officials, civil servants, local government officials, personnel working in institutions and places of detention for children, teachers and health personnel).

2. General principles

43. The Committee is concerned that the right to non-discrimination (article 2 of the Convention), the principle that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (art. 3), the right to life, survival and development of the child (art. 6) and the right of the child to express his or her views freely and to have those views taken into account according to age and maturity (art. 12) are not fully reflected in the State party's legislation, policies and programmes at the national and local levels.

44. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Appropriately integrate the general principles of the Convention, namely articles 2, 3, 6 and 12, into all relevant legislation concerning children;

(b) Apply those principles in all political, judicial and administrative decisions, as well as in projects, programmes and services which have an impact on all children;

(c) Apply those principles in planning and policy-making at every level, as well as in actions taken by social and health welfare and educational institutions, courts of law and administrative authorities.

The right to non-discrimination

45. The Committee is concerned that the current discriminatory attitudes towards linguistic minority communities (e.g. the Russian-speaking community), non-citizens, especially those without legal status, and other disadvantaged groups may restrict, directly or indirectly, the rights guaranteed under the Convention to children belonging to those groups. In particular, the Committee is concerned:

(a) That there are no legislative provisions defining crimes with a racist element as racially motivated crimes, or for racist motivation to be taken into account by the courts as a factor when pronouncing sentence. In this regard, the Committee is concerned at the effectiveness of measures to guarantee the security of children who may be victims of racist acts;

(b) That there is no legislation at present prohibiting discrimination in housing, and access to education and public services;

(c) That a high proportion of children from Russian-speaking communities are stateless;

(d) That large minority groups (e.g. the Russian-speaking community, which accounts for approximately 30 per cent of the population) are disproportionately overrepresented among low-income and unemployed households, and underrepresented in the public service.

46. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Take effective measures, including enacting or rescinding legislation where necessary, to ensure that all children enjoy all the rights set out in the Convention without discrimination, in accordance with article 2;

(b) Study the effectiveness of the measures taken to counter all forms of discrimination;

(c) Consider the adoption of provisions to criminalize and punish racially motivated acts;

(d) Carry out comprehensive public education campaigns to prevent and combat negative societal attitudes in this regard.

47. The Committee requests that specific information be included, in the next periodic report, on the measures and programmes relevant to the Convention undertaken by the State party to follow up on the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in 2001, taking account of the Committee's general comment No. 1 on article 29, paragraph 1, of the Convention (aims of education).

Respect for the views of the child

48. The Committee, while noting the information received on the active involvement of students in the education system in Estonia, regrets that little information was provided in the report on the actual respect for and enjoyment of this right in the family, administrative bodies and courts.

49. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Promote and facilitate within the family, institutions, the courts and administrative bodies respect for the views of children and their participation in all matters affecting them, in

accordance with article 12 of the Convention;

(b) Develop skills-training programmes in community settings for parents, teachers, professionals working with and for children and local officials on how to encourage children to express their informed views and opinions by providing them with proper information and guidance, and to take those views and opinions into consideration;

(c) Encourage and support the establishment of youth centres throughout the State party.

3. Civil and political freedoms

Nationality

50. The Committee welcomes the amendments made in 1998 to the Law on Citizenship simplifying procedures for the naturalization of children of stateless persons and notes that the number of stateless persons in Estonia is decreasing. Nevertheless, the Committee is concerned that the situation of stateless parents, who by virtue of their status are unable to participate fully in Estonian society, negatively impacts on their children's integration into Estonian society. Moreover, it is concerned that, under article 21 of the Law on Citizenship, children of former military and security service personnel and their spouses and families may be denied citizenship.

51. The Committee recommends, in accordance with articles 2 and 7 of the Convention, that the State party:

(a) Reduce the number of stateless children by, inter alia, expediting and improving the procedure of naturalization;

(b) Improve the situation of non-citizens without legal residence permits by, among other things, simplifying and shortening the procedures for applying for residence permits;

(c) Carry out campaigns to encourage applications with a view to reducing, as far as possible, the number of children who are stateless or illegal residents;

(d) Take measures to eliminate discrimination against children on account of their parents' past opinions or activities;

(e) Ensure that all children residing on the territory of Estonia enjoy all the rights under the Convention, whether or not they are citizens;

(f) Accede to the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons of 1954 as well as to the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness of 1961, with a view to ensuring protection to all stateless persons in Estonia.

