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Volume II

**COMPILATION OF GENERAL COMMENTS AND
GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY
HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES**

Note by the Secretariat

This document contains a compilation of the general comments or general recommendations adopted, respectively, by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee against Torture and the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee on Migrant Workers has not yet adopted any general comments.

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III. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

According to article 9, paragraph 2, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Committee may make suggestions and general recommendations based on the examination of the reports and information received from the States parties. Such suggestions and general recommendations shall be reported to the General Assembly together with comments, if any, from States parties. The Committee has so far adopted a total of 18 general recommendations.

Fifth session (1972)*

General recommendation I concerning States parties' obligations (art. 4 of the Convention)

On the basis of the consideration at its fifth session of reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Committee found that the legislation of a number of States parties did not include the provisions envisaged in article 4 (a) and (b) of the Convention, the implementation of which (with due regard to the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the rights expressly set forth in article 5 of the Convention) is obligatory under the Convention for all States parties.

The Committee accordingly recommends that the States parties whose legislation was deficient in this respect should consider, in accordance with their national legislative procedures, the question of supplementing their legislation with provisions conforming to the requirements of article 4 (a) and (b) of the Convention.

Fifth session (1972)*

General recommendation II concerning States parties' obligations

The Committee has considered some reports from States parties which expressed or implied the belief that the information mentioned in the Committee's communication of 28 January 1970 (CERD/C/R.12), need not be supplied by States parties on whose territories racial discrimination does not exist.

However, inasmuch as, in accordance with article 9, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, all States parties undertake to submit reports on the measures that they have adopted and that give effect to the provisions of the Convention and, since all the categories of information listed in the Committee's communication of 28 January 1970 refer to obligations undertaken by the States

* Contained in document A/87/18.

parties under the Convention, that communication is addressed to all States parties without distinction, whether or not racial discrimination exists in their respective territories. The Committee welcomes the inclusion in the reports from all States parties, which have not done so, of the necessary information in conformity with all the headings set out in the aforementioned communication of the Committee.

Sixth session (1972)*

General recommendation III concerning reporting by States parties

The Committee has considered some reports from States parties containing information about measures taken to implement resolutions of United Nations organs concerning relations with the racist regimes in southern Africa.

The Committee notes that, in the tenth paragraph of the preamble to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, States parties have “resolved”, inter alia, “to build an international community free from all forms of racial segregation and racial discrimination”.

It notes also that, in article 3 of the Convention, “States parties particularly condemn racial segregation and apartheid”.

Furthermore, the Committee notes that, in resolution 2784 (XXVI), section III, the General Assembly, immediately after taking note with appreciation of the Committee’s second annual report and endorsing certain opinions and recommendations, submitted by it, proceeded to call upon “all the trading partners of South Africa to abstain from any action that constitutes an encouragement to the continued violation of the principles and objectives of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by South Africa and the illegal regime in Southern Rhodesia”.

The Committee expresses the view that measures adopted on the national level to give effect to the provisions of the Convention are interrelated with measures taken on the international level to encourage respect everywhere for the principles of the Convention.

The Committee welcomes the inclusion in the reports submitted under article 9, paragraph 1, of the Convention, by any State party which chooses to do so, of information regarding the status of its diplomatic, economic and other relations with the racist regimes in southern Africa.

* Contained in document A/87/18.

Eighth session (1973)*

**General recommendation IV concerning reporting by States parties
(art. 1 of the Convention)**

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Having considered reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination at its seventh and eighth sessions,

Bearing in mind the need for the reports sent by States parties to the Committee to be as informative as possible,

Invites States parties to endeavour to include in their reports under article 9 relevant information on the demographic composition of the population referred to in the provisions of article 1 of the Convention.

Fifteenth session (1977)**

**General recommendation V concerning reporting by States parties
(art. 7 of the Convention)**

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Bearing in mind the provisions of articles 7 and 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Convinced that combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination, promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among racial and ethnic groups, and propagating the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and of the human rights declarations and other relevant instruments adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, are important and effective means of eliminating racial discrimination,

Considering that the obligations under article 7 of the Convention, which are binding on all States parties, must be fulfilled by them, including States which declare that racial discrimination is not practised on the territories under their jurisdiction, and that therefore all States parties are required to include information on their implementation of the provisions of that article in the reports they submit in accordance with article 9, paragraph 1, of the Convention,

* Contained in document A/90/18.

** Contained in document A/32/18.

Noting with regret that few States parties have included, in the reports they have submitted in accordance with article 9 of the Convention, information on the measures which they have adopted and which give effect to the provisions of article 7 of the Convention, and that that information has often been general and perfunctory,

Recalling that, in accordance with article 9, paragraph 1, of the Convention, the Committee may request further information from the States parties,

1. *Requests* every State party which has not already done so to include - in the next report it will submit in accordance with article 9 of the Convention, or in a special report before its next periodic report becomes due - adequate information on the measures which it has adopted and which give effect to the provisions of article 7 of the Convention;

2. *Invites* the attention of States parties to the fact that, in accordance with article 7 of the Convention, the information to which the preceding paragraph refers should include information on the “immediate and effective measures” which they have adopted, “in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information”, with a view to:

(a) “Combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination”;

(b) “Promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or ethnical groups”;

(c) “Propagating the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination” as well as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

Twenty-fifth session (1982)*

General recommendation VI concerning overdue reports

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Recognizing the fact that an impressive number of States has ratified, or acceded to, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Bearing in mind, however, that ratification alone does not enable the control system set up by the Convention to function effectively,

Recalling that article 9 of the Convention obliges States parties to submit initial and periodic reports on the measures that give effect to the provisions of the Convention,

* Contained in document A/37/18.

Stating that at present no less than 89 reports are overdue from 62 States, that 42 of those reports are overdue from 15 States, each with two or more outstanding reports, and that four initial reports which were due between 1973 and 1978 have not been received,

Noting with regret that neither reminders sent through the Secretary-General to States parties nor the inclusion of the relevant information in the annual reports to the General Assembly has had the desired effect, in all cases,

Invites the General Assembly:

- (a) To take note of the situation;
- (b) To use its authority in order to ensure that the Committee could more effectively fulfil its obligations under the Convention.

Thirty-second session (1985)*

General recommendation VII relating to the implementation of article 4

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Having considered periodic reports of States parties for a period of 16 years, and in over 100 cases sixth, seventh and eighth periodic reports of States parties,

Recalling and reaffirming its general recommendation I of 24 February 1972 and its decision 3 (VII) of 4 May 1973,

Noting with satisfaction that in a number of reports States parties have provided information on specific cases dealing with the implementation of article 4 of the Convention with regard to acts of racial discrimination,

Noting, however, that in a number of States parties the necessary legislation to implement article 4 of the Convention has not been enacted, and that many States parties have not yet fulfilled all the requirements of article 4 (a) and (b) of the Convention,

Further recalling that, in accordance with the first paragraph of article 4, States parties “undertake to adopt immediate and positive measures designed to eradicate all incitement to, or acts of, such discrimination”, with due regard to the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the rights expressly set forth in article 5 of the Convention,

Bearing in mind the preventive aspects of article 4 to deter racism and racial discrimination as well as activities aimed at their promotion or incitement,

* Contained in document A/40/18.

1. *Recommends* that those States parties whose legislation does not satisfy the provisions of article 4 (a) and (b) of the Convention take the necessary steps with a view to satisfying the mandatory requirements of that article;
2. *Requests* that those States parties which have not yet done so inform the Committee more fully in their periodic reports of the manner and extent to which the provisions of article 4 (a) and (b) are effectively implemented and quote the relevant parts of the texts in their reports;
3. *Further requests* those States parties which have not yet done so to endeavour to provide in their periodic reports more information concerning decisions taken by the competent national tribunals and other State institutions regarding acts of racial discrimination and in particular those offences dealt with in article 4 (a) and (b).

Thirty-eighth session (1990)*

General recommendation VIII concerning the interpretation and application of article 1, paragraphs 1 and 4 of the Convention

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Having considered reports from States parties concerning information about the ways in which individuals are identified as being members of a particular racial or ethnic group or groups,

Is of the opinion that such identification shall, if no justification exists to the contrary, be based upon self-identification by the individual concerned.

Thirty-eighth session (1990)*

General recommendation IX concerning the application of article 8, paragraph 1, of the Convention

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Considering that respect for the independence of the experts is essential to secure full observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Recalling article 8, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Alarmed by the tendency of the representatives of States, organizations and groups to put pressure upon experts, especially those serving as country rapporteurs,

Strongly recommends that they respect unreservedly the status of its members as independent experts of acknowledged impartiality serving in their personal capacity.

* Contained in document A/45/18.

Thirty-ninth session (1991)*

General recommendation X concerning technical assistance

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Taking note of the recommendation of the third meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies, as endorsed by the General Assembly at its forty-fifth session, to the effect that a series of seminars or workshops should be organized at the national level for the purpose of training those involved in the preparation of State party reports,

Concerned over the continued failure of certain States parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination to meet their reporting obligations under the Convention,

Believing that training courses and workshops organized on the national level might prove of immeasurable assistance to officials responsible for the preparation of such State party reports,

1. *Requests* the Secretary-General to organize, in consultation with the States parties concerned, appropriate national training courses and workshops for their reporting officials as soon as practicable;
2. *Recommends* that the services of the staff of the Centre for Human Rights as well as of the experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination should be utilized, as appropriate, in the conduct of such training courses and workshops.

Forty-second session (1993)**

General recommendation XI on non-citizens

1. Article 1, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination defines racial discrimination. Article 1, paragraph 2, excepts from this definition actions by a State party which differentiate between citizens and non-citizens. Article 1, paragraph 3, qualifies article 1, paragraph 2, by declaring that, among non-citizens, States parties may not discriminate against any particular nationality.

2. The Committee has noted that article 1, paragraph 2, has on occasion been interpreted as absolving States parties from any obligation to report on matters relating to legislation on foreigners. The Committee therefore affirms that States parties are under an obligation to report fully upon legislation on foreigners and its implementation.

* Contained in document A/46/18.

** Contained in document A/48/18.

3. The Committee further affirms that article 1, paragraph 2, must not be interpreted to detract in any way from the rights and freedoms recognized and enunciated in other instruments, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Forty-second session (1993)*

General recommendation XII on successor States

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Emphasizing the importance of universal participation of States in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Taking into account the emergence of successor States as a result of the dissolution of States,

1. *Encourages* successor States that have not yet done so to confirm to the Secretary-General, as depositary of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, that they continue to be bound by obligations under that Convention, if predecessor States were parties to it;

2. *Invites* successor States that have not yet done so to accede to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination if predecessor States were not parties to it;

3. *Invites* successor States to consider the importance of making the declaration under article 14, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, recognizing the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to receive and consider individual communications.

Forty-second session (1993)*

General recommendation XIII on the training of law enforcement officials in the protection of human rights

1. In accordance with article 2, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, States parties have undertaken that all public authorities and public institutions, national and local, will not engage in any practice of racial discrimination; further, States parties have undertaken to guarantee the rights listed in article 5 of the Convention to everyone without distinction as to race, colour or national or ethnic origin.

2. The fulfilment of these obligations very much depends upon national law enforcement officials who exercise police powers, especially the powers of detention or arrest, and upon whether they are properly informed about the obligations their State has entered into under the Convention. Law enforcement officials should receive intensive training to ensure that in the

* Contained in document A/48/18.

performance of their duties they respect as well as protect human dignity and maintain and uphold the human rights of all persons without distinction as to race, colour or national or ethnic origin.

3. In the implementation of article 7 of the Convention, the Committee calls upon States parties to review and improve the training of law enforcement officials so that the standards of the Convention as well as the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials (1979) are fully implemented. They should also include respective information thereupon in their periodic reports.

Forty-second session (1993)*

General recommendation XIV on article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention

1. Non-discrimination, together with equality before the law and equal protection of the law without any discrimination, constitutes a basic principle in the protection of human rights. The Committee wishes to draw the attention of States parties to certain features of the definition of racial discrimination in article 1, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. It is of the opinion that the words “based on” do not bear any meaning different from “on the grounds of” in preambular paragraph 7. A distinction is contrary to the Convention if it has either the purpose or the effect of impairing particular rights and freedoms. This is confirmed by the obligation placed upon States parties by article 2, paragraph 1 (c), to nullify any law or practice which has the effect of creating or perpetuating racial discrimination.

2. The Committee observes that a differentiation of treatment will not constitute discrimination if the criteria for such differentiation, judged against the objectives and purposes of the Convention, are legitimate or fall within the scope of article 1, paragraph 4, of the Convention. In considering the criteria that may have been employed, the Committee will acknowledge that particular actions may have varied purposes. In seeking to determine whether an action has an effect contrary to the Convention, it will look to see whether that action has an unjustifiable disparate impact upon a group distinguished by race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.

3. Article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention also refers to the political, economic, social and cultural fields; the related rights and freedoms are set up in article 5.

Forty-second session (1993)*

General recommendation XV on article 4 of the Convention

1. When the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was being adopted, article 4 was regarded as central to the struggle against racial discrimination. At that time, there was a widespread fear of the revival of authoritarian ideologies. The proscription of the dissemination of ideas of racial superiority, and of organized

* Contained in document A/48/18.

activity likely to incite persons to racial violence, was properly regarded as crucial. Since that time, the Committee has received evidence of organized violence based on ethnic origin and the political exploitation of ethnic difference. As a result, implementation of article 4 is now of increased importance.

2. The Committee recalls its general recommendation VII in which it explained that the provisions of article 4 are of a mandatory character. To satisfy these obligations, States parties have not only to enact appropriate legislation but also to ensure that it is effectively enforced. Because threats and acts of racial violence easily lead to other such acts and generate an atmosphere of hostility, only immediate intervention can meet the obligations of effective response.

3. Article 4 (a) requires States parties to penalize four categories of misconduct: (i) dissemination of ideas based upon racial superiority or hatred; (ii) incitement to racial hatred; (iii) acts of violence against any race or group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin; and (iv) incitement to such acts.

4. In the opinion of the Committee, the prohibition of the dissemination of all ideas based upon racial superiority or hatred is compatible with the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right is embodied in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is recalled in article 5 (d) (viii) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Its relevance to article 4 is noted in the article itself. The citizen's exercise of this right carries special duties and responsibilities, specified in article 29, paragraph 2, of the Universal Declaration, among which the obligation not to disseminate racist ideas is of particular importance. The Committee wishes, furthermore, to draw to the attention of States parties article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, according to which any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

5. Article 4 (a) also penalizes the financing of racist activities, which the Committee takes to include all the activities mentioned in paragraph 3 above, that is to say, activities deriving from ethnic as well as racial differences. The Committee calls upon States parties to investigate whether their national law and its implementation meet this requirement.

6. Some States have maintained that in their legal order it is inappropriate to declare illegal an organization before its members have promoted or incited racial discrimination. The Committee is of the opinion that article 4 (b) places a greater burden upon such States to be vigilant in proceeding against such organizations at the earliest moment. These organizations, as well as organized and other propaganda activities, have to be declared illegal and prohibited. Participation in these organizations is, of itself, to be punished.

7. Article 4 (c) of the Convention outlines the obligations of public authorities. Public authorities at all administrative levels, including municipalities, are bound by this paragraph. The Committee holds that States parties must ensure that they observe these obligations and report on this.

Forty-second session (1993)*

**General recommendation XVI concerning the application
of article 9 of the Convention**

1. Under article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, States parties have undertaken to submit, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for consideration by the Committee, reports on measures taken by them to give effect to the provisions of the Convention.
2. With respect to this obligation of the States parties, the Committee has noted that, on some occasions, reports have made references to situations existing in other States.
3. For this reason, the Committee wishes to remind States parties of the provisions of article 9 of the Convention concerning the content of their reports, while bearing in mind article 11, which is the only procedural means available to States for drawing to the attention of the Committee situations in which they consider that some other State is not giving effect to the provisions of the Convention.

Forty-second session (1993)*

**General recommendation XVII on the establishment of national
institutions to facilitate the implementation of the Convention**

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Considering the practice of States parties concerning the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Convinced of the necessity to encourage further the establishment of national institutions to facilitate the implementation of the Convention,

Emphasizing the need to strengthen further the implementation of the Convention,

1. *Recommends* that States parties establish national commissions or other appropriate bodies, taking into account, *mutatis mutandis*, the principles relating to the status of national institutions annexed to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1992/54 of 3 March 1992, to serve, *inter alia*, the following purposes:

(a) To promote respect for the enjoyment of human rights without any discrimination, as expressly set out in article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;

(b) To review government policy towards protection against racial discrimination;

* Contained in document A/48/18.

- (c) To monitor legislative compliance with the provisions of the Convention;
- (d) To educate the public about the obligations of States parties under the Convention;
- (e) To assist the Government in the preparation of reports submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination;

2. *Also recommends* that, where such commissions have been established, they should be associated with the preparation of reports and possibly included in government delegations in order to intensify the dialogue between the Committee and the State party concerned.

Forty-fourth session (1994)*

General recommendation XVIII on the establishment of an international tribunal to prosecute crimes against humanity

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Alarmed at the increasing number of racially and ethnically motivated massacres and atrocities occurring in different regions of the world,

Convinced that the impunity of the perpetrators is a major factor contributing to the occurrence and recurrence of these crimes,

Convinced of the need to establish, as quickly as possible, an international tribunal with general jurisdiction to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977 thereto,

Taking into account the work already done on this question by the International Law Commission and the encouragement given in this regard by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/31 of 9 December 1993,

Also taking into account Security Council resolution 872 (1993) of 25 May 1993 establishing an international tribunal for the purpose of prosecuting persons responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia,

1. *Considers* that an international tribunal with general jurisdiction should be established urgently to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity, including murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, torture, rape, persecutions on political, racial and religious grounds and other inhumane acts directed against any civilian population, and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977 thereto;

* Contained in document A/49/18.