Violence/abuse/neglect/maltreatment

52. The Committee notes the information on the Tartu and Tallin support centres, as well as the

recent studies on child sex abuse and bullying in schools. The Committee also notes that all violence against children is prohibited. However, it remains concerned that there is still insufficient information on and awareness of the ill-treatment and abuse of children within the family, in schools and in institutions, as well as of domestic violence and its impact on children. Moreover, it is concerned that current efforts in this regard may have limited impact because of the lack of a comprehensive strategy and the inadequate allocation of resources.

53. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Conduct a study to assess the causes, nature and extent of ill-treatment and abuse of children, including sexual abuse, and design policies and programmes to address them, bearing in mind the importance of prevention programmes;

(b) Explicitly prohibit corporal punishment and take all measures to prevent all forms of physical and mental violence, including corporal punishment and sexual abuse of children in the family, in schools and in institutions;

(c) Continue to carry out public education campaigns on the negative consequences of ill-treatment of children and promote positive, non-violent forms of discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment;

(d) Establish effective mechanisms and procedures for receiving, monitoring and investigating complaints, including intervention where necessary;

(e) Investigate and prosecute instances of ill-treatment, ensuring that the abused child is not further victimized in legal proceedings and that his or her privacy is protected;

(f) Give attention to addressing and overcoming sociocultural barriers that inhibit victims from seeking assistance;

(g) Provide counselling, care, recovery and reintegration services to victims and perpetrators alike;

(h) Train teachers, law enforcement officials, care and social workers, judges and health professionals in the identification, reporting and management of cases of ill-treatment;

(i) Devise a comprehensive strategy for reducing and preventing violence in schools, whether among students or by teachers, including through peer groups;

(j) Take into account the Committee's recommendations adopted at its day of general discussion on "Violence against children within the family and in schools" (CRC/C/111, chap. V.).

4. Family environment and alternative care

Family environment

54. The Committee welcomes the priorities as described in the State party's report to support the family structure, but remains concerned that there is a high number of children in institutions and that:

(a) According to the report submitted by the State party, 27.6 per cent (1999) of children in shelters are placed there because of their difficult economic conditions;

(b) Conditions in institutions are poor and the system of periodic review of placement does not adequately take into account the views and best interests of the child by providing appropriate counselling and support or finding forms of alternative care;

(c) There is insufficient collection of adequate data.

55. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Undertake a comprehensive study on the phenomenon of institutionalization of children;

(b) Promote the family as the best environment for the child, through counselling and community-based programmes as well as financial support to assist parents in raising children at home;

(c) Continue to increase and strengthen foster care, family-type foster homes and other family-based alternative care;

(d) Place children in institutions only as a measure of last resort;

(e) Take all necessary measures to improve standards and conditions in institutions;

(f) Ensure that children in institutions enjoy all the rights set forth in the Convention, including the right to maintain personal relationships and direct contact with their parents and families on a regular basis;

(g) Provide support and training for personnel in institutions, including social workers;

(h) Establish effective mechanisms for complaints from children in care and for monitoring standards of care and establish efficient regular periodic review of placement, taking into account the best interests of the child;

(i) Provide adequate follow-up and reintegration services for children who leave institutional care.

Family reunification

56. The Committee welcomes the judgement pronounced in May 2000 by the National Court of the Estonian Republic, which deemed unconstitutional the refusal of a residence permit application for the purposes of family reunification on the grounds that it exceeded the immigration quota. The Committee is concerned that article 5, paragraph 3, of the 1997 Refugee Act does not guarantee family reunification because it requires a dependent refugee spouse and dependent children outside Estonia to meet the criteria of the 1951 Refugee Convention even after the principal applicant has met the criteria. Further, the Committee is concerned that there are no legal provisions which make it possible for family members to reunite with a child who has been recognized as a refugee.

57. In accordance with article 10 of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party ensure:

(a) That the provisions of the Aliens Act reflect the decision of the National Court and are implemented;

(b) That the Refugee Act is amended to ensure that the right to family reunification shall be dealt with by the State party in a positive, humane and expeditious manner.

Foster care and adoption

58. The Committee is concerned that there is no effective system for the screening of foster or adoptive parents, including national standards and efficient mechanism to prevent the sale and trafficking of children, to review, monitor and follow up the placement of children, and to collect statistics on foster care and adoption, including intercountry adoption.

59. In the light of articles 20 and 21 of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Establish a comprehensive national policy and guidelines governing foster care and adoption;

(b) Establish a central monitoring mechanism in this regard.

5. Basic health and welfare

Children with disabilities

60. The Committee appreciates the many efforts made in this field, as well as the fact that the State party acknowledges that challenges remain with regard to guaranteeing children with disabilities the rights contained in the Convention, integrating them in mainstream education and providing support for families. It notes with concern that the implementation of the Education Act does not sufficiently envisage the inclusion of disabled children; that negative societal attitudes towards inclusion persist; and that support payments are only payable for disabled children up to 16 years of age.

61. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Review existing policies and practice in relation to children with disabilities, taking due account of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (General Assembly resolution 48/96, annex) and of the Committee's recommendations adopted at its day of general discussion on children with disabilities (CRC/C/69, para. 338);

(b) Provide early childhood care and special education for children with disabilities;

(c) Make greater efforts to implement alternatives to the institutionalization of children with disabilities, including community-based rehabilitation programmes;

(d) Undertake awareness-raising campaigns which focus on prevention, inclusive education, family care and the promotion of the rights of children with disabilities;

(e) Give attention to combating negative societal attitudes towards children with disabilities;

(f) Provide adequate support, supervision and training to persons working with these children, including the teaching staff in mainstream schools;

(g) Take measures to remove physical barriers to enable effective access of children with disabilities to schools and other institutions and services in a manner conducive to the child's achieving the fullest possible social integration and individual development.

Adolescent health

62. The Committee notes the existence of the State-sponsored ongoing prevention programme on alcoholism and substance abuse, 1997-2002, and welcomes information in the written replies concerning the development of new programmes to address the problems affecting the reproductive health of youths, including sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. However, the Committee is concerned at the prevailing mental health problems, the high suicide rate, the large number of abortions and incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, the increasing number of HIV infections among injecting drug users and the high number of accidents, and reiterates the concerns expressed by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (E/C.12/1/Add.85, paras. 27-30) where these relate to children.

63. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Strengthen and ensure that its programmes for adolescent health are effectively implemented, including through the provision of adequate resources;

(b) Ensure that future measures are formulated with the full participation of adolescents;

(c) Ensure that adolescents have access to child-sensitive and confidential counselling services, including mental health counselling;

(d) Strengthen efforts in the area of adolescent health education within schools.

6. Education

Education

64. The Committee welcomes the inclusion of the Convention in the school curriculum and appreciates the acknowledgment by the State party that there are challenges facing the right to education. In this regard, it shares the concern that more than 5,000 children do not attend school, and that repetition and drop-out rates are high. Possible reasons for dropping out include: lack of protection from bullying, overcrowded classrooms, a poor school environment as a result of diminished extracurricular activities, overburdened teachers and closure of schools in rural areas for economic reasons.

65. The Committee encourages the State party:

(a) To undertake a study of the causes of the high repetition, drop-out and non-attendance rates and undertake effective actions to address these problems on the basis of the findings of the study;

(b) To consider adapting the school curricula to the varied needs of children and promote activities that may attract children to schools, thereby reducing the number of dropouts;

(c) To evaluate the effectiveness of those activities and devise strategies accordingly;

(d) To further enhance the system of education for national minorities;

(e) To take adequate measures to promote a non-violent environment in schools;

(f) To take all the appropriate measures to implement regulation No. 209 for mother-tongue instruction for students whose mother tongue is not Estonian, providing also for the teaching of their culture and history;

(g) To consider implementing the recommendations made by the Legal Chancellor with regard to schools in rural areas;

(h) To improve the quality of education in the whole country in order to achieve the goals set out in article 29, paragraph 1, of the Convention and in the Committee's general comment No. 1 on the aims of education, and to ensure that human rights education, including children's rights, are included in the school curricula.

7. Special measures of protection

Street children

66. The Committee is concerned at the increasing number of street children and at the lack of a systematic comprehensive strategy to address this situation and to provide these children with adequate assistance.

67. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Undertake a study on the causes and scope of the phenomenon of street children and develop a comprehensive strategy with the aim of preventing and reducing this phenomenon and protecting children;

(b) Ensure that street children are provided with adequate nutrition, clothing, housing, health care and educational opportunities, including vocational and life-skills training, in order to support their full development;

(c) Ensure that these children are provided with recovery and reintegration services, including psychosocial assistance for physical, sexual and substance abuse, and services for reconciliation with their families.

Drug abuse

68. The Committee notes the information related to the ongoing “Alcoholism and substance abuse prevention programme, 1997-2007”; however, it remains concerned that children are not effectively protected from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and at the increasing use of drugs and the rise in the number of injecting drug users.

69. The Committee encourages the State party to continue its efforts to provide children with accurate and objective information about substance use and to take all appropriate measures, including drug education in schools. The Committee urges the State party to evaluate the ongoing prevention programme with a view to reconsidering modalities of implementation to maximize its effectiveness. Furthermore, the State party is urged to enhance rehabilitation services for children who are victims of substance abuse.