2. *Urges* the Secretary-General to bring the present recommendation to the attention of the competent organs and bodies of the United Nations, including the Security Council;

3. *Requests* the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that all relevant information pertaining to the crimes referred to in paragraph 1 is systematically collected by the Centre for Human Rights so that it can be readily available to the international tribunal as soon as it is established.

Forty-seventh session (1995)*

General recommendation XIX on article 3 of the Convention

1. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination calls the attention of States parties to the wording of article 3, by which States parties undertake to prevent, prohibit and eradicate all practices of racial segregation and apartheid in territories under their jurisdiction. The reference to apartheid may have been directed exclusively to South Africa, but the article as adopted prohibits all forms of racial segregation in all countries.

2. The Committee believes that the obligation to eradicate all practices of this nature includes the obligation to eradicate the consequences of such practices undertaken or tolerated by previous Governments in the State or imposed by forces outside the State.

3. The Committee observes that while conditions of complete or partial racial segregation may in some countries have been created by governmental policies, a condition of partial segregation may also arise as an unintended by-product of the actions of private persons. In many cities residential patterns are influenced by group differences in income, which are sometimes combined with differences of race, colour, descent and national or ethnic origin, so that inhabitants can be stigmatized and individuals suffer a form of discrimination in which racial grounds are mixed with other grounds.

4. The Committee therefore affirms that a condition of racial segregation can also arise without any initiative or direct involvement by the public authorities. It invites States parties to monitor all trends which can give rise to racial segregation, to work for the eradication of any negative consequences that ensue, and to describe any such action in their periodic reports.

Forty-eighth session (1996)**

General recommendation XX on article 5 of the Convention

1. Article 5 of the Convention contains the obligation of States parties to guarantee the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and freedoms without racial discrimination. Note should be taken that the rights and freedoms mentioned in article 5 do not constitute an exhaustive list. At the head of these rights and freedoms are those deriving from the

* Contained in document A/50/18.

** Contained in document A/51/18.

Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as recalled in the preamble to the Convention. Most of these rights have been elaborated in the International Covenants on Human Rights. All States parties are therefore obliged to acknowledge and protect the enjoyment of human rights, but the manner in which these obligations are translated into the legal orders of States parties may differ. Article 5 of the Convention, apart from requiring a guarantee that the exercise of human rights shall be free from racial discrimination, does not of itself create civil, political, economic, social or cultural rights, but assumes the existence and recognition of these rights. The Convention obliges States to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination in the enjoyment of such human rights.

2. Whenever a State imposes a restriction upon one of the rights listed in article 5 of the Convention which applies ostensibly to all within its jurisdiction, it must ensure that neither in purpose nor effect is the restriction incompatible with article 1 of the Convention as an integral part of international human rights standards. To ascertain whether this is the case, the Committee is obliged to inquire further to make sure that any such restriction does not entail racial discrimination.

3. Many of the rights and freedoms mentioned in article 5, such as the right to equal treatment before tribunals, are to be enjoyed by all persons living in a given State; others such as the right to participate in elections, to vote and to stand for election are the rights of citizens.

4. The States parties are recommended to report about the non-discriminatory implementation of each of the rights and freedoms referred to in article 5 of the Convention one by one.

5. The rights and freedoms referred to in article 5 of the Convention and any similar rights shall be protected by a State party. Such protection may be achieved in different ways, be it by the use of public institutions or through the activities of private institutions. In any case, it is the obligation of the State party concerned to ensure the effective implementation of the Convention and to report thereon under article 9 of the Convention. To the extent that private institutions influence the exercise of rights or the availability of opportunities, the State party must ensure that the result has neither the purpose nor the effect of creating or perpetuating racial discrimination.

Forty-eighth session (1996)*

General recommendation XXI on the right to self-determination

1. The Committee notes that ethnic or religious groups or minorities frequently refer to the right to self-determination as a basis for an alleged right to secession. In this connection the Committee wishes to express the following views.

2. The right to self-determination of peoples is a fundamental principle of international law. It is enshrined in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations, in article 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and article 1 of the International Covenant on

* Contained in document A/51/18.

Civil and Political Rights, as well as in other international human rights instruments. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides for the rights of peoples to self-determination besides the right of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion or to use their own language.

3. The Committee emphasizes that in accordance with the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, approved by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 2625 (XXV) of 24 October 1970, it is the duty of States to promote the right to self-determination of peoples. But the implementation of the principle of self-determination requires every State to promote, through joint and separate action, universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. In this context the Committee draws the attention of Governments to the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/135 of 18 December 1992.

4. In respect of the self-determination of peoples two aspects have to be distinguished. The right to self-determination of peoples has an internal aspect, that is to say, the rights of all peoples to pursue freely their economic, social and cultural development without outside interference. In that respect there exists a link with the right of every citizen to take part in the conduct of public affairs at any level, as referred to in article 5 (c) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In consequence, Governments are to represent the whole population without distinction as to race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin. The external aspect of self-determination implies that all peoples have the right to determine freely their political status and their place in the international community based upon the principle of equal rights and exemplified by the liberation of peoples from colonialism and by the prohibition to subject peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation.

5. In order to respect fully the rights of all peoples within a State, Governments are again called upon to adhere to and implement fully the international human rights instruments and in particular the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Concern for the protection of individual rights without discrimination on racial, ethnic, tribal, religious or other grounds must guide the policies of Governments. In accordance with article 2 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and other relevant international documents, Governments should be sensitive towards the rights of persons belonging to ethnic groups, particularly their right to lead lives of dignity, to preserve their culture, to share equitably in the fruits of national growth and to play their part in the Government of the country of which they are citizens. Also, Governments should consider, within their respective constitutional frameworks, vesting persons belonging to ethnic or linguistic groups comprised of their citizens, where appropriate, with the right to engage in activities which are particularly relevant to the preservation of the identity of such persons or groups.

6. The Committee emphasizes that, in accordance with the Declaration on Friendly Relations, none of the Committee's actions shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of

equal rights and self-determination of peoples and possessing a Government representing the whole people belonging to the territory, without distinction as to race, creed or colour. In the view of the Committee, international law has not recognized a general right of peoples unilaterally to declare secession from a State. In this respect, the Committee follows the views expressed in *An Agenda for Peace* (paragraphs 17 and following), namely, that a fragmentation of States may be detrimental to the protection of human rights, as well as to the preservation of peace and security. This does not, however, exclude the possibility of arrangements reached by free agreements of all parties concerned.

Forty-ninth session (1996)*

**General recommendation XXII on article 5 of the Convention
on refugees and displaced persons**

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Conscious of the fact that foreign military, non-military and/or ethnic conflicts have resulted in massive flows of refugees and the displacement of persons on the basis of ethnic criteria in many parts of the world,

Considering that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination proclaim that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set out therein, without distinction of any kind, in particular as to race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin,

Recalling the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees as the main source of the international system for the protection of refugees in general,

1. *Draws the attention* of States parties to article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination as well as the Committee's general recommendation XX (48) on article 5, and reiterates that the Convention obliges States parties to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination in the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and freedoms;

2. *Emphasizes* in this respect that:

(a) All such refugees and displaced persons have the right freely to return to their homes of origin under conditions of safety;

(b) States parties are obliged to ensure that the return of such refugees and displaced persons is voluntary and to observe the principle of non-refoulement and non-expulsion of refugees;

* Contained in document A/51/18.

(c) All such refugees and displaced persons have, after their return to their homes of origin, the right to have restored to them property of which they were deprived in the course of the conflict and to be compensated appropriately for any such property that cannot be restored to them. Any commitments or statements relating to such property made under duress are null and void;

(d) All such refugees and displaced persons have, after their return to their homes of origin, the right to participate fully and equally in public affairs at all levels and to have equal access to public services and to receive rehabilitation assistance.

Fifty-first session (1997)*

General recommendation XXIII on the rights of indigenous peoples

1. In the practice of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in particular in the examination of reports of States parties under article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the situation of indigenous peoples has always been a matter of close attention and concern. In this respect, the Committee has consistently affirmed that discrimination against indigenous peoples falls under the scope of the Convention and that all appropriate means must be taken to combat and eliminate such discrimination.

2. The Committee, noting that the General Assembly proclaimed the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples commencing on 10 December 1994, reaffirms that the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination apply to indigenous peoples.

3. The Committee is conscious of the fact that in many regions of the world indigenous peoples have been, and are still being, discriminated against and deprived of their human rights and fundamental freedoms and in particular that they have lost their land and resources to colonists, commercial companies and State enterprises. Consequently, the preservation of their culture and their historical identity has been and still is jeopardized.

4. The Committee calls in particular upon States parties to:

(a) Recognize and respect indigenous distinct culture, history, language and way of life as an enrichment of the State's cultural identity and to promote its preservation;

(b) Ensure that members of indigenous peoples are free and equal in dignity and rights and free from any discrimination, in particular that based on indigenous origin or identity;

(c) Provide indigenous peoples with conditions allowing for a sustainable economic and social development compatible with their cultural characteristics;

* Contained in document A/52/18, annex V.

(d) Ensure that members of indigenous peoples have equal rights in respect of effective participation in public life and that no decisions directly relating to their rights and interests are taken without their informed consent;

(e) Ensure that indigenous communities can exercise their rights to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs and to preserve and to practise their languages.

5. The Committee especially calls upon States parties to recognize and protect the rights of indigenous peoples to own, develop, control and use their communal lands, territories and resources and, where they have been deprived of their lands and territories traditionally owned or otherwise inhabited or used without their free and informed consent, to take steps to return those lands and territories. Only when this is for factual reasons not possible, the right to restitution should be substituted by the right to just, fair and prompt compensation. Such compensation should as far as possible take the form of lands and territories.

6. The Committee further calls upon States parties with indigenous peoples in their territories to include in their periodic reports full information on the situation of such peoples, taking into account all relevant provisions of the Convention.

Fifty-fifth session (1999)*

General recommendation XXIV concerning article 1 of the Convention

1. The Committee stresses that, according to the definition given in article 1, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention relates to all persons who belong to different races, national or ethnic groups or to indigenous peoples. If the Committee is to secure the proper consideration of the periodic reports of States parties, it is essential that States parties provide as far as possible the Committee with information on the presence within their territory of such groups.

2. It appears from the periodic reports submitted to the Committee under article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and from other information received by the Committee, that a number of States parties recognize the presence on their territory of some national or ethnic groups or indigenous peoples, while disregarding others. Certain criteria should be uniformly applied to all groups, in particular the number of persons concerned, and their being of a race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin different from the majority or from other groups within the population.

3. Some States parties fail to collect data on the ethnic or national origin of their citizens or of other persons living on their territory, but decide at their own discretion which groups constitute ethnic groups or indigenous peoples that are to be recognized and treated as such. The Committee believes that there is an international standard concerning the specific rights of people belonging to such groups, together with generally recognized norms concerning equal rights for all and non-discrimination, including those incorporated in the International

* Contained in document A/54/18, annex V.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. At the same time, the Committee draws to the attention of States parties that the application of different criteria in order to determine ethnic groups or indigenous peoples, leading to the recognition of some and refusal to recognize others, may give rise to differing treatment for various groups within a country's population.

4. The Committee recalls general recommendation IV, which it adopted at its eighth session in 1973, and paragraph 8 of the general guidelines regarding the form and contents of reports to be submitted by States parties under article 9, paragraph 1, of the Convention (CERD/C/70/Rev.3), inviting States parties to endeavour to include in their periodic reports relevant information on the demographic composition of their population, in the light of the provisions of article 1 of the Convention, that is, as appropriate, information on race, colour, descent and national or ethnic origin.

Fifty-sixth session (2000)

General recommendation XXV on gender-related dimensions of racial discrimination

1. The Committee notes that racial discrimination does not always affect women and men equally or in the same way. There are circumstances in which racial discrimination only or primarily affects women, or affects women in a different way, or to a different degree than men. Such racial discrimination will often escape detection if there is no explicit recognition or acknowledgement of the different life experiences of women and men, in areas of both public and private life.

2. Certain forms of racial discrimination may be directed towards women specifically because of their gender, such as sexual violence committed against women members of particular racial or ethnic groups in detention or during armed conflict; the coerced sterilization of indigenous women; abuse of women workers in the informal sector or domestic workers employed abroad by their employers. Racial discrimination may have consequences that affect primarily or only women, such as pregnancy resulting from racial bias-motivated rape; in some societies women victims of such rape may also be ostracized. Women may also be further hindered by a lack of access to remedies and complaint mechanisms for racial discrimination because of gender-related impediments, such as gender bias in the legal system and discrimination against women in private spheres of life.

3. Recognizing that some forms of racial discrimination have a unique and specific impact on women, the Committee will endeavour in its work to take into account gender factors or issues which may be interlinked with racial discrimination. The Committee believes that its practices in this regard would benefit from developing, in conjunction with the States parties, a more systematic and consistent approach to evaluating and monitoring racial discrimination against women, as well as the disadvantages, obstacles and difficulties women face in the full exercise and enjoyment of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights on grounds of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.

4. Accordingly, the Committee, when examining forms of racial discrimination, intends to enhance its efforts to integrate gender perspectives, incorporate gender analysis, and encourage the use of gender-inclusive language in its sessional working methods, including its review of reports submitted by States parties, concluding observations, early warning mechanisms and urgent action procedures, and general recommendations.
5. As part of the methodology for fully taking into account the gender-related dimensions of racial discrimination, the Committee will include in its sessional working methods an analysis of the relationship between gender and racial discrimination, by giving particular consideration to:
 - (a) The form and manifestation of racial discrimination;
 - (b) The circumstances in which racial discrimination occurs;
 - (c) The consequences of racial discrimination; and
 - (d) The availability and accessibility of remedies and complaint mechanisms for racial discrimination.
6. Noting that reports submitted by States parties often do not contain specific or sufficient information on the implementation of the Convention with respect to women, States parties are requested to describe, as far as possible in quantitative and qualitative terms, factors affecting and difficulties experienced in ensuring the equal enjoyment by women, free from racial discrimination, of rights under the Convention. Data which have been categorized by race or ethnic origin, and which are then disaggregated by gender within those racial or ethnic groups, will allow the States parties and the Committee to identify, compare and take steps to remedy forms of racial discrimination against women that may otherwise go unnoticed and unaddressed.

*1391st meeting,
20 March 2000*

Fifty-sixth session (2000)

General recommendation XXVI on article 6 of the Convention

1. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination believes that the degree to which acts of racial discrimination and racial insults damage the injured party's perception of his/her own worth and reputation is often underestimated.
2. The Committee notifies States parties that, in its opinion, the right to seek just and adequate reparation or satisfaction for any damage suffered as a result of such discrimination, which is embodied in article 6 of the Convention, is not necessarily secured solely by the punishment of the perpetrator of the discrimination; at the same time, the courts and other competent authorities should consider awarding financial compensation for damage, material or moral, suffered by a victim, whenever appropriate.

*1399th meeting,
24 March 2000*

Fifty-seventh session (2000)

General recommendation XXVII on discrimination against Roma

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Having in mind the submissions from States parties to the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, their periodic reports submitted under article 9 of the Convention, as well as the concluding observations adopted by the Committee in connection with the consideration of States parties' periodic reports,

Having organized a thematic discussion on the issue of discrimination against Roma and received the contributions of members of the Committee, as well as contributions by experts from United Nations bodies and other treaty bodies and from regional organizations,

Having also received the contributions of interested non-governmental organizations, both orally during the informal meeting organized with them and through written information,

Taking into account the provisions of the Convention,

Recommends that the States parties to the Convention, taking into account their specific situations, adopt for the benefit of members of the Roma communities, inter alia, all or part of the following measures, as appropriate.

1. Measures of a general nature

1. To review and enact or amend legislation, as appropriate, in order to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination against Roma as against other persons or groups, in accordance with the Convention.
2. To adopt and implement national strategies and programmes and express determined political will and moral leadership, with a view to improving the situation of Roma and their protection against discrimination by State bodies, as well as by any person or organization.
3. To respect the wishes of Roma as to the designation they want to be given and the group to which they want to belong.
4. To ensure that legislation regarding citizenship and naturalization does not discriminate against members of Roma communities.
5. To take all necessary measures in order to avoid any form of discrimination against immigrants or asylum-seekers of Roma origin.
6. To take into account, in all programmes and projects planned and implemented and in all measures adopted, the situation of Roma women, who are often victims of double discrimination.

7. To take appropriate measures to secure for members of Roma communities effective remedies and to ensure that justice is fully and promptly done in cases concerning violations of their fundamental rights and freedoms.
8. To develop and encourage appropriate modalities of communication and dialogue between Roma communities and central and local authorities.
9. To endeavour, by encouraging a genuine dialogue, consultations or other appropriate means, to improve the relations between Roma communities and non-Roma communities, in particular at local levels, with a view to promoting tolerance and overcoming prejudices and negative stereotypes on both sides, to promoting efforts for adjustment and adaptation and to avoiding discrimination and ensuring that all persons fully enjoy their human rights and freedoms.
10. To acknowledge wrongs done during the Second World War to Roma communities by deportation and extermination and consider ways of compensating for them.
11. To take the necessary measures, in cooperation with civil society, and initiate projects to develop the political culture and educate the population as a whole in a spirit of non-discrimination, respect for others and tolerance, in particular concerning Roma.

2. Measures for protection against racial violence

12. To ensure protection of the security and integrity of Roma, without any discrimination, by adopting measures for preventing racially motivated acts of violence against them; to ensure prompt action by the police, the prosecutors and the judiciary for investigating and punishing such acts; and to ensure that perpetrators, be they public officials or other persons, do not enjoy any degree of impunity.
13. To take measures to prevent the use of illegal force by the police against Roma, in particular in connection with arrest and detention.
14. To encourage appropriate arrangements for communication and dialogue between the police and Roma communities and associations, with a view to preventing conflicts based on racial prejudice and combating acts of racially motivated violence against members of these communities, as well as against other persons.
15. To encourage recruitment of members of Roma communities into the police and other law enforcement agencies.
16. To promote action in post-conflict areas, by States parties and from other responsible States or authorities in order to prevent violence against and forced displacement of members of the Roma communities.

3. Measures in the field of education

17. To support the inclusion in the school system of all children of Roma origin and to act to reduce drop-out rates, in particular among Roma girls, and, for these purposes, to cooperate actively with Roma parents, associations and local communities.

18. To prevent and avoid as much as possible the segregation of Roma students, while keeping open the possibility for bilingual or mother-tongue tuition; to this end, to endeavour to raise the quality of education in all schools and the level of achievement in schools by the minority community, to recruit school personnel from among members of Roma communities and to promote intercultural education.
19. To consider adopting measures in favour of Roma children, in cooperation with their parents, in the field of education.
20. To act with determination to eliminate any discrimination or racial harassment of Roma students.
21. To take the necessary measures to ensure a process of basic education for Roma children of travelling communities, including by admitting them temporarily to local schools, by temporary classes in their places of encampment, or by using new technologies for distance education.
22. To ensure that their programmes, projects and campaigns in the field of education take into account the disadvantaged situation of Roma girls and women.
23. To take urgent and sustained measures in training teachers, educators and assistants from among Roma students.
24. To act to improve dialogue and communication between the teaching personnel and Roma children, Roma communities and parents, using more often assistants chosen from among the Roma.
25. To ensure adequate forms and schemes of education for members of Roma communities beyond school age, in order to improve adult literacy among them.
26. To include in textbooks, at all appropriate levels, chapters about the history and culture of Roma, and encourage and support the publication and distribution of books and other print materials as well as the broadcasting of television and radio programmes, as appropriate, about their history and culture, including in languages spoken by them.

4. Measures to improve living conditions

27. To adopt or make more effective legislation prohibiting discrimination in employment and all discriminatory practices in the labour market affecting members of Roma communities, and to protect them against such practices.
28. To take special measures to promote the employment of Roma in the public administration and institutions, as well as in private companies.
29. To adopt and implement, whenever possible, at the central or local level, special measures in favour of Roma in public employment such as public contracting and other activities undertaken or funded by the Government, or training Roma in various skills and professions.

30. To develop and implement policies and projects aimed at avoiding segregation of Roma communities in housing; to involve Roma communities and associations as partners together with other persons in housing project construction, rehabilitation and maintenance.
31. To act firmly against any discriminatory practices affecting Roma, mainly by local authorities and private owners, with regard to taking up residence and access to housing; to act firmly against local measures denying residence to and unlawful expulsion of Roma, and to refrain from placing Roma in camps outside populated areas that are isolated and without access to health care and other facilities.
32. To take the necessary measures, as appropriate, for offering Roma nomadic groups or Travellers camping places for their caravans, with all necessary facilities.
33. To ensure Roma equal access to health care and social security services and to eliminate any discriminatory practices against them in this field.
34. To initiate and implement programmes and projects in the field of health for Roma, mainly women and children, having in mind their disadvantaged situation due to extreme poverty and low level of education, as well as to cultural differences; to involve Roma associations and communities and their representatives, mainly women, in designing and implementing health programmes and projects concerning Roma groups.
35. To prevent, eliminate and adequately punish any discriminatory practices concerning the access of members of the Roma communities to all places and services intended for the use of the general public, including restaurants, hotels, theatres and music halls, discotheques and others.

5. Measures in the field of the media

36. To act as appropriate for the elimination of any ideas of racial or ethnic superiority, of racial hatred and incitement to discrimination and violence against Roma in the media, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention.
37. To encourage awareness among professionals of all media of the particular responsibility to not disseminate prejudices and to avoid reporting incidents involving individual members of Roma communities in a way which blames such communities as a whole.
38. To develop educational and media campaigns to educate the public about Roma life, society and culture and the importance of building an inclusive society while respecting the human rights and the identity of the Roma.
39. To encourage and facilitate access by Roma to the media, including newspapers and television and radio programmes, the establishment of their own media, as well as the training of Roma journalists.
40. To encourage methods of self-monitoring by the media, through a code of conduct for media organizations, in order to avoid racial, discriminatory or biased language.

6. Measures concerning participation in public life

41. To take the necessary steps, including special measures, to secure equal opportunities for the participation of Roma minorities or groups in all central and local governmental bodies.
42. To develop modalities and structures of consultation with Roma political parties, associations and representatives, both at central and local levels, when considering issues and adopting decisions on matters of concern to Roma communities.
43. To involve Roma communities and associations and their representatives at the earliest stages in the development and implementation of policies and programmes affecting them and to ensure sufficient transparency about such policies and programmes.
44. To promote more awareness among members of Roma communities of the need for their more active participation in public and social life and in promoting their own interests, for instance the education of their children and their participation in professional training.
45. To organize training programmes for Roma public officials and representatives, as well as for prospective candidates to such responsibilities, aimed at improving their political, policy-making and public administration skills.

The Committee *also recommends* that:

46. States parties include in their periodic reports, in an appropriate form, data about the Roma communities within their jurisdiction, including statistical data about Roma participation in political life and about their economic, social and cultural situation, including from a gender perspective, and information about the implementation of this general recommendation.
47. Intergovernmental organizations, in their projects of cooperation and assistance to the various States parties, as appropriate, address the situation of Roma communities and favour their economic, social and cultural advancement.
48. The High Commissioner for Human Rights consider establishing a focal point for Roma issues within the Office of the High Commissioner.

The Committee *further recommends* that:

49. The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance give due consideration to the above recommendations, taking into account the place of the Roma communities among those most disadvantaged and most subject to discrimination in the contemporary world.

*1424th meeting,
16 August 2000*

Sixtieth session (2002)

General recommendation XXVIII on the follow-up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Welcoming the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the provisions of General Assembly resolution 56/266 which endorse or are designed to ensure the follow-up of those instruments,

Welcoming the fact that the instruments adopted at Durban strongly reaffirm all the fundamental values and standards of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Recalling that the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action refer to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination as the principal instrument to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,

Noting in particular the affirmation in the Durban Declaration that universal adherence to and full implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination are of paramount importance for promoting equality and non-discrimination in the world,

Expressing its satisfaction at the recognition of the role and contribution of the Committee to the struggle against racial discrimination,

Conscious of its own responsibilities in the follow-up to the World Conference and of the need to strengthen its capacity to undertake these responsibilities,

Stressing the vital role of non-governmental organizations in the struggle against racial discrimination and welcoming their contribution during the World Conference,

Taking note of the recognition by the World Conference of the important role that national human rights institutions play in combating racism and racial discrimination, and of the need to strengthen such institutions and provide them with greater resources,

1. *Recommends* to States:

I. MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

(a) If they have not yet done so, to accede to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination with a view to universal ratification by the year 2005;

- (b) If they have not yet done so, to consider making the optional declaration envisaged under article 14 of the Convention;
- (c) To comply with their reporting obligations under the Convention by presenting reports in a timely manner in conformity with the relevant guidelines;
- (d) To consider withdrawing their reservations to the Convention;
- (e) To make increased efforts to inform the public of the existence of the complaints mechanism under article 14 of the Convention;
- (f) To take into account the relevant parts of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action when implementing the Convention in the domestic legal order, in particular in respect of articles 2 to 7 of the Convention;
- (g) To include in their periodic reports information on action plans or other measures they have taken to implement the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action at the national level;
- (h) To disseminate the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action in an appropriate manner and provide the Committee with information on the efforts in this respect under the section of their periodic reports concerning article 7 of the Convention;

II. MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMITTEE

- (i) To consider setting up appropriate national monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that all appropriate steps are taken to follow-up the concluding observations and general recommendations of the Committee;
 - (j) To include in their periodic reports to the Committee appropriate information on the follow-up to such concluding observations and recommendations;
 - (k) To ratify the amendment to article 8, paragraph 6, of the Convention adopted on 15 January 1992 at the 14th meeting of States parties to the Convention and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/111 of 15 December 1992;
 - (l) To continue cooperating with the Committee with a view to promoting the effective implementation of the Convention;
2. *Also recommends:*
- (a) That national human rights institutions assist their respective States to comply with their reporting obligations and closely monitor the follow-up to the concluding observations and recommendations of the Committee;
 - (b) That non-governmental organizations continue to provide the Committee in good time with relevant information in order to enhance its cooperation with them;

(c) That the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights continue its efforts to increase awareness of the work of the Committee;

(d) That the competent United Nations bodies provide the Committee with adequate resources to enable it to discharge its mandate fully;

3. *Expresses its willingness:*

(a) To cooperate fully with all relevant institutions of the United Nations system, in particular the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in following up the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action;

(b) To cooperate with the five independent eminent experts to be appointed by the Secretary-General to facilitate the implementation of the recommendations of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action;

(c) To coordinate its activities with the other human rights treaty bodies with a view to achieving a more effective follow-up of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action;

(d) To take into consideration all aspects of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action concerning the fulfilment of its mandate.

*1517th meeting,
19 March 2002*

Sixty-first session (2002)

**General recommendation XXIX on article 1, paragraph 1,
of the Convention (Descent)**

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Recalling the terms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights according to which all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and are entitled to the rights and freedoms therein without distinction of any kind, including race, colour, sex, language, religion, social origin, birth or other status,

Recalling also the terms of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference on Human Rights according to which it is the duty of States, regardless of political, economic and cultural system, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Reaffirming its general recommendation XXVIII in which the Committee expresses wholehearted support for the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance,

Reaffirming also the condemnation of discrimination against persons of Asian and African descent and indigenous and other forms of descent in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action,

Basing its action on the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination which seeks to eliminate discrimination based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin,

Confirming the consistent view of the Committee that the term “descent” in article 1, paragraph 1, the Convention does not solely refer to “race” and has a meaning and application which complement the other prohibited grounds of discrimination,

Strongly reaffirming that discrimination based on “descent” includes discrimination against members of communities based on forms of social stratification such as caste and analogous systems of inherited status which nullify or impair their equal enjoyment of human rights,

Noting that the existence of such discrimination has become evident from the Committee’s examination of reports of a number of States parties to the Convention,

Having organized a thematic discussion on descent-based discrimination and received the contributions of members of the Committee, as well as contributions from some Governments and members of other United Nations bodies, notably experts of the Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights,

Having received contributions from a great number of concerned non-governmental organizations and individuals, orally and through written information, providing the Committee with further evidence of the extent and persistence of descent-based discrimination in different regions of the world,

Concluding that fresh efforts need to be made as well as existing efforts intensified at the level of domestic law and practice to eliminate the scourge of descent-based discrimination and empower communities affected by it,

Commending the efforts of those States that have taken measures to eliminate descent-based discrimination and remedy its consequences,

Strongly encouraging those affected States that have yet to recognize and address this phenomenon to take steps to do so,

Recalling the positive spirit in which the dialogues between the Committee and Governments have been conducted on the question of descent-based discrimination and anticipating further such constructive dialogues,

Attaching the highest importance to its ongoing work in combating all forms of descent-based discrimination,

Strongly condemning descent-based discrimination, such as discrimination on the basis of caste and analogous systems of inherited status, as a violation of the Convention,

Recommends that the States parties, as appropriate for their particular circumstances, adopt some or all of the following measures:

1. Measures of a general nature

(a) Steps to identify those descent-based communities under their jurisdiction who suffer from discrimination, especially on the basis of caste and analogous systems of inherited status, and whose existence may be recognized on the basis of various factors including some or all of the following: inability or restricted ability to alter inherited status; socially enforced restrictions on marriage outside the community; private and public segregation, including in housing and education, access to public spaces, places of worship and public sources of food and water; limitation of freedom to renounce inherited occupations or degrading or hazardous work; subjection to debt bondage; subjection to dehumanizing discourses referring to pollution or untouchability; and generalized lack of respect for their human dignity and equality;

(b) Consider the incorporation of an explicit prohibition of descent-based discrimination in the national constitution;

(c) Review and enact or amend legislation in order to outlaw all forms of discrimination based on descent in accordance with the Convention;

(d) Resolutely implement legislation and other measures already in force;

(e) Formulate and put into action a comprehensive national strategy with the participation of members of affected communities, including special measures in accordance with articles 1 and 2 of the Convention, in order to eliminate discrimination against members of descent-based groups;

(f) Adopt special measures in favour of descent-based groups and communities in order to ensure their enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular concerning access to public functions, employment and education;

(g) Establish statutory mechanisms, through the strengthening of existing institutions or the creation of specialized institutions, to promote respect for the equal human rights of members of descent-based communities;

(h) Educate the general public on the importance of affirmative action programmes to address the situation of victims of descent-based discrimination;

(i) Encourage dialogue between members of descent-based communities and members of other social groups;

(j) Conduct periodic surveys on the reality of descent-based discrimination and provide disaggregated information in their reports to the Committee on the geographical distribution and economic and social conditions of descent-based communities, including a gender perspective;

2. Multiple discrimination against women members of descent-based communities

(k) Take into account, in all programmes and projects planned and implemented and in measures adopted, the situation of women members of the communities, as victims of multiple discrimination, sexual exploitation and forced prostitution;

(l) Take all measures necessary in order to eliminate multiple discrimination including descent-based discrimination against women, particularly in the areas of personal security, employment and education;

(m) Provide disaggregated data for the situation of women affected by descent-based discrimination;

3. Segregation

(n) Monitor and report on trends which give rise to the segregation of descent-based communities and work for the eradication of the negative consequences resulting from such segregation;

(o) Undertake to prevent, prohibit and eliminate practices of segregation directed against members of descent-based communities including in housing, education and employment;

(p) Secure for everyone the right of access on an equal and non-discriminatory basis to any place or service intended for use by the general public;

(q) Take steps to promote mixed communities in which members of affected communities are integrated with other elements of society and ensure that services to such settlements are accessible on an equal basis for all;

4. Dissemination of hate speech including through the mass media and the Internet

(r) Take measures against any dissemination of ideas of caste superiority and inferiority or which attempt to justify violence, hatred or discrimination against descent-based communities;

(s) Take strict measures against any incitement to discrimination or violence against the communities, including through the Internet;

(t) Take measures to raise awareness among media professionals of the nature and incidence of descent-based discrimination;

5. Administration of justice

(u) Take the necessary steps to secure equal access to the justice system for all members of descent-based communities, including by providing legal aid, facilitating of group claims and encouraging non-governmental organizations to defend community rights;

(v) Ensure, where relevant, that judicial decisions and official actions take the prohibition of descent-based discrimination fully into account;

(w) Ensure the prosecution of persons who commit crimes against members of descent-based communities and the provision of adequate compensation for the victims of such crimes;

(x) Encourage the recruitment of members of descent-based communities into the police and other law enforcement agencies;

(y) Organize training programmes for public officials and law enforcement agencies with a view to preventing injustices based on prejudice against descent-based communities;

(z) Encourage and facilitate constructive dialogue between the police and other law enforcement agencies and members of the communities;

6. Civil and political rights

(aa) Ensure that authorities at all levels in the country concerned involve members of descent-based communities in decisions which affect them;

(bb) Take special and concrete measures to guarantee to members of descent-based communities the right to participate in elections, to vote and stand for election on the basis of equal and universal suffrage, and to have due representation in Government and legislative bodies;

(cc) Promote awareness among members of the communities of the importance of their active participation in public and political life, and eliminate obstacles to such participation;

(dd) Organize training programmes to improve the political policy-making and public administration skills of public officials and political representatives who belong to descent-based communities;

(ee) Take steps to identify areas prone to descent-based violence in order to prevent the recurrence of such violence;

(ff) Take resolute measures to secure rights of marriage for members of descent-based communities who wish to marry outside the community;

7. Economic and social rights

(gg) Elaborate, adopt and implement plans and programmes of economic and social development on an equal and non-discriminatory basis;

(hh) Take substantial and effective measures to eradicate poverty among descent-based communities and combat their social exclusion or marginalization;

(ii) Work with intergovernmental organizations, including international financial institutions, to ensure that development or assistance projects which they support take into account the economic and social situation of members of descent-based communities;

(jj) Take special measures to promote the employment of members of affected communities in the public and private sectors;

(kk) Develop or refine legislation and practice specifically prohibiting all discriminatory practices based on descent in employment and the labour market;

- (ll) Take measures against public bodies, private companies and other associations that investigate the descent background of applicants for employment;
- (mm) Take measures against discriminatory practices of local authorities or private owners with regard to residence and access to adequate housing for members of affected communities;
- (nn) Ensure equal access to health care and social security services for members of descent-based communities;
- (oo) Involve affected communities in designing and implementing health programmes and projects;
- (pp) Take measures to address the special vulnerability of children of descent-based communities to exploitative child labour;
- (qq) Take resolute measures to eliminate debt bondage and degrading conditions of labour associated with descent-based discrimination;

8. Right to education

- (rr) Ensure that public and private education systems include children of all communities and do not exclude any children on the basis of descent;
- (ss) Reduce school drop-out rates for children of all communities, in particular for children of affected communities, with special attention to the situation of girls;
- (tt) Combat discrimination by public or private bodies and any harassment of students who are members of descent-based communities;
- (uu) Take necessary measures in cooperation with civil society to educate the population as a whole in a spirit of non-discrimination and respect for the communities subject to descent-based discrimination;
- (vv) Review all language in textbooks which conveys stereotyped or demeaning images, references, names or opinions concerning descent-based communities and replace it by images, references, names and opinions which convey the message of the inherent dignity of all human beings and their equality of human rights.