Sexual exploitation and trafficking

70. The Committee is concerned at the insufficient information and awareness of the extent of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking of children. It is also concerned that there is no specific prohibition in law of trafficking in human beings, including for the purpose of prostitution.

71. In the light of article 34 and other related articles of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the State party undertake studies with a view to assessing the causes, nature and extent of sexual exploitation and trafficking of children, including prostitution and child pornography (including on the Internet), and implement appropriate policies and programmes for prevention and protection and for the recovery and social reintegration of child victims, in

accordance with the 1996 Declaration and Agenda for Action and the Global Commitment adopted at the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in 2001.

Administration of juvenile justice

72. The Committee notes the existence of the Crime Prevention Council and a new training council to train judges and prosecutors, and appreciates that the minimum age of criminal responsibility has recently been raised to 14 years. However, the Committee is concerned:

(a) That there are no special courts, specially trained judges or prosecutors established for criminal proceedings against juveniles;

(b) That there have been several cases recently where the child's right to privacy in criminal proceedings has not been respected by the media;

(c) That the period for investigation and pre-trial detention can be prolonged for up to six months;

(d) That only Tartu and Tallinn have separate rooms and facilities for the questioning of children;

(e) That in practice the handling of cases by juvenile committees is very limited and that most cases are processed by the general court system;

(f) That the situation at Maardu Prison is difficult and there is not sufficient opportunity for learning or working or participating in social, educational or arts courses. In addition, there are no programmes to protect the youngest and weakest prison inmates from violent behaviour.

73. The Committee recommends that the State party:

(a) Ensure a system of juvenile justice that fully integrates into its legislation (including the Juvenile Sanctions Act, the Means of Influencing Minors Act, and the new Penal Code) and practise the provisions of the Convention, in particular articles 37, 39 and 40, as well as other relevant international standards in this area, such as the Beijing Rules, the Riyadh Guidelines, the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of Their Liberty, the Guidelines for Action on Children in the Criminal Justice System, and the Committee's recommendations at its day of general discussion on the administration of juvenile justice, held in 1995;

(b) Ensure that children have access to legal aid and independent and effective complaints mechanisms;

(c) Train professionals in the area of social recovery and reintegration of children;

(d) Ensure that deprivation of liberty is only used as a measure of last resort, for the shortest possible time, is authorized by the court, and that persons under 18 are not detained with

adults;

- (e) Continue and strengthen efforts to improve conditions at Maardu Prison.

Children belonging to minority groups

74. While welcoming the Programme on Integration in Estonian Society, 2000-2007, the Committee notes the tension arising around the question of the language of instruction of children belonging to minority groups in Estonia.

75. The Committee recommends that the State party:

- (a) Take all measures to implement effectively regulation No. 209 for mother-tongue instruction for students whose mother tongue is not Estonian;

- (b) Implement the Programme on Integration in Estonian Society in such a way that all the children of Estonia will be taught about the culture, history and identity of the various groups living in Estonia and that exchanges are organized between pupils of different schools in order to foster contacts, friendships and mutual respect among children from all groups of society;

- (c) Guarantee the quality of instruction of the Estonian language to children belonging to minority groups so as to ensure that minority-language-speaking children can participate on a more equal level with Estonian-speaking children, in particular at higher education levels.

8. Optional Protocols

76. The Committee encourages the State party to ratify the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

9. Dissemination of reports

77. In the light of article 44, paragraph 6, of the Convention, the Committee recommends that the report and written replies submitted by the State party be made widely available to the public at large and that efforts be made to translate the report into the languages of the minorities, along with the relevant summary records and concluding observations adopted by the Committee. Such a document should be widely distributed in order to generate debate and awareness of the Convention and its implementation and monitoring within all levels of administration of the State party and the general public, including concerned NGOs.

10. Next report

78. In the light of the recommendation on reporting periodicity adopted by the Committee at its twenty-ninth session (see CRC/C/114), the Committee, aware of the considerable delay in the State party's reporting, underlines the importance of a reporting practice that is in full compliance with

the provisions of article 44 of the Convention. An important aspect of States' responsibilities to children under the Convention includes ensuring that the Committee has regular opportunities to examine the progress made in the implementation of the Convention. In this regard, regular and timely reporting by States parties is crucial. The Committee recognizes that some States parties experience difficulties in reporting in a timely and regular manner. As an exceptional measure, in order to help the State party catch up with its reporting obligations under the Convention, the Committee invites the State party to submit its second, third and fourth periodic reports in one consolidated report by 1 November 2008. The Committee expects the State party to report thereafter every five years, as foreseen by the Convention.