Sixty-fifth session (2005)

General recommendation XXX on discrimination against non-citizens

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Recalling the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, according to which all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and are entitled to the rights and freedoms enshrined therein without distinction of any

kind, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Recalling the Durban Declaration in which the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, recognized that xenophobia against non-nationals, particularly migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, constitutes one of the main sources of contemporary racism and that human rights violations against members of such groups occur widely in the context of discriminatory, xenophobic and racist practices,

Noting that, based on the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and general recommendations XI and XX, it has become evident from the examination of the reports of States parties to the Convention that groups other than migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers are also of concern, including undocumented non-citizens and persons who cannot establish the nationality of the State on whose territory they live, even where such persons have lived all their lives on the same territory,

Having organized a thematic discussion on the issue of discrimination against non-citizens and received the contributions of members of the Committee and States parties, as well as contributions from experts of other United Nations organs and specialized agencies and from non-governmental organizations,

Recognizing the need to clarify the responsibilities of States parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination with regard to non-citizens,

Basing its action on the provisions of the Convention, in particular article 5, which requires States parties to prohibit and eliminate discrimination based on race, colour, descent, and national or ethnic origin in the enjoyment by all persons of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and freedoms,

Affirms that:

I. RESPONSIBILITIES OF STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION

1. Article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention defines racial discrimination. Article 1, paragraph 2 provides for the possibility of differentiating between citizens and non-citizens. Article 1, paragraph 3 declares that, concerning nationality, citizenship or naturalization, the legal provisions of States parties must not discriminate against any particular nationality;

2. Article 1, paragraph 2, must be construed so as to avoid undermining the basic prohibition of discrimination; hence, it should not be interpreted to detract in any way from the rights and freedoms recognized and enunciated in particular in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

3. Article 5 of the Convention incorporates the obligation of States parties to prohibit and eliminate racial discrimination in the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Although some of these rights, such as the right to participate in elections, to vote and to stand for election, may be confined to citizens, human rights are, in principle, to be enjoyed by all persons. States parties are under an obligation to guarantee equality between citizens and non-citizens in the enjoyment of these rights to the extent recognized under international law;

4. Under the Convention, differential treatment based on citizenship or immigration status will constitute discrimination if the criteria for such differentiation, judged in the light of the objectives and purposes of the Convention, are not applied pursuant to a legitimate aim, and are not proportional to the achievement of this aim. Differentiation within the scope of article 1, paragraph 4, of the Convention relating to special measures is not considered discriminatory;

5. States parties are under an obligation to report fully upon legislation on non-citizens and its implementation. Furthermore, States parties should include in their periodic reports, in an appropriate form, socio-economic data on the non-citizen population within their jurisdiction, including data disaggregated by gender and national or ethnic origin;

Recommends,

Based on these general principles, that the States parties to the Convention, as appropriate to their specific circumstances, adopt the following measures:

II. MEASURES OF A GENERAL NATURE

6. Review and revise legislation, as appropriate, in order to guarantee that such legislation is in full compliance with the Convention, in particular regarding the effective enjoyment of the rights mentioned in article 5, without discrimination;

7. Ensure that legislative guarantees against racial discrimination apply to non-citizens regardless of their immigration status, and that the implementation of legislation does not have a discriminatory effect on non-citizens;

8. Pay greater attention to the issue of multiple discrimination faced by non-citizens, in particular concerning the children and spouses of non-citizen workers, to refrain from applying different standards of treatment to female non-citizen spouses of citizens and male non-citizen spouses of citizens, to report on any such practices and to take all necessary steps to address them;

9. Ensure that immigration policies do not have the effect of discriminating against persons on the basis of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin;

10. Ensure that any measures taken in the fight against terrorism do not discriminate, in purpose or effect, on the grounds of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin and that non-citizens are not subjected to racial or ethnic profiling or stereotyping;

III. PROTECTION AGAINST HATE SPEECH AND RACIAL VIOLENCE

11. Take steps to address xenophobic attitudes and behaviour towards non-citizens, in particular hate speech and racial violence, and to promote a better understanding of the principle of non-discrimination in respect of the situation of non-citizens;

12. Take resolute action to counter any tendency to target, stigmatize, stereotype or profile, on the basis of race, colour, descent, and national or ethnic origin, members of “non-citizen” population groups, especially by politicians, officials, educators and the media, on the Internet and other electronic communications networks and in society at large;

IV. ACCESS TO CITIZENSHIP

13. Ensure that particular groups of non-citizens are not discriminated against with regard to access to citizenship or naturalization, and to pay due attention to possible barriers to naturalization that may exist for long-term or permanent residents;

14. Recognize that deprivation of citizenship on the basis of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin is a breach of States parties’ obligations to ensure non-discriminatory enjoyment of the right to nationality;

15. Take into consideration that in some cases denial of citizenship for long-term or permanent residents could result in creating disadvantage for them in access to employment and social benefits, in violation of the Convention’s anti-discrimination principles;

16. Reduce statelessness, in particular statelessness among children, by, for example, encouraging their parents to apply for citizenship on their behalf and allowing both parents to transmit their citizenship to their children;

17. Regularize the status of former citizens of predecessor States who now reside within the jurisdiction of the State party;

V. ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

18. Ensure that non-citizens enjoy equal protection and recognition before the law and in this context, to take action against racially motivated violence and to ensure the access of victims to effective legal remedies and the right to seek just and adequate reparation for any damage suffered as a result of such violence;

19. Ensure the security of non-citizens, in particular with regard to arbitrary detention, as well as ensure that conditions in centres for refugees and asylum-seekers meet international standards;

20. Ensure that non-citizens detained or arrested in the fight against terrorism are properly protected by domestic law that complies with international human rights, refugee and humanitarian law;

21. Combat ill-treatment of and discrimination against non-citizens by police and other law enforcement agencies and civil servants by strictly applying relevant legislation and regulations providing for sanctions and by ensuring that all officials dealing with non-citizens receive special training, including training in human rights;

22. Introduce in criminal law the provision that committing an offence with racist motivation or aim constitutes an aggravating circumstance allowing for a more severe punishment;

23. Ensure that claims of racial discrimination brought by non-citizens are investigated thoroughly and that claims made against officials, notably those concerning discriminatory or racist behaviour, are subject to independent and effective scrutiny;

24. Regulate the burden of proof in civil proceedings involving discrimination based on race, colour, descent, and national or ethnic origin so that once a non-citizen has established a prima facie case that he or she has been a victim of such discrimination, it shall be for the respondent to provide evidence of an objective and reasonable justification for the differential treatment;

VI. EXPULSION AND DEPORTATION OF NON-CITIZENS

25. Ensure that laws concerning deportation or other forms of removal of non-citizens from the jurisdiction of the State party do not discriminate in purpose or effect among non-citizens on the basis of race, colour or ethnic or national origin, and that non-citizens have equal access to effective remedies, including the right to challenge expulsion orders, and are allowed effectively to pursue such remedies;

26. Ensure that non-citizens are not subject to collective expulsion, in particular in situations where there are insufficient guarantees that the personal circumstances of each of the persons concerned have been taken into account;

27. Ensure that non-citizens are not returned or removed to a country or territory where they are at risk of being subject to serious human rights abuses, including torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;

28. Avoid expulsions of non-citizens, especially of long-term residents, that would result in disproportionate interference with the right to family life;

VII. ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

29. Remove obstacles that prevent the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights by non-citizens, notably in the areas of education, housing, employment and health;

30. Ensure that public educational institutions are open to non-citizens and children of undocumented immigrants residing in the territory of a State party;

31. Avoid segregated schooling and different standards of treatment being applied to non-citizens on grounds of race, colour, descent, and national or ethnic origin in elementary and secondary school and with respect to access to higher education;

32. Guarantee the equal enjoyment of the right to adequate housing for citizens and non-citizens, especially by avoiding segregation in housing and ensuring that housing agencies refrain from engaging in discriminatory practices;
33. Take measures to eliminate discrimination against non-citizens in relation to working conditions and work requirements, including employment rules and practices with discriminatory purposes or effects;
34. Take effective measures to prevent and redress the serious problems commonly faced by non-citizen workers, in particular by non-citizen domestic workers, including debt bondage, passport retention, illegal confinement, rape and physical assault;
35. Recognize that, while States parties may refuse to offer jobs to non-citizens without a work permit, all individuals are entitled to the enjoyment of labour and employment rights, including the freedom of assembly and association, once an employment relationship has been initiated until it is terminated;
36. Ensure that States parties respect the right of non-citizens to an adequate standard of physical and mental health by, inter alia, refraining from denying or limiting their access to preventive, curative and palliative health services;
37. Take the necessary measures to prevent practices that deny non-citizens their cultural identity, such as legal or de facto requirements that non-citizens change their name in order to obtain citizenship, and to take measures to enable non-citizens to preserve and develop their culture;
38. Ensure the right of non-citizens, without discrimination based on race, colour, descent, and national or ethnic origin, to have access to any place or service intended for use by the general public, such as transport, hotels, restaurants, cafés, theatres and parks;
39. The present general recommendation replaces general recommendation XI (1993).

Sixty-fifth session (2005)

General recommendation XXXI on the prevention of racial discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Recalling the definition of racial discrimination set out in article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Recalling the provisions of article 5 (a) of the Convention, under which States parties have an obligation to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the right to equal treatment before the tribunals and all other organs administering justice,

Recalling that article 6 of the Convention requires States parties to assure to everyone within their jurisdiction effective protection and remedies, through the competent national

tribunals and other State institutions, against any acts of racial discrimination, as well as the right to seek from such tribunals just and adequate reparation or satisfaction for any damage suffered as a result of such discrimination,

Referring to paragraph 25 of the declaration adopted by the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, which expressed “profound repudiation of the racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance that persist in some States in the functioning of the penal system and in the application of the law, as well as in the actions and attitudes of institutions and individuals responsible for law enforcement, especially where this has contributed to certain groups being overrepresented among persons under detention or imprisoned”,

Referring to the work of the Commission on Human Rights and of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (see E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/7) concerning discrimination in the criminal justice system,

Bearing in mind the reports of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance,

Referring to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, in particular article 16, which stipulates that “[a] refugee shall have free access to the courts of law on the territory of all Contracting States”,

Bearing in mind the observations relating to the functioning of the system of justice made in the Committee’s conclusions concerning reports submitted by States parties and in general recommendations XXVII (2000) on discrimination against Roma, XXIX (2002) on discrimination based on descent and XXX (2004) on discrimination against non-citizens,

Convinced that, even though the system of justice may be regarded as impartial and not affected by racism, racial discrimination or xenophobia, when racial or ethnic discrimination does exist in the administration and functioning of the system of justice, it constitutes a particularly serious violation of the rule of law, the principle of equality before the law, the principle of fair trial and the right to an independent and impartial tribunal, through its direct effect on persons belonging to groups which it is the very role of justice to protect,

Considering that no country is free from racial discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system, regardless of the type of law applied or the judicial system in force, whether accusatorial, inquisitorial or mixed,

Considering that the risks of discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system have increased in recent years, partly as a result of the rise in immigration and population movements, which have prompted prejudice and feelings of xenophobia or intolerance among certain sections of the population and certain law enforcement officials, and partly as a result of the security policies and anti-terrorism measures adopted by many States, which among other things have encouraged the emergence of anti-Arab or anti-Muslim feelings, or, as a reaction, anti-Semitic feelings, in a number of countries,

Determined to combat all forms of discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system which may be suffered, in all countries of the world, by persons belonging to racial or ethnic groups, in particular non-citizens - including immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons - Roma/Gypsies, indigenous peoples, displaced populations, persons discriminated against because of their descent, as well as other vulnerable groups which are particularly exposed to exclusion, marginalization and non-integration in society, paying particular attention to the situation of women and children belonging to the aforementioned groups, who are susceptible to multiple discrimination because of their race and because of their sex or their age,

Formulates the following recommendations addressed to States parties:

I. GENERAL STEPS

A. Steps to be taken in order to better gauge the existence and extent of racial discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system; the search for indicators attesting to such discrimination

1. Factual indicators

1. States parties should pay the greatest attention to the following possible indicators of racial discrimination:

(a) The number and percentage of persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble who are victims of aggression or other offences, especially when they are committed by police officers or other State officials;

(b) The absence or small number of complaints, prosecutions and convictions relating to acts of racial discrimination in the country. Such a statistic should not be viewed as necessarily positive, contrary to the belief of some States. It may also reveal either that victims have inadequate information concerning their rights, or that they fear social censure or reprisals, or that victims with limited resources fear the cost and complexity of the judicial process, or that there is a lack of trust in the police and judicial authorities, or that the authorities are insufficiently alert to or aware of offences involving racism;

(c) Insufficient or no information on the behaviour of law enforcement personnel vis-à-vis persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble;

(d) The proportionately higher crime rates attributed to persons belonging to those groups, particularly as regards petty street crime and offences related to drugs and prostitution, as indicators of the exclusion or the non-integration of such persons into society;

(e) The number and percentage of persons belonging to those groups who are held in prison or preventive detention, including internment centres, penal establishments, psychiatric establishments or holding areas in airports;

(f) The handing down by the courts of harsher or inappropriate sentences against persons belonging to those groups;

(g) The insufficient representation of persons belonging to those groups among the ranks of the police, in the system of justice, including judges and jurors, and in other law enforcement departments.

2. In order for these factual indicators to be well known and used, States parties should embark on regular and public collection of information from police, judicial and prison authorities and immigration services, while respecting standards of confidentiality, anonymity and protection of personal data.

3. In particular, States parties should have access to comprehensive statistical or other information on complaints, prosecutions and convictions relating to acts of racism and xenophobia, as well as on compensation awarded to the victims of such acts, whether such compensation is paid by the perpetrators of the offences or under State compensation plans financed from public funds.

2. Legislative indicators

4. The following should be regarded as indicators of potential causes of racial discrimination:

(a) Any gaps in domestic legislation on racial discrimination. In this regard, States parties should fully comply with the requirements of article 4 of the Convention and criminalize all acts of racism as provided by that article, in particular the dissemination of ideas based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial hatred, violence or incitement to racial violence, but also racist propaganda activities and participation in racist organizations. States parties are also encouraged to incorporate a provision in their criminal legislation to the effect that committing offences for racial reasons generally constitutes an aggravating circumstance;

(b) The potential indirect discriminatory effects of certain domestic legislation, particularly legislation on terrorism, immigration, nationality, banning or deportation of non-citizens from a country, as well as legislation that has the effect of penalizing without legitimate grounds certain groups or membership of certain communities. States should seek to eliminate the discriminatory effects of such legislation and in any case to respect the principle of proportionality in its application to persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble.

B. Strategies to be developed to prevent racial discrimination in the administration and functioning of the criminal justice system

5. States parties should pursue national strategies the objectives of which include the following:

(a) To eliminate laws that have an impact in terms of racial discrimination, particularly those which target certain groups indirectly by penalizing acts which can be committed only by persons belonging to such groups, or laws that apply only to non-nationals without legitimate grounds or which do not respect the principle of proportionality;

- (b) To develop, through appropriate education programmes, training in respect for human rights, tolerance and friendship among racial or ethnic groups, as well as sensitization to intercultural relations, for law enforcement officials: police personnel, persons working in the system of justice, prison institutions, psychiatric establishments, social and medical services, etc.;
- (c) To foster dialogue and cooperation between the police and judicial authorities and the representatives of the various groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble, in order to combat prejudice and create a relationship of trust;
- (d) To promote proper representation of persons belonging to racial and ethnic groups in the police and the system of justice;
- (e) To ensure respect for, and recognition of the traditional systems of justice of indigenous peoples, in conformity with international human rights law;
- (f) To make the necessary changes to the prison regime for prisoners belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble, so as to take into account their cultural and religious practices;
- (g) To institute, in situations of mass population movements, the interim measures and arrangements necessary for the operation of the justice system in order to take account of the particularly vulnerable situation of displaced persons, in particular by setting up decentralized courts at the places where the displaced persons are staying or by organizing mobile courts;
- (h) To set up, in post-conflict situations, plans for the reconstruction of the legal system and the re-establishment of the rule of law throughout the territory of the countries concerned, by availing themselves, in particular, of the international technical assistance provided by the relevant United Nations entities;
- (i) To implement national strategies or plans of action aimed at the elimination of structural racial discrimination. These long-term strategies should include specific objectives and actions as well as indicators against which progress can be measured. They should include, in particular, guidelines for prevention, recording, investigation and prosecution of racist or xenophobic incidents, assessment of the level of satisfaction among all communities concerning their relations with the police and the system of justice, and recruitment and promotion in the judicial system of persons belonging to various racial or ethnic groups;
- (j) To entrust an independent national institution with the task of tracking, monitoring and measuring progress made under the national plans of action and guidelines against racial discrimination, identifying undetected manifestations of racial discrimination and submitting recommendations and proposals for improvement.

II. STEPS TO BE TAKEN TO PREVENT RACIAL DISCRIMINATION WITH REGARD TO VICTIMS OF RACISM

A. Access to the law and to justice

6. In accordance with article 6 of the Convention, States parties are obliged to guarantee the right of every person within their jurisdiction to an effective remedy against the perpetrators of acts of racial discrimination, without discrimination of any kind, whether such acts are committed by private individuals or State officials, as well as the right to seek just and adequate reparation for the damage suffered.

7. In order to facilitate access to justice for the victims of racism, States parties should strive to supply the requisite legal information to persons belonging to the most vulnerable social groups, who are often unaware of their rights.

8. In that regard, States parties should promote, in the areas where such persons live, institutions such as free legal help and advice centres, legal information centres and centres for conciliation and mediation.

9. States parties should also expand their cooperation with associations of lawyers, university institutions, legal advice centres and non-governmental organizations specializing in protecting the rights of marginalized communities and in the prevention of discrimination.

B. Reporting of incidents to the authorities competent for receiving complaints

10. States parties should take the necessary steps to ensure that the police services have an adequate and accessible presence in the neighbourhoods, regions, collective facilities, camps or centres where the persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble reside, so that complaints from such persons can be expeditiously received.

11. The competent services should be instructed to receive the victims of acts of racism in police stations in a satisfactory manner, so that complaints are recorded immediately, investigations are pursued without delay and in an effective, independent and impartial manner, and files relating to racist or xenophobic incidents are retained and incorporated into databases.

12. Any refusal by a police official to accept a complaint involving an act of racism should lead to disciplinary or penal sanctions, and those sanctions should be increased if corruption is involved.

13. Conversely, it should be the right and duty of any police official or State employee to refuse to obey orders or instructions that require him or her to commit violations of human rights, particularly those based on racial discrimination. States parties should guarantee the freedom of any official to invoke this right without fear of punishment.

14. In cases of allegations of torture, ill-treatment or executions, investigations should be conducted in accordance with the Principles on the Effective Prevention and Investigation of

Extra-legal, Arbitrary and Summary Executions¹ and the Principles on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.²

C. Initiation of judicial proceedings

15. States parties should remind public prosecutors and members of the prosecution service of the general importance of prosecuting racist acts, including minor offences committed with racist motives, since any racially motivated offence undermines social cohesion and society as a whole.

16. In advance of the initiation of proceedings, States parties could also encourage, with a view to respecting the rights of the victims, the use of parajudicial procedures for conflict resolution, including customary procedures compatible with human rights, mediation or conciliation, which can serve as useful options for the victims of acts of racism and to which less stigma may be attached.

17. In order to make it easier for the victims of acts of racism to bring actions in the courts, the steps to be taken should include the following:

(a) Offering procedural status for the victims of racism and xenophobia and associations for the protection of the rights of such victims, such as an opportunity to associate themselves with the criminal proceedings, or other similar procedures that might enable them to assert their rights in the criminal proceedings, at no cost to themselves;

(b) Granting victims effective judicial cooperation and legal aid, including the assistance of counsel and an interpreter free of charge;

(c) Ensuring that victims have information about the progress of the proceedings;

(d) Guaranteeing protection for the victim or the victim's family against any form of intimidation or reprisals;

(e) Providing for the possibility of suspending the functions, for the duration of the investigation, of the agents of the State against whom the complaints were made.

18. In countries where there are assistance and compensation plans for victims, States parties should ensure that such plans are available to all victims without discrimination and regardless of their nationality or residential status.

D. Functioning of the system of justice

19. States parties should ensure that the system of justice:

(a) Grants a proper place to victims and their families, as well as witnesses, throughout the proceedings, by enabling complainants to be heard by the judges during the examination proceedings and the court hearing, to have access to information, to confront hostile witnesses, to challenge evidence and to be informed of the progress of proceedings;

(b) Treats the victims of racial discrimination without discrimination or prejudice, while respecting their dignity, through ensuring in particular that hearings, questioning or confrontations are carried out with the necessary sensitivity as far as racism is concerned;

(c) Guarantees the victim a court judgement within a reasonable period;

(d) Guarantees victims just and adequate reparation for the material and moral harm suffered as a result of racial discrimination.

III. STEPS TO BE TAKEN TO PREVENT RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN REGARD TO ACCUSED PERSONS WHO ARE SUBJECT TO JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS

A. Questioning, interrogation and arrest

20. States parties should take the necessary steps to prevent questioning, arrests and searches which are in reality based solely on the physical appearance of a person, that person's colour or features or membership of a racial or ethnic group, or any profiling which exposes him or her to greater suspicion.

21. States parties should prevent and most severely punish violence, acts of torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and all violations of human rights affecting persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble which are committed by State officials, particularly police and army personnel, customs authorities, and persons working in airports, penal institutions and social, medical and psychiatric services.

22. States parties should ensure the observance of the general principle of proportionality and strict necessity in recourse to force against persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble, in accordance with the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials.³

23. States parties should also guarantee to all arrested persons, whatever the racial, national or ethnic group to which they belong, enjoyment of the fundamental rights of the defence enshrined in the relevant international human rights instruments (especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), in particular the right not to be arbitrarily arrested or detained, the right to be informed of the reasons for their arrest, the right to the assistance of an interpreter, the right to the assistance of counsel, the right to be brought promptly before a judge or an authority empowered by the law to perform judicial functions, the right to consular protection guaranteed by article 36 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and, in the case of refugees, the right to contact the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

24. As regards persons placed in administrative holding centres or in holding areas in airports, States parties should ensure that they enjoy sufficiently decent living conditions.

25. Lastly, as regards the questioning or arrest of persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble, States parties should bear in mind the special precautions to be taken when dealing with women or minors, because of their particular vulnerability.

B. Pretrial detention

26. Bearing in mind statistics which show that persons held awaiting trial include an excessively high number of non-nationals and persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble, States parties should ensure:

(a) That the mere fact of belonging to a racial or ethnic group or one of the aforementioned groups is not a sufficient reason, de jure or de facto, to place a person in pretrial detention. Such pretrial detention can be justified only on objective grounds stipulated in the law, such as the risk of flight, the risk that the person might destroy evidence or influence witnesses, or the risk of a serious disturbance of public order;

(b) That the requirement to deposit a guarantee or financial security in order to obtain release pending trial is applied in a manner appropriate to the situation of persons belonging to such groups, who are often in straitened economic circumstances, so as to prevent this requirement from leading to discrimination against such persons;

(c) That the guarantees often required of accused persons as a condition of their remaining at liberty pending trial (fixed address, declared employment, stable family ties) are weighed in the light of the insecure situation which may result from their membership of such groups, particularly in the case of women and minors;

(d) That persons belonging to such groups who are held pending trial enjoy all the rights to which prisoners are entitled under the relevant international norms, and particularly the rights specially adapted to their circumstances: the right to respect for their traditions as regards religion, culture and food, the right to relations with their families, the right to the assistance of an interpreter and, where appropriate, the right to consular assistance.

C. The trial and the court judgement

27. Prior to the trial, States parties may, where appropriate, give preference to non-judicial or parajudicial procedures for dealing with the offence, taking into account the cultural or customary background of the perpetrator, especially in the case of persons belonging to indigenous peoples.

28. In general, States parties must ensure that persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble, like all other persons, enjoy all the guarantees of a fair trial and equality before the law, as enshrined in the relevant international human rights instruments, and specifically.

1. The right to the presumption of innocence

29. This right implies that the police authorities, the judicial authorities and other public authorities must be forbidden to express their opinions publicly concerning the guilt of the accused before the court reaches a decision, much less to cast suspicion in advance on the members of a specific racial or ethnic group. These authorities have an obligation to ensure that the mass media do not disseminate information which might stigmatize certain categories of persons, particularly those belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble.

2. The right to the assistance of counsel and the right to an interpreter

30. Effectively guaranteeing these rights implies that States parties must set up a system under which counsel and interpreters will be assigned free of charge, together with legal help or advice and interpretation services for persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble.

3. The right to an independent and impartial tribunal

31. States parties should strive firmly to ensure a lack of any racial or xenophobic prejudice on the part of judges, jury members and other judicial personnel.

32. They should prevent all direct influence by pressure groups, ideologies, religions and churches on the functioning of the system of justice and on the decisions of judges, which may have a discriminatory effect on certain groups.

33. States parties may, in this regard, take into account the Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct adopted in 2002 (E/CN.4/2003/65, annex), which recommend in particular that:

- Judges should be aware of the diversity of society and differences linked with background, in particular racial origins;
- They should not, by words or conduct, manifest any bias towards persons or groups on the grounds of their racial or other origin;
- They should carry out their duties with appropriate consideration for all persons, such as the parties, witnesses, lawyers, court staff and their colleagues, without unjustified differentiation; and
- They should oppose the manifestation of prejudice by the persons under their direction and by lawyers or their adoption of discriminatory behaviour towards a person or group on the basis of their colour, racial, national, religious or sexual origin, or on other irrelevant grounds.

D. Guarantee of fair punishment

34. In this regard, States should ensure that the courts do not apply harsher punishments solely because of an accused person's membership of a specific racial or ethnic group.

35. Special attention should be paid in this regard to the system of minimum punishments and obligatory detention applicable to certain offences and to capital punishment in countries which have not abolished it, bearing in mind reports that this punishment is imposed and carried out more frequently against persons belonging to specific racial or ethnic groups.

36. In the case of persons belonging to indigenous peoples, States parties should give preference to alternatives to imprisonment and to other forms of punishment that are better adapted to their legal system, bearing in mind in particular International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries.

37. Punishments targeted exclusively at non-nationals that are additional to punishments under ordinary law, such as deportation, expulsion or banning from the country concerned, should be imposed only in exceptional circumstances and in a proportionate manner, for serious reasons related to public order which are stipulated in the law, and should take into account the need to respect the private family life of those concerned and the international protection to which they are entitled.

E. Execution of sentences

38. When persons belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble are serving prison terms, the States parties should:

(a) Guarantee such persons the enjoyment of all the rights to which prisoners are entitled under the relevant international norms, in particular rights specially adapted to their situation: the right to respect for their religious and cultural practices, the right to respect for their customs as regards food, the right to relations with their families, the right to the assistance of an interpreter, the right to basic welfare benefits and, where appropriate, the right to consular assistance. The medical, psychological or social services offered to prisoners should take their cultural background into account;

(b) Guarantee to all prisoners whose rights have been violated the right to an effective remedy before an independent and impartial authority;

(c) Comply, in this regard, with the United Nations norms in this field, and particularly the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners,⁴ the Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners⁵ and the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment;⁶

(d) Allow such persons to benefit, where appropriate, from the provisions of domestic legislation and international or bilateral conventions relating to the transfer of foreign prisoners, offering them an opportunity to serve the prison term in their countries of origin.

39. Further, the independent authorities in the States parties that are responsible for supervising prison institutions should include members who have expertise in the field of racial discrimination and sound knowledge of the problems of racial and ethnic groups and the other vulnerable groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble; when necessary, such supervisory authorities should have an effective visit and complaint mechanism.

40. When non-nationals are sentenced to deportation, expulsion or banning from their territory, States parties should comply fully with the obligation of non-refoulement arising out of the international norms concerning refugees and human rights, and ensure that such persons will not be sent back to a country or territory where they would run the risk of serious violations of their human rights.

41. Lastly, with regard to women and children belonging to the groups referred to in the last paragraph of the preamble, States parties should pay the greatest attention possible with a view to ensuring that such persons benefit from the special regime to which they are entitled in relation to the execution of sentences, bearing in mind the particular difficulties faced by mothers of families and women belonging to certain communities, particularly indigenous communities.

Notes

¹ Recommended by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1989/65 of 24 May 1989.

² Recommended by the General Assembly in its resolution 55/89 of 4 December 2000.

³ Adopted by the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Havana, 27 August-7 September 1990.

⁴ Adopted by the First United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, Geneva, 22 August-3 September 1955, and approved by the Economic and Social Council in its resolutions 663 C (XXIV) of 31 July 1957 and 2076 (LXII) of 13 May 1977.

⁵ Adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 45/111 of 14 December 1990.

⁶ Adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 43/173 of 9 December 1988.

IV. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

According to article 21, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee may make suggestions and general recommendations based on the examination of the reports and information received from the States parties. Such suggestions and general recommendations shall be included in the report of the Committee together with comments, if any, from States parties. The Committee has so far adopted a total of 20 general recommendations.

Fifth session (1986)*

General recommendation No. 1: Reporting by States parties

Initial reports submitted under article 18 of the Convention should cover the situation up to the date of submission. Thereafter, reports should be submitted at least every four years after the first report was due and should include obstacles encountered in implementing the Convention fully and the measures adopted to overcome such obstacles.

Sixth session (1987)**

General recommendation No. 2: Reporting by States parties

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Bearing in mind that the Committee had been faced with difficulties in its work because some initial reports of States parties under article 18 of the Convention did not reflect adequately the information available in the State party concerned in accordance with the guidelines,

Recommends:

- (a) That the States parties, in preparing reports under article 18 of the Convention, should follow the general guidelines adopted in August 1983 (CEDAW/C/7) as to the form, content and date of reports;
- (b) That the States parties should follow the general recommendation adopted in 1986 in these terms:

* Contained in document A/41/45.

** Contained in document A/42/38.

“Initial reports submitted under article 18 of the Convention should cover the situation up to the date of submission. Thereafter, reports should be submitted at least every four years after the first report was due and should include obstacles encountered in implementing the Convention fully and the measures adopted to overcome such obstacles.”

(c) That additional information supplementing the report of a State party should be sent to the Secretariat at least three months before the session at which the report is due to be considered.

Sixth session (1987)*

General recommendation No. 3: Education and public information campaigns

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Considering that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has considered 34 reports from States parties since 1983,

Further considering that, although the reports have come from States with different levels of development, they present features in varying degrees showing the existence of stereotyped conceptions of women, owing to sociocultural factors, that perpetuate discrimination based on sex and hinder the implementation of article 5 of the Convention,

Urges all States parties effectively to adopt education and public information programmes, which will help eliminate prejudices and current practices that hinder the full operation of the principle of the social equality of women.

Sixth session (1987)*

General recommendation No. 4: Reservations

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Having examined reports from States parties at its sessions,

Expressed concern in relation to the significant number of reservations that appeared to be incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention,

Welcomes the decision of the States parties to consider reservations at its next meeting in New York in 1988, and to that end suggests that all States parties concerned reconsider such reservations with a view to withdrawing them.

* Contained in document A/42/38.

Seventh session (1988)*

General recommendation No. 5: Temporary special measures

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Taking note that the reports, the introductory remarks and the replies by States parties reveal that while significant progress has been achieved in regard to repealing or modifying discriminatory laws, there is still a need for action to be taken to implement fully the Convention by introducing measures to promote de facto equality between men and women,

Recalling article 4.1 of the Convention,

Recommends that States parties make more use of temporary special measures such as positive action, preferential treatment or quota systems to advance women's integration into education, the economy, politics and employment.

Seventh session (1988)*

General recommendation No. 6: Effective national machinery and publicity

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Having considered the reports of States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Noting United Nations General Assembly resolution 42/60 of 30 November 1987,

Recommends that States parties:

1. Establish and/or strengthen effective national machinery, institutions and procedures, at a high level of Government, and with adequate resources, commitment and authority to:
 - (a) Advise on the impact on women of all government policies;
 - (b) Monitor the situation of women comprehensively;
 - (c) Help formulate new policies and effectively carry out strategies and measures to eliminate discrimination;
2. Take appropriate steps to ensure the dissemination of the Convention, the reports of the States parties under article 18 and the reports of the Committee in the language of the States concerned;

* Contained in document A/43/38.

3. Seek the assistance of the Secretary-General and the Department of Public Information in providing translations of the Convention and the reports of the Committee;

4. Include in their initial and periodic reports the action taken in respect of this recommendation.

Seventh session (1988)*

General recommendation No. 7: Resources

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Noting General Assembly resolutions 40/39, 41/108 and in particular 42/60, paragraph 14, which invited the Committee and the States parties to consider the question of holding future sessions of the Committee at Vienna,

Bearing in mind General Assembly resolution 42/105 and, in particular, paragraph 11, which requests the Secretary-General to strengthen coordination between the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the secretariat in relation to the implementation of human rights treaties and servicing treaty bodies,

Recommends to the States parties:

1. That they continue to support proposals for strengthening the coordination between the Centre for Human Rights at Geneva and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs at Vienna, in relation to the servicing of the Committee;

2. That they support proposals that the Committee meet in New York and Vienna;

3. That they take all necessary and appropriate steps to ensure that adequate resources and services are available to the Committee to assist it in its functions under the Convention and in particular that full-time staff are available to help the Committee to prepare for its sessions and during its session;

4. That they ensure that supplementary reports and materials are submitted to the Secretariat in due time to be translated into the official languages of the United Nations in time for distribution and consideration by the Committee.

* Contained in document A/43/38.

Seventh session (1988)*

General recommendation No. 8: Implementation of article 8 of the Convention

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Having considered the reports of States parties submitted in accordance with article 18 of the Convention,

Recommends that States parties take further direct measures in accordance with article 4 of the Convention to ensure the full implementation of article 8 of the Convention and to ensure to women on equal terms with men and without any discrimination the opportunities to represent their Government at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

Eighth session (1989)**

General recommendation No. 9: Statistical data concerning the situation of women

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Considering that statistical information is absolutely necessary in order to understand the real situation of women in each of the States parties to the Convention,

Having observed that many of the States parties that present their reports for consideration by the Committee do not provide statistics,

Recommends that States parties should make every effort to ensure that their national statistical services responsible for planning national censuses and other social and economic surveys formulate their questionnaires in such a way that data can be disaggregated according to gender, with regard to both absolute numbers and percentages, so that interested users can easily obtain information on the situation of women in the particular sector in which they are interested.

* Contained in document A/43/38.

** Contained in document A/44/38.

Eighth session (1989)*

General recommendation No. 10: Tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Considering that 18 December 1989 marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Considering further that in those 10 years the Convention has proved to be one of the most effective instruments that the United Nations has adopted to promote equality between the sexes in the societies of its States Members,

Recalling general recommendation No. 6 (Seventh session, 1988) on effective national machinery and publicity,

Recommends that, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, the States parties should consider:

1. Undertaking programmes including conferences and seminars to publicize the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the main languages of and providing information on the Convention in their respective countries;
2. Inviting their national women's organizations to cooperate in the publicity campaigns regarding the Convention and its implementation and encouraging non-governmental organizations at the national, regional and international levels to publicize the Convention and its implementation;
3. Encouraging action to ensure the full implementation of the principles of the Convention, and in particular article 8, which relates to the participation of women at all levels of activity of the United Nations and the United Nations system;
4. Requesting the Secretary-General to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention by publishing and disseminating, in cooperation with the specialized agencies, printed and other materials regarding the Convention and its implementation in all official languages of the United Nations, preparing television documentaries about the Convention, and making the necessary resources available to the Division for the Advancement of Women, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Office at Vienna, to prepare an analysis of the information provided by States parties in order to update and publish the report of the Committee (A/CONF.116/13), which was first published for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held at Nairobi in 1985.

* Contained in document A/44/38.

Eighth session (1989)*

**General recommendation No. 11: Technical advisory services
for reporting obligations**

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Bearing in mind that, as at 3 March 1989, 96 States had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Taking into account the fact that by that date 60 initial and 19 second periodic reports had been received,

Noting that 36 initial and 36 second periodic reports were due by 3 March 1989 and had not yet been received,

Welcoming the request in General Assembly resolution 43/115, paragraph 9, that the Secretary-General should arrange, within existing resources and taking into account the priorities of the programme of advisory services, further training courses for those countries experiencing the most serious difficulties in meeting their reporting obligations under international instruments on human rights,

Recommends to States parties that they should encourage, support and cooperate in projects for technical advisory services, including training seminars, to assist States parties on their request in fulfilling their reporting obligations under article 18 of the Convention.

Eighth session (1989)*

General recommendation No. 12: Violence against women

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Considering that articles 2, 5, 11, 12 and 16 of the Convention require the States parties to act to protect women against violence of any kind occurring within the family, at the workplace or in any other area of social life,

Taking into account Economic and Social Council resolution 1988/27,

Recommends to the States parties that they should include in their periodic reports to the Committee information about:

1. The legislation in force to protect women against the incidence of all kinds of violence in everyday life (including sexual violence, abuses in the family, sexual harassment at the workplace, etc.);
2. Other measures adopted to eradicate this violence;

* Contained in document A/44/38.

3. The existence of support services for women who are the victims of aggression or abuses;
4. Statistical data on the incidence of violence of all kinds against women and on women who are the victims of violence.

Eighth session (1989)*

General recommendation No. 13: Equal remuneration for work of equal value

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Recalling International Labour Organization Convention No. 100 concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, which has been ratified by a large majority of States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Recalling also that it has considered 51 initial and 5 second periodic reports of States parties since 1983,

Considering that although reports of States parties indicate that, even though the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value has been accepted in the legislation of many countries, more remains to be done to ensure the application of that principle in practice, in order to overcome the gender-segregation in the labour market,

Recommends to the States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women that:

1. In order to implement fully the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, those States parties that have not yet ratified ILO Convention No. 100 should be encouraged to do so;
2. They should consider the study, development and adoption of job evaluation systems based on gender-neutral criteria that would facilitate the comparison of the value of those jobs of a different nature, in which women presently predominate, with those jobs in which men presently predominate, and they should include the results achieved in their reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;
3. They should support, as far as practicable, the creation of implementation machinery and encourage the efforts of the parties to collective agreements, where they apply, to ensure the application of the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value.

* Contained in document A/44/38.

Ninth session (1990)*

General recommendation No. 14: Female circumcision

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Concerned about the continuation of the practice of female circumcision and other traditional practices harmful to the health of women,

Noting with satisfaction that Governments, where such practices exist, national women's organizations, non-governmental organizations, specialized agencies, such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, as well as the Commission on Human Rights and its Submission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, remain seized of the issue having particularly recognized that such traditional practices as female circumcision have serious health and other consequences for women and children,

Noting with interest the study of the Special Rapporteur on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, as well as the study of the Special Working Group on Traditional Practices,

Recognizing that women are taking important action themselves to identify and to combat practices that are prejudicial to the health and well-being of women and children,

Convinced that the important action that is being taken by women and by all interested groups needs to be supported and encouraged by Governments,

Noting with grave concern that there are continuing cultural, traditional and economic pressures which help to perpetuate harmful practices, such as female circumcision,

Recommends to States parties:

(a) That States parties take appropriate and effective measures with a view to eradicating the practice of female circumcision. Such measures could include:

The collection and dissemination by universities, medical or nursing associations, national women's organizations or other bodies of basic data about such traditional practices;

The support of women's organizations at the national and local levels working for the elimination of female circumcision and other practices harmful to women;

The encouragement of politicians, professionals, religious and community leaders at all levels including the media and the arts to cooperate in influencing attitudes towards the eradication of female circumcision;

* Contained in document A/45/38 and Corrigendum.

The introduction of appropriate educational and training programmes and seminars based on research findings about the problems arising from female circumcision;

(b) That States parties include in their national health policies appropriate strategies aimed at eradicating female circumcision in public health care. Such strategies could include the special responsibility of health personnel including traditional birth attendants to explain the harmful effects of female circumcision;

(c) That States parties invite assistance, information and advice from the appropriate organizations of the United Nations system to support and assist efforts being deployed to eliminate harmful traditional practices;

(d) That States parties include in their reports to the Committee under articles 10 and 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women information about measures taken to eliminate female circumcision.

Ninth session (1990)*

General recommendation No. 15: Avoidance of discrimination against women in national strategies for the prevention and control of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Having considered information brought to its attention on the potential effects of both the global pandemic of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and strategies to control it on the exercise of the rights of women,

Having regard to the reports and materials prepared by the World Health Organization and other United Nations organizations, organs and bodies in relation to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and, in particular, the note by the Secretary-General to the Commission on the Status of Women on the effects of AIDS on the advancement of women and the Final Document of the International Consultation on AIDS and Human Rights, held at Geneva from 26 to 28 July 1989,

Noting World Health Assembly resolution WHA 41.24 on the avoidance of discrimination in relation to HIV-infected people and people with AIDS, of 13 May 1988, resolution 1989/11 of the Commission on Human Rights on non-discrimination in the field of health, of 2 March 1989, and in particular the Paris Declaration on Women, Children and AIDS, of 30 November 1989,

Noting that the World Health Organization has announced that the theme of World Aids Day, 1 December 1990, will be "Women and Aids",

* Contained in document A/45/38.

Recommends:

(a) That States parties intensify efforts in disseminating information to increase public awareness of the risk of HIV infection and AIDS, especially in women and children, and of its effect on them;

(b) That programmes to combat AIDS should give special attention to the rights and needs of women and children, and to the factors relating to the reproductive role of women and their subordinate position in some societies which make them especially vulnerable to HIV infection;

(c) That States parties ensure the active participation of women in primary health care and take measures to enhance their role as care providers, health workers and educators in the prevention of infection with HIV;

(d) That all States parties include in their reports under article 12 of the Convention information on the effects of AIDS on the situation of women and on the action taken to cater to the needs of those women who are infected and to prevent specific discrimination against women in response to AIDS.

Tenth session (1991)*

**General recommendation No. 16: Unpaid women workers
in rural and urban family enterprises**

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Bearing in mind articles 2 (c) and 11 (c), (d) and (e) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and general recommendation No. 9 (Eighth session, 1989) on statistical data concerning the situation of women,

Taking into consideration that a high percentage of women in the States parties work without payment, social security and social benefits in enterprises owned usually by a male member of the family,

Noting that the reports presented to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women generally do not refer to the problem of unpaid women workers of family enterprises,

Affirming that unpaid work constitutes a form of women's exploitation that is contrary to the Convention,

* Contained in document A/46/38.

Recommends that States parties:

- (a) Include in their reports to the Committee information on the legal and social situation of unpaid women working in family enterprises;
- (b) Collect statistical data on women who work without payment, social security and social benefits in enterprises owned by a family member, and include these data in their report to the Committee;
- (c) Take the necessary steps to guarantee payment, social security and social benefits for women who work without such benefits in enterprises owned by a family member.

Tenth session (1991)*

General recommendation No. 17: Measurement and quantification of the unremunerated domestic activities of women and their recognition in the gross national product

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Bearing in mind article 11 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Recalling paragraph 120 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,

Affirming that the measurement and quantification of the unremunerated domestic activities of women, which contribute to development in each country, will help to reveal the de facto economic role of women,

Convinced that such measurement and quantification offers a basis for the formulation of further policies related to the advancement of women,

Noting the discussions of the Statistical Commission, at its twenty-first session, on the current revision of the System of National Accounts and the development of statistics on women,

Recommends that States parties:

- (a) Encourage and support research and experimental studies to measure and value the unremunerated domestic activities of women; for example, by conducting time-use surveys as part of their national household survey programmes and by collecting statistics disaggregated by gender on time spent on activities both in the household and on the labour market;

* Contained in document A/46/38.

(b) Take steps, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, to quantify and include the unremunerated domestic activities of women in the gross national product;

(c) Include in their reports submitted under article 18 of the Convention information on the research and experimental studies undertaken to measure and value unremunerated domestic activities, as well as on the progress made in the incorporation of the unremunerated domestic activities of women in national accounts.

Tenth session (1991)*

General recommendation No. 18: Disabled women

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Taking into consideration particularly article 3 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Having considered more than 60 periodic reports of States parties, and having recognized that they provide scarce information on disabled women,

Concerned about the situation of disabled women, who suffer from a double discrimination linked to their special living conditions,

Recalling paragraph 296 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, in which disabled women are considered as a vulnerable group under the heading “areas of special concern”,

Affirming its support for the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (1982),

Recommends that States parties provide information on disabled women in their periodic reports, and on measures taken to deal with their particular situation, including special measures to ensure that they have equal access to education and employment, health services and social security, and to ensure that they can participate in all areas of social and cultural life.

* Contained in document A/46/38.

Eleventh session (1992)*

General recommendation No. 19: Violence against women

Background

1. Gender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men.
2. In 1989, the Committee recommended that States should include in their reports information on violence and on measures introduced to deal with it (general recommendation 12, Eighth session).
3. At its tenth session in 1991, it was decided to allocate part of the eleventh session to a discussion and study on article 6 and other articles of the Convention relating to violence towards women and the sexual harassment and exploitation of women. That subject was chosen in anticipation of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, convened by the General Assembly by its resolution 45/155 of 18 December 1990.
4. The Committee concluded that not all the reports of States parties adequately reflected the close connection between discrimination against women, gender-based violence, and violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The full implementation of the Convention required States to take positive measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women.
5. The Committee suggested to States parties that in reviewing their laws and policies, and in reporting under the Convention, they should have regard to the following comments of the Committee concerning gender-based violence.

General comments

6. The Convention in article 1 defines discrimination against women. The definition of discrimination includes gender-based violence, that is, violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. Gender-based violence may breach specific provisions of the Convention, regardless of whether those provisions expressly mention violence.
7. Gender-based violence, which impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms under general international law or under human rights conventions, is discrimination within the meaning of article 1 of the Convention. These rights and freedoms include:

- (a) The right to life;

* Contained in document A/47/38.

(b) The right not to be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;

(c) The right to equal protection according to humanitarian norms in time of international or internal armed conflict;

(d) The right to liberty and security of person;

(e) The right to equal protection under the law;

(f) The right to equality in the family;

(g) The right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health;

(h) The right to just and favourable conditions of work.

8. The Convention applies to violence perpetrated by public authorities. Such acts of violence may breach that State's obligations under general international human rights law and under other conventions, in addition to breaching this Convention.

9. It is emphasized, however, that discrimination under the Convention is not restricted to action by or on behalf of Governments (see articles 2 (e), 2 (f) and 5). For example, under article 2 (e) the Convention calls on States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise. Under general international law and specific human rights covenants, States may also be responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence, and for providing compensation.

Comments on specific articles of the Convention

Articles 2 and 3

10. Articles 2 and 3 establish a comprehensive obligation to eliminate discrimination in all its forms in addition to the specific obligations under articles 5-16.

Articles 2 (f), 5 and 10 (c)

11. Traditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men or as having stereotyped roles perpetuate widespread practices involving violence or coercion, such as family violence and abuse, forced marriage, dowry deaths, acid attacks and female circumcision. Such prejudices and practices may justify gender-based violence as a form of protection or control of women. The effect of such violence on the physical and mental integrity of women is to deprive them of the equal enjoyment, exercise and knowledge of human rights and fundamental freedoms. While this comment addresses mainly actual or threatened violence the underlying consequences of these forms of gender-based violence help to maintain women in subordinate roles and contribute to their low level of political participation and to their lower level of education, skills and work opportunities.

12. These attitudes also contribute to the propagation of pornography and the depiction and other commercial exploitation of women as sexual objects, rather than as individuals. This in turn contributes to gender-based violence.

Article 6

13. States parties are required by article 6 to take measures to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of the prostitution of women.

14. Poverty and unemployment increase opportunities for trafficking in women. In addition to established forms of trafficking there are new forms of sexual exploitation, such as sex tourism, the recruitment of domestic labour from developing countries to work in developed countries, and organized marriages between women from developing countries and foreign nationals. These practices are incompatible with the equal enjoyment of rights by women and with respect for their rights and dignity. They put women at special risk of violence and abuse.

15. Poverty and unemployment force many women, including young girls, into prostitution. Prostitutes are especially vulnerable to violence because their status, which may be unlawful, tends to marginalize them. They need the equal protection of laws against rape and other forms of violence.

16. Wars, armed conflicts and the occupation of territories often lead to increased prostitution, trafficking in women and sexual assault of women, which require specific protective and punitive measures.

Article 11

17. Equality in employment can be seriously impaired when women are subjected to gender-specific violence, such as sexual harassment in the workplace.

18. Sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour as physical contact and advances, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography and sexual demands, whether by words or actions. Such conduct can be humiliating and may constitute a health and safety problem; it is discriminatory when the woman has reasonable ground to believe that her objection would disadvantage her in connection with her employment, including recruitment or promotion, or when it creates a hostile working environment.

Article 12

19. States parties are required by article 12 to take measures to ensure equal access to health care. Violence against women puts their health and lives at risk.

20. In some States there are traditional practices perpetuated by culture and tradition that are harmful to the health of women and children. These practices include dietary restrictions for pregnant women, preference for male children and female circumcision or genital mutilation.

Article 14

21. Rural women are at risk of gender-based violence because of traditional attitudes regarding the subordinate role of women that persist in many rural communities. Girls from rural communities are at special risk of violence and sexual exploitation when they leave the rural community to seek employment in towns.

Article 16 (and article 5)

22. Compulsory sterilization or abortion adversely affects women's physical and mental health, and infringes the right of women to decide on the number and spacing of their children.

23. Family violence is one of the most insidious forms of violence against women. It is prevalent in all societies. Within family relationships women of all ages are subjected to violence of all kinds, including battering, rape, other forms of sexual assault, mental and other forms of violence, which are perpetuated by traditional attitudes. Lack of economic independence forces many women to stay in violent relationships. The abrogation of their family responsibilities by men can be a form of violence, and coercion. These forms of violence put women's health at risk and impair their ability to participate in family life and public life on a basis of equality.

Specific recommendations

24. In light of these comments, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommends:

(a) States parties should take appropriate and effective measures to overcome all forms of gender-based violence, whether by public or private act;

(b) States parties should ensure that laws against family violence and abuse, rape, sexual assault and other gender-based violence give adequate protection to all women, and respect their integrity and dignity. Appropriate protective and support services should be provided for victims. Gender-sensitive training of judicial and law enforcement officers and other public officials is essential for the effective implementation of the Convention;

(c) States parties should encourage the compilation of statistics and research on the extent, causes and effects of violence, and on the effectiveness of measures to prevent and deal with violence;

(d) Effective measures should be taken to ensure that the media respect and promote respect for women;

(e) States parties in their report should identify the nature and extent of attitudes, customs and practices that perpetuate violence against women, and the kinds of violence that result. They should report the measures that they have undertaken to overcome violence, and the effect of those measures;

(f) Effective measures should be taken to overcome these attitudes and practices. States should introduce education and public information programmes to help eliminate prejudices which hinder women's equality (recommendation No. 3, 1987);

(g) Specific preventive and punitive measures are necessary to overcome trafficking and sexual exploitation;

(h) States parties in their reports should describe the extent of all these problems and the measures, including penal provisions, preventive and rehabilitation measures, that have been taken to protect women engaged in prostitution or subject to trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation. The effectiveness of these measures should also be described;

(i) Effective complaints procedures and remedies, including compensation, should be provided;

(j) States parties should include in their reports information on sexual harassment, and on measures to protect women from sexual harassment and other forms of violence of coercion in the workplace;

(k) States parties should establish or support services for victims of family violence, rape, sex assault and other forms of gender-based violence, including refuges, specially trained health workers, rehabilitation and counselling;

(l) States parties should take measures to overcome such practices and should take account of the Committee's recommendation on female circumcision (recommendation No. 14) in reporting on health issues;

(m) States parties should ensure that measures are taken to prevent coercion in regard to fertility and reproduction, and to ensure that women are not forced to seek unsafe medical procedures such as illegal abortion because of lack of appropriate services in regard to fertility control;

(n) States parties in their reports should state the extent of these problems and should indicate the measures that have been taken and their effect;

(o) States parties should ensure that services for victims of violence are accessible to rural women and that where necessary special services are provided to isolated communities;

(p) Measures to protect them from violence should include training and employment opportunities and the monitoring of the employment conditions of domestic workers;

(q) States parties should report on the risks to rural women, the extent and nature of violence and abuse to which they are subject, their need for and access to support and other services and the effectiveness of measures to overcome violence;

(r) Measures that are necessary to overcome family violence should include:

Criminal penalties where necessary and civil remedies in case of domestic violence;

Legislation to remove the defence of honour in regard to the assault or murder of a female family member;

Services to ensure the safety and security of victims of family violence, including refuges, counselling and rehabilitation programmes;

Rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence;

Support services for families where incest or sexual abuse has occurred;

(s) States parties should report on the extent of domestic violence and sexual abuse, and on the preventive, punitive and remedial measures that have been taken;

(t) That States parties should take all legal and other measures that are necessary to provide effective protection of women against gender-based violence, including, inter alia:

Effective legal measures, including penal sanctions, civil remedies compensatory provisions to protect women against all kinds of violence, including, inter alia, violence and abuse in the family, sexual assault and sexual harassment in the workplace;

Preventive measures, including public information and education programmes to change attitudes concerning the roles and status of men and women;

Protective measures, including refuges, counselling, rehabilitation and support services for women who are the victims of violence or who are at risk of violence;

(u) That States parties should report on all forms of gender-based violence, and that such reports should include all available data on the incidence of each form of violence, and on the effects of such violence on the women who are victims;

(v) That the reports of States parties should include information on the legal, preventive and protective measures that have been taken to overcome violence against women, and on the effectiveness of such measures.

Eleventh session (1992)*

General recommendation No. 20: Reservations to the Convention

1. The Committee recalled the decision of the Fourth Meeting of States parties on reservations to the Convention with regard to article 28.2, which was welcomed in general recommendation No. 4 of the Committee.

2. The Committee recommended that, in connection with preparations for the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, States parties should:

(a) Raise the question of the validity and the legal effect of reservations to the Convention in the context of reservations to other human rights treaties;

* Contained in document A/47/38.

(b) Reconsider such reservations with a view to strengthening the implementation of all human rights treaties;

(c) Consider introducing a procedure on reservations to the Convention comparable with that of other human rights treaties.

Thirteenth session (1994)*

General recommendation No. 21: Equality in marriage and family relations

1. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex) affirms the equality of human rights for women and men in society and in the family. The Convention has an important place among international treaties concerned with human rights.

2. Other conventions and declarations also confer great significance on the family and woman's status within it. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 217/A (III)), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex), the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (resolution 1040 (XI), annex), the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (resolution 1763 A (XVII), annex) and the subsequent Recommendation thereon (resolution 2018 (XX)) and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.

3. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women recalls the inalienable rights of women which are already embodied in the above-mentioned conventions and declarations, but it goes further by recognizing the importance of culture and tradition in shaping the thinking and behaviour of men and women and the significant part they play in restricting the exercise of basic rights by women.

Background

4. The year 1994 has been designated by the General Assembly in its resolution 44/82 as the International Year of the Family. The Committee wishes to take the opportunity to stress the significance of compliance with women's basic rights within the family as one of the measures which will support and encourage the national celebrations that will take place.

5. Having chosen in this way to mark the International Year of the Family, the Committee wishes to analyse three articles in the Convention that have special significance for the status of women in the family.

* Contained in document A/49/38.

Article 9

1. States parties shall grant women equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality. They shall ensure in particular that neither marriage to an alien nor change of nationality by the husband during marriage shall automatically change the nationality of the wife, render her stateless or force upon her the nationality of the husband.
2. States parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.

Comment

6. Nationality is critical to full participation in society. In general, States confer nationality on those who are born in that country. Nationality can also be acquired by reason of settlement or granted for humanitarian reasons such as statelessness. Without status as nationals or citizens, women are deprived of the right to vote or to stand for public office and may be denied access to public benefits and a choice of residence. Nationality should be capable of change by an adult woman and should not be arbitrarily removed because of marriage or dissolution of marriage or because her husband or father changes his nationality.

Article 15

1. States parties shall accord to women equality with men before the law.
2. States parties shall accord to women, in civil matters, a legal capacity identical to that of men and the same opportunities to exercise that capacity. In particular, they shall give women equal rights to conclude contracts and to administer property and shall treat them equally in all stages of procedure in courts and tribunals.
3. States parties agree that all contracts and all other private instruments of any kind with a legal effect which is directed at restricting the legal capacity of women shall be deemed null and void.
4. States parties shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile.

Comment

7. When a woman cannot enter into a contract at all, or have access to financial credit, or can do so only with her husband's or a male relative's concurrence or guarantee, she is denied legal autonomy. Any such restriction prevents her from holding property as the sole owner and precludes her from the legal management of her own business or from entering into any other form of contract. Such restrictions seriously limit the woman's ability to provide for herself and her dependants.
8. A woman's right to bring litigation is limited in some countries by law or by her access to legal advice and her ability to seek redress from the courts. In others, her status as a witness or her evidence is accorded less respect or weight than that of a man. Such laws or customs limit the woman's right effectively to pursue or retain her equal share of property and diminish her

standing as an independent, responsible and valued member of her community. When countries limit a woman's legal capacity by their laws, or permit individuals or institutions to do the same, they are denying women their rights to be equal with men and restricting women's ability to provide for themselves and their dependants.

9. Domicile is a concept in common law countries referring to the country in which a person intends to reside and to whose jurisdiction she will submit. Domicile is originally acquired by a child through its parents but, in adulthood, denotes the country in which a person normally resides and in which she intends to reside permanently. As in the case of nationality, the examination of States parties' reports demonstrates that a woman will not always be permitted at law to choose her own domicile. Domicile, like nationality, should be capable of change at will by an adult woman regardless of her marital status. Any restrictions on a woman's right to choose a domicile on the same basis as a man may limit her access to the courts in the country in which she lives or prevent her from entering and leaving a country freely and in her own right.

10. Migrant women who live and work temporarily in another country should be permitted the same rights as men to have their spouses, partners and children join them.

Article 16

1. States parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- (a) The same right to enter into marriage;
- (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
- (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;
- (d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
- (e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights;
- (f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
- (g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation;
- (h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

Comment

Public and private life

11. Historically, human activity in public and private life has been viewed differently and regulated accordingly. In all societies women who have traditionally performed their roles in the private or domestic sphere have long had those activities treated as inferior.

12. As such activities are invaluable for the survival of society, there can be no justification for applying different and discriminatory laws or customs to them. Reports of States parties disclose that there are still countries where de jure equality does not exist. Women are thereby prevented from having equal access to resources and from enjoying equality of status in the family and society. Even where de jure equality exists, all societies assign different roles, which are regarded as inferior, to women. In this way, principles of justice and equality contained in particular in article 16 and also in articles 2, 5 and 24 of the Convention are being violated.

Various forms of family

13. The form and concept of the family can vary from State to State, and even between regions within a State. Whatever form it takes, and whatever the legal system, religion, custom or tradition within the country, the treatment of women in the family both at law and in private must accord with the principles of equality and justice for all people, as article 2 of the Convention requires.

Polygamous marriages

14. States parties' reports also disclose that polygamy is practised in a number of countries. Polygamous marriage contravenes a woman's right to equality with men, and can have such serious emotional and financial consequences for her and her dependants that such marriages ought to be discouraged and prohibited. The Committee notes with concern that some States parties, whose constitutions guarantee equal rights, permit polygamous marriage in accordance with personal or customary law. This violates the constitutional rights of women, and breaches the provisions of article 5 (a) of the Convention.

Article 16 (1) (a) and (b)

15. While most countries report that national constitutions and laws comply with the Convention, custom, tradition and failure to enforce these laws in reality contravene the Convention.

16. A woman's right to choose a spouse and enter freely into marriage is central to her life and to her dignity and equality as a human being. An examination of States parties' reports discloses that there are countries which, on the basis of custom, religious beliefs or the ethnic origins of particular groups of people, permit forced marriages or remarriages. Other countries allow a woman's marriage to be arranged for payment or preferment and in others women's poverty

forces them to marry foreign nationals for financial security. Subject to reasonable restrictions based for example on a woman's youth or consanguinity with her partner, a woman's right to choose when, if, and whom she will marry must be protected and enforced at law.

Article 16 (1) (c)

17. An examination of States parties' reports discloses that many countries in their legal systems provide for the rights and responsibilities of married partners by relying on the application of common law principles, religious or customary law, rather than by complying with the principles contained in the Convention. These variations in law and practice relating to marriage have wide-ranging consequences for women, invariably restricting their rights to equal status and responsibility within marriage. Such limitations often result in the husband being accorded the status of head of household and primary decision maker and therefore contravene the provisions of the Convention.

18. Moreover, generally a de facto union is not given legal protection at all. Women living in such relationships should have their equality of status with men both in family life and in the sharing of income and assets protected by law. Such women should share equal rights and responsibilities with men for the care and raising of dependent children or family members.

Article 16 (1) (d) and (f)

19. As provided in article 5 (b), most States recognize the shared responsibility of parents for the care, protection and maintenance of children. The principle that "the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration" has been included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex) and seems now to be universally accepted. However, in practice, some countries do not observe the principle of granting the parents of children equal status, particularly when they are not married. The children of such unions do not always enjoy the same status as those born in wedlock and, where the mothers are divorced or living apart, many fathers fail to share the responsibility of care, protection and maintenance of their children.

20. The shared rights and responsibilities enunciated in the Convention should be enforced at law and as appropriate through legal concepts of guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption. States parties should ensure that by their laws both parents, regardless of their marital status and whether they live with their children or not, share equal rights and responsibilities for their children.

Article 16 (1) (e)

21. The responsibilities that women have to bear and raise children affect their right of access to education, employment and other activities related to their personal development. They also impose inequitable burdens of work on women. The number and spacing of their children have a similar impact on women's lives and also affect their physical and mental health, as well as that of their children. For these reasons, women are entitled to decide on the number and spacing of their children.

22. Some reports disclose coercive practices which have serious consequences for women, such as forced pregnancies, abortions or sterilization. Decisions to have children or not, while preferably made in consultation with spouse or partner, must not nevertheless be limited by spouse, parent, partner or Government. In order to make an informed decision about safe and reliable contraceptive measures, women must have information about contraceptive measures and their use, and guaranteed access to sex education and family planning services, as provided in article 10 (h) of the Convention.

23. There is general agreement that where there are freely available appropriate measures for the voluntary regulation of fertility, the health, development and well-being of all members of the family improve. Moreover, such services improve the general quality of life and health of the population, and the voluntary regulation of population growth helps preserve the environment and achieve sustainable economic and social development.

Article 16 (1) (g)

24. A stable family is one which is based on principles of equity, justice and individual fulfilment for each member. Each partner must therefore have the right to choose a profession or employment that is best suited to his or her abilities, qualifications and aspirations, as provided in article 11 (a) and (c) of the Convention. Moreover, each partner should have the right to choose his or her name, thereby preserving individuality and identity in the community and distinguishing that person from other members of society. When by law or custom a woman is obliged to change her name on marriage or at its dissolution, she is denied these rights.

Article 16 (1) (h)

25. The rights provided in this article overlap with and complement those in article 15 (2) in which an obligation is placed on States to give women equal rights to enter into and conclude contracts and to administer property.

26. Article 15 (1) guarantees women equality with men before the law. The right to own, manage, enjoy and dispose of property is central to a woman's right to enjoy financial independence, and in many countries will be critical to her ability to earn a livelihood and to provide adequate housing and nutrition for herself and for her family.

27. In countries that are undergoing a programme of agrarian reform or redistribution of land among groups of different ethnic origins, the right of women, regardless of marital status, to share such redistributed land on equal terms with men should be carefully observed.

28. In most countries, a significant proportion of the women are single or divorced and many have the sole responsibility to support a family. Any discrimination in the division of property that rests on the premise that the man alone is responsible for the support of the women and children of his family and that he can and will honourably discharge this responsibility is clearly unrealistic. Consequently, any law or custom that grants men a right to a greater share of property at the end of a marriage or de facto relationship, or on the death of a relative, is discriminatory and will have a serious impact on a woman's practical ability to divorce her husband, to support herself or her family and to live in dignity as an independent person.

29. All of these rights should be guaranteed regardless of a woman's marital status.

Marital property

30. There are countries that do not acknowledge that right of women to own an equal share of the property with the husband during a marriage or de facto relationship and when that marriage or relationship ends. Many countries recognize that right, but the practical ability of women to exercise it may be limited by legal precedent or custom.

31. Even when these legal rights are vested in women, and the courts enforce them, property owned by a woman during marriage or on divorce may be managed by a man. In many States, including those where there is a community-property regime, there is no legal requirement that a woman be consulted when property owned by the parties during marriage or de facto relationship is sold or otherwise disposed of. This limits the woman's ability to control disposition of the property or the income derived from it.

32. In some countries, on division of marital property, greater emphasis is placed on financial contributions to property acquired during a marriage, and other contributions, such as raising children, caring for elderly relatives and discharging household duties are diminished. Often, such contributions of a non-financial nature by the wife enable the husband to earn an income and increase the assets. Financial and non-financial contributions should be accorded the same weight.

33. In many countries, property accumulated during a de facto relationship is not treated at law on the same basis as property acquired during marriage. Invariably, if the relationship ends, the woman receives a significantly lower share than her partner. Property laws and customs that discriminate in this way against married or unmarried women with or without children should be revoked and discouraged.

Inheritance

34. Reports of States parties should include comment on the legal or customary provisions relating to inheritance laws as they affect the status of women as provided in the Convention and in Economic and Social Council resolution 884D (XXXIV), in which the Council recommended that States ensure that men and women in the same degree of relationship to a deceased are entitled to equal shares in the estate and to equal rank in the order of succession. That provision has not been generally implemented.

35. There are many countries where the law and practice concerning inheritance and property result in serious discrimination against women. As a result of this uneven treatment, women may receive a smaller share of the husband's or father's property at his death than would widowers and sons. In some instances, women are granted limited and controlled rights and receive income only from the deceased's property. Often inheritance rights for widows do not reflect the principles of equal ownership of property acquired during marriage. Such provisions contravene the Convention and should be abolished.

Article 16 (2)

36. In the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, held at Vienna from 14 to 25 June 1993, States are urged to repeal existing laws and regulations and to remove customs and practices which discriminate against and cause harm to the girl child. Article 16 (2) and the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child preclude States parties from permitting or giving validity to a marriage between persons who have not attained their majority. In the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, “a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. Notwithstanding this definition, and bearing in mind the provisions of the Vienna Declaration, the Committee considers that the minimum age for marriage should be 18 years for both man and woman. When men and women marry, they assume important responsibilities. Consequently, marriage should not be permitted before they have attained full maturity and capacity to act. According to the World Health Organization, when minors, particularly girls, marry and have children, their health can be adversely affected and their education is impeded. As a result their economic autonomy is restricted.

37. This not only affects women personally but also limits the development of their skills and independence and reduces access to employment, thereby detrimentally affecting their families and communities.

38. Some countries provide for different ages for marriage for men and women. As such provisions assume incorrectly that women have a different rate of intellectual development from men, or that their stage of physical and intellectual development at marriage is immaterial, these provisions should be abolished. In other countries, the betrothal of girls or undertakings by family members on their behalf is permitted. Such measures contravene not only the Convention, but also a woman’s right freely to choose her partner.

39. States parties should also require the registration of all marriages whether contracted civilly or according to custom or religious law. The State can thereby ensure compliance with the Convention and establish equality between partners, a minimum age for marriage, prohibition of bigamy and polygamy and the protection of the rights of children.

Recommendations

Violence against women

40. In considering the place of women in family life, the Committee wishes to stress that the provisions of general recommendation 19 (Eleventh session) concerning violence against women have great significance for women’s abilities to enjoy rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men. States parties are urged to comply with that general recommendation to ensure that, in both public and family life, women will be free of the gender-based violence that so seriously impedes their rights and freedoms as individuals.

Reservations

41. The Committee has noted with alarm the number of States parties which have entered reservations to the whole or part of article 16, especially when a reservation has also been

entered to article 2, claiming that compliance may conflict with a commonly held vision of the family based, inter alia, on cultural or religious beliefs or on the country's economic or political status.

42. Many of these countries hold a belief in the patriarchal structure of a family which places a father, husband or son in a favourable position. In some countries where fundamentalist or other extremist views or economic hardships have encouraged a return to old values and traditions, women's place in the family has deteriorated sharply. In others, where it has been recognized that a modern society depends for its economic advance and for the general good of the community on involving all adults equally, regardless of gender, these taboos and reactionary or extremist ideas have progressively been discouraged.

43. Consistent with articles 2, 3 and 24 in particular, the Committee requires that all States parties gradually progress to a stage where, by its resolute discouragement of notions of the inequality of women in the home, each country will withdraw its reservation, in particular to articles 9, 15 and 16 of the Convention.

44. States parties should resolutely discourage any notions of inequality of women and men which are affirmed by laws, or by religious or private law or by custom, and progress to the stage where reservations, particularly to article 16, will be withdrawn.

45. The Committee noted, on the basis of its examination of initial and subsequent periodic reports, that in some States parties to the Convention that had ratified or acceded without reservation, certain laws, especially those dealing with family, do not actually conform to the provisions of the Convention.

46. Their laws still contain many measures which discriminate against women based on norms, customs and sociocultural prejudices. These States, because of their specific situation regarding these articles, make it difficult for the Committee to evaluate and understand the status of women.

47. The Committee, in particular on the basis of articles 1 and 2 of the Convention, requests that those States parties make the necessary efforts to examine the de facto situation relating to the issues and to introduce the required measures in their national legislations still containing provisions discriminatory to women.

Reports

48. Assisted by the comments in the present general recommendation, in their reports States parties should:

(a) Indicate the stage that has been reached in the country's progress to removal of all reservations to the Convention, in particular reservations to article 16;

(b) Set out whether their laws comply with the principles of articles 9, 15 and 16 and where, by reason of religious or private law or custom, compliance with the law or with the Convention is impeded.

Legislation

49. States parties should, where necessary to comply with the Convention, in particular in order to comply with articles 9, 15 and 16, enact and enforce legislation.

Encouraging compliance with the Convention

50. Assisted by the comments in the present general recommendation, and as required by articles 2, 3 and 24, States parties should introduce measures directed at encouraging full compliance with the principles of the Convention, particularly where religious or private law or custom conflict with those principles.

Fourteenth session (1995)*

General recommendation No. 22: Amending article 20 of the Convention

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Noting that the States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, at the request of the General Assembly, will meet during 1995 to consider amending article 20 of the Convention,

Recalling its previous decision, taken at its tenth session, to ensure effectiveness in its work and prevent the building up of an undesirable backlog in the consideration of reports of States parties,

Recalling that the Convention is one of the international human rights instruments that has been ratified by the largest number of States parties,

Considering that the articles of the Convention address the fundamental human rights of women in all aspects of their daily lives and in all areas of society and the State,

Concerned about the workload of the Committee as a result of the growing number of ratifications, in addition to the backlog of reports pending consideration, as reflected in annex I,

Concerned also about the long lapse of time between the submission of reports of States parties and their consideration, resulting in the need for States to provide additional information for updating their reports,

Bearing in mind that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is the only human rights treaty body whose meeting time is limited by its Convention, and that it has the shortest duration of meeting time of all the human rights treaty bodies, as reflected in annex II,

* Contained in document A/50/38.

Noting that the limitation on the duration of sessions, as contained in the Convention has become a serious obstacle to the effective performance by the Committee of its functions under the Convention,

1. *Recommends* that the States parties favourably consider amending article 20 of the Convention in respect of the meeting time of the Committee, so as to allow it to meet annually for such duration as is necessary for the effective performance of its functions under the Convention, with no specific restriction except for that which the General Assembly shall decide;

2. *Recommends also* that the General Assembly, pending the completion of an amendment process, authorize the Committee to meet exceptionally in 1996 for two sessions, each of three weeks' duration and each being preceded by pre-session working groups;

3. *Recommends further* that the meeting of States parties receive an oral report from the Chairperson of the Committee on the difficulties faced by the Committee in performing its functions;

4. *Recommends* that the Secretary-General make available to the States parties at their meeting all relevant information on the workload of the Committee and comparative information in respect of the other human rights treaty bodies.

Sixteenth session (1997)*

General recommendation No. 23: Political and public life

States parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

(a) To vote in all elections and public referendums and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;

(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

(c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

Background

1. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women places special importance on the participation of women in the public life of their countries. The preamble to the Convention states in part:

* Contained in document A/52/38.

“*Recalling* that discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity.”

2. The Convention further reiterates in its preamble the importance of women’s participation in decision-making as follows:

“*Convinced* that the full and complete development of a country, the welfare of the world and the cause of peace require the maximum participation of women on equal terms with men in all fields.”

3. Moreover, in article 1 of the Convention, the term “discrimination against women” is interpreted to mean:

“any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”

4. Other conventions, declarations and international analyses place great importance on the participation of women in public life and have set a framework of international standards of equality. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹ the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,² the Convention on the Political Rights of Women,³ the Vienna Declaration,⁴ paragraph 13 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,⁵ general recommendations 5 and 8 under the Convention,⁶ general comment No. 25 adopted by the Human Rights Committee,⁷ the recommendation adopted by the Council of the European Union on balanced participation of women and men in the decision-making process⁸ and the European Commission’s “How to Create a Gender Balance in Political Decision-making”.⁹

5. Article 7 obliges States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life and to ensure that they enjoy equality with men in political and public life. The obligation specified in article 7 extends to all areas of public and political life and is not limited to those areas specified in subparagraphs (a), (b) and (c). The political and public life of a country is a broad concept. It refers to the exercise of political power, in particular the exercise of legislative, judicial, executive and administrative powers. The term covers all aspects of public administration and the formulation and implementation of policy at the international, national, regional and local levels. The concept also includes many aspects of civil society, including public boards and local councils and the activities of organizations such as political parties, trade unions, professional or industry associations, women’s organizations, community-based organizations and other organizations concerned with public and political life.

6. The Convention envisages that, to be effective, this equality must be achieved within the framework of a political system in which each citizen enjoys the right to vote and be elected at genuine periodic elections held on the basis of universal suffrage and by secret ballot, in such a way as to guarantee the free expression of the will of the electorate, as provided for under international human rights instruments, such as article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

7. The Convention's emphasis on the importance of equality of opportunity and of participation in public life and decision-making has led the Committee to review article 7 and to suggest to States parties that in reviewing their laws and policies and in reporting under the Convention, they should take into account the comments and recommendations set out below.

Comments

8. Public and private spheres of human activity have always been considered distinct, and have been regulated accordingly. Invariably, women have been assigned to the private or domestic sphere, associated with reproduction and the raising of children, and in all societies these activities have been treated as inferior. By contrast, public life, which is respected and honoured, extends to a broad range of activity outside the private and domestic sphere. Men historically have both dominated public life and exercised the power to confine and subordinate women within the private sphere.

9. Despite women's central role in sustaining the family and society and their contribution to development, they have been excluded from political life and the decision-making process, which nonetheless determine the pattern of their daily lives and the future of societies. Particularly in times of crisis, this exclusion has silenced women's voices and rendered invisible their contribution and experiences.

10. In all nations, the most significant factors inhibiting women's ability to participate in public life have been the cultural framework of values and religious beliefs, the lack of services and men's failure to share the tasks associated with the organization of the household and with the care and raising of children. In all nations, cultural traditions and religious beliefs have played a part in confining women to the private spheres of activity and excluding them from active participation in public life.

11. Relieving women of some of the burdens of domestic work would allow them to engage more fully in the life of their communities. Women's economic dependence on men often prevents them from making important political decisions and from participating actively in public life. Their double burden of work and their economic dependence, coupled with the long or inflexible hours of both public and political work, prevent women from being more active.

12. Stereotyping, including that perpetrated by the media, confines women in political life to issues such as the environment, children and health, and excludes them from responsibility for finance, budgetary control and conflict resolution. The low involvement of women in the professions from which politicians are recruited can create another obstacle. In countries where women leaders do assume power this can be the result of the influence of their fathers, husbands or male relatives rather than electoral success in their own right.

Political systems

13. The principle of equality of women and men has been affirmed in the constitutions and laws of most countries and in all international instruments. Nonetheless, in the last 50 years, women have not achieved equality, and their inequality has been reinforced by their low level of participation in public and political life. Policies developed and decisions made by men alone reflect only part of human experience and potential. The just and effective organization of society demands the inclusion and participation of all its members.

14. No political system has conferred on women both the right to and the benefit of full and equal participation. While democratic systems have improved women's opportunities for involvement in political life, the many economic, social and cultural barriers they continue to face have seriously limited their participation. Even historically stable democracies have failed to integrate fully and equally the opinions and interests of the female half of the population. Societies in which women are excluded from public life and decision-making cannot be described as democratic. The concept of democracy will have real and dynamic meaning and lasting effect only when political decision-making is shared by women and men and takes equal account of the interests of both. The examination of States parties' reports shows that where there is full and equal participation of women in public life and decision-making, the implementation of their rights and compliance with the Convention improves.

Temporary special measures

15. While removal of de jure barriers is necessary, it is not sufficient. Failure to achieve full and equal participation of women can be unintentional and the result of outmoded practices and procedures which inadvertently promote men. Under article 4, the Convention encourages the use of temporary special measures in order to give full effect to articles 7 and 8. Where countries have developed effective temporary strategies in an attempt to achieve equality of participation, a wide range of measures has been implemented, including recruiting, financially assisting and training women candidates, amending electoral procedures, developing campaigns directed at equal participation, setting numerical goals and quotas and targeting women for appointment to public positions such as the judiciary or other professional groups that play an essential part in the everyday life of all societies. The formal removal of barriers and the introduction of temporary special measures to encourage the equal participation of both men and women in the public life of their societies are essential prerequisites to true equality in political life. In order, however, to overcome centuries of male domination of the public sphere, women also require the encouragement and support of all sectors of society to achieve full and effective participation, encouragement which must be led by States parties to the Convention, as well as by political parties and public officials. States parties have an obligation to ensure that temporary special measures are clearly designed to support the principle of equality and therefore comply with constitutional principles which guarantee equality to all citizens.

Summary

16. The critical issue, emphasized in the Beijing Platform for Action,⁵ is the gap between the de jure and de facto, or the right as against the reality of women's participation in politics

and public life generally. Research demonstrates that if women's participation reaches 30 to 35 per cent (generally termed a "critical mass"), there is a real impact on political style and the content of decisions, and political life is revitalized.

17. In order to achieve broad representation in public life, women must have full equality in the exercise of political and economic power; they must be fully and equally involved in decision-making at all levels, both nationally and internationally, so that they may make their contribution to the goals of equality, development and the achievement of peace. A gender perspective is critical if these goals are to be met and if true democracy is to be assured. For these reasons, it is essential to involve women in public life to take advantage of their contribution, to assure their interests are protected and to fulfil the guarantee that the enjoyment of human rights is for all people regardless of gender. Women's full participation is essential not only for their empowerment but also for the advancement of society as a whole.

The right to vote and to be elected (art. 7, para. (a))

18. The Convention obliges States parties in constitutions or legislation to take appropriate steps to ensure that women, on the basis of equality with men, enjoy the right to vote in all elections and referendums, and to be elected. These rights must be enjoyed both de jure and de facto.

19. The examination of the reports of States parties demonstrates that, while almost all have adopted constitutional or other legal provisions that grant to both women and men the equal right to vote in all elections and public referendums, in many nations women continue to experience difficulties in exercising this right.

20. Factors which impede these rights include the following:

(a) Women frequently have less access than men to information about candidates and about party political platforms and voting procedures, information which Governments and political parties have failed to provide. Other important factors that inhibit women's full and equal exercise of their right to vote include their illiteracy, their lack of knowledge and understanding of political systems or about the impact that political initiatives and policies will have upon their lives. Failure to understand the rights, responsibilities and opportunities for change conferred by franchise also means that women are not always registered to vote;

(b) Women's double burden of work, as well as financial constraints, will limit women's time or opportunity to follow electoral campaigns and to have the full freedom to exercise their vote;

(c) In many nations, traditions and social and cultural stereotypes discourage women from exercising their right to vote. Many men influence or control the votes of women by persuasion or direct action, including voting on their behalf. Any such practices should be prevented;

(d) Other factors that in some countries inhibit women's involvement in the public or political lives of their communities include restrictions on their freedom of movement or right to participate, prevailing negative attitudes towards women's political participation, or a lack of

confidence in and support for female candidates by the electorate. In addition, some women consider involvement in politics to be distasteful and avoid participation in political campaigns.

21. These factors at least partially explain the paradox that women, who represent half of all electorates, do not wield their political power or form blocs which would promote their interests or change government, or eliminate discriminatory policies.

22. The system of balloting, the distribution of seats in Parliament, the choice of district, all have a significant impact on the proportion of women elected to Parliament. Political parties must embrace the principles of equal opportunity and democracy and endeavour to balance the number of male and female candidates.

23. The enjoyment of the right to vote by women should not be subject to restrictions or conditions that do not apply to men or that have a disproportionate impact on women. For example, limiting the right to vote to persons who have a specified level of education, who possess a minimum property qualification or who are literate is not only unreasonable, it may violate the universal guarantee of human rights. It is also likely to have a disproportionate impact on women, thereby contravening the provisions of the Convention.

The right to participate in formulation of government policy (art. 7, para. (b))

24. The participation of women in government at the policy level continues to be low in general. Although significant progress has been made and in some countries equality has been achieved, in many countries women's participation has actually been reduced.

25. Article 7 (b) also requires States parties to ensure that women have the right to participate fully in and be represented in public policy formulation in all sectors and at all levels. This would facilitate the mainstreaming of gender issues and contribute a gender perspective to public policy-making.

26. States parties have a responsibility, where it is within their control, both to appoint women to senior decision-making roles and, as a matter of course, to consult and incorporate the advice of groups which are broadly representative of women's views and interests.

27. States parties have a further obligation to ensure that barriers to women's full participation in the formulation of government policy are identified and overcome. These barriers include complacency when token women are appointed, and traditional and customary attitudes that discourage women's participation. When women are not broadly represented in the senior levels of government or are inadequately or not consulted at all, government policy will not be comprehensive and effective.

28. While States parties generally hold the power to appoint women to senior cabinet and administrative positions, political parties also have a responsibility to ensure that women are included in party lists and nominated for election in areas where they have a likelihood of electoral success. States parties should also endeavour to ensure that women are appointed to government advisory bodies on an equal basis with men and that these bodies take into account, as appropriate, the views of representative women's groups. It is the Government's fundamental

responsibility to encourage these initiatives to lead and guide public opinion and change attitudes that discriminate against women or discourage women's involvement in political and public life.

29. Measures that have been adopted by a number of States parties in order to ensure equal participation by women in senior cabinet and administrative positions and as members of government advisory bodies include: adoption of a rule whereby, when potential appointees are equally qualified, preference will be given to a woman nominee; the adoption of a rule that neither sex should constitute less than 40 per cent of the members of a public body; a quota for women members of cabinet and for appointment to public office; and consultation with women's organizations to ensure that qualified women are nominated for membership in public bodies and offices and the development and maintenance of registers of such women in order to facilitate the nomination of women for appointment to public bodies and posts. Where members are appointed to advisory bodies upon the nomination of private organizations, States parties should encourage these organizations to nominate qualified and suitable women for membership in these bodies.

The right to hold public office and to perform all public functions (art. 7, para. (b))

30. The examination of the reports of States parties demonstrates that women are excluded from top-ranking positions in cabinets, the civil service and in public administration, in the judiciary and in justice systems. Women are rarely appointed to these senior or influential positions and while their numbers may in some States be increasing at the lower levels and in posts usually associated with the home or the family, they form only a tiny minority in decision-making positions concerned with economic policy or development, political affairs, defence, peacemaking missions, conflict resolution or constitutional interpretation and determination.

31. Examination of the reports of States parties also demonstrates that in certain cases the law excludes women from exercising royal powers, from serving as judges in religious or traditional tribunals vested with jurisdiction on behalf of the State or from full participation in the military. These provisions discriminate against women, deny to society the advantages of their involvement and skills in these areas of the life of their communities and contravene the principles of the Convention.

The right to participate in non-governmental and public and political organizations (art. 7, para. (c))

32. An examination of the reports of States parties demonstrates that, on the few occasions when information concerning political parties is provided, women are underrepresented or concentrated in less influential roles than men. As political parties are an important vehicle in decision-making roles, Governments should encourage political parties to examine the extent to which women are full and equal participants in their activities and, where this is not the case, should identify the reasons for this. Political parties should be encouraged to adopt effective measures, including the provision of information, financial and other resources, to overcome obstacles to women's full participation and representation and ensure that women have an equal opportunity in practice to serve as party officials and to be nominated as candidates for election.

33. Measures that have been adopted by some political parties include setting aside for women a certain minimum number or percentage of positions on their executive bodies, ensuring that there is a balance between the number of male and female candidates nominated for election, and ensuring that women are not consistently assigned to less favourable constituencies or to the least advantageous positions on a party list. States parties should ensure that such temporary special measures are specifically permitted under anti-discrimination legislation or other constitutional guarantees of equality.

34. Other organizations such as trade unions and political parties have an obligation to demonstrate their commitment to the principle of gender equality in their constitutions, in the application of those rules and in the composition of their memberships with gender-balanced representation on their executive boards so that these bodies may benefit from the full and equal participation of all sectors of society and from contributions made by both sexes. These organizations also provide a valuable training ground for women in political skills, participation and leadership, as do non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Article 8 (international level)

States parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

Comments

35. Under article 8, Governments are obliged to ensure the presence of women at all levels and in all areas of international affairs. This requires that they be included in economic and military matters, in both multilateral and bilateral diplomacy, and in official delegations to international and regional conferences.

36. From an examination of the reports of States parties, it is evident that women are grossly underrepresented in the diplomatic and foreign services of most Governments, and particularly at the highest ranks. Women tend to be assigned to embassies of lesser importance to the country's foreign relations and in some cases women are discriminated against in terms of their appointments by restrictions pertaining to their marital status. In other instances spousal and family benefits accorded to male diplomats are not available to women in parallel positions. Opportunities for women to engage in international work are often denied because of assumptions about their domestic responsibilities, including that the care of family dependants will prevent them accepting appointment.

37. Many Permanent Missions to the United Nations and to other international organizations have no women among their diplomats and very few at senior levels. The situation is similar at expert meetings and conferences that establish international and global goals, agendas and priorities. Organizations of the United Nations system and various economic, political and military structures at the regional level have become important international public employers, but here, too, women have remained a minority concentrated in lower-level positions.

38. There are few opportunities for women and men, on equal terms, to represent Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations. This is frequently the result of an absence of objective criteria and processes for appointment and promotion to relevant positions and official delegations.

39. The globalization of the contemporary world makes the inclusion of women and their participation in international organizations, on equal terms with men, increasingly important. The integration of a gender perspective and women's human rights into the agenda of all international bodies is a government imperative. Many crucial decisions on global issues, such as peacemaking and conflict resolution, military expenditure and nuclear disarmament, development and the environment, foreign aid and economic restructuring, are taken with limited participation of women. This is in stark contrast to their participation in these areas at the non-governmental level.

40. The inclusion of a critical mass of women in international negotiations, peacekeeping activities, all levels of preventive diplomacy, mediation, humanitarian assistance, social reconciliation, peace negotiations and the international criminal justice system will make a difference. In addressing armed or other conflicts, a gender perspective and analysis is necessary to understand their differing effects on women and men.¹⁰

Recommendations

Articles 7 and 8

41. States parties should ensure that their constitutions and legislation comply with the principles of the Convention, and in particular with articles 7 and 8.

42. States parties are under an obligation to take all appropriate measures, including the enactment of appropriate legislation that complies with their Constitution, to ensure that organizations such as political parties and trade unions, which may not be subject directly to obligations under the Convention, do not discriminate against women and respect the principles contained in articles 7 and 8.

43. States parties should identify and implement temporary special measures to ensure the equal representation of women in all fields covered by articles 7 and 8.

44. States parties should explain the reason for, and effect of, any reservations to articles 7 or 8 and indicate where the reservations reflect traditional, customary or stereotyped attitudes towards women's roles in society, as well as the steps being taken by the States parties to change those attitudes. States parties should keep the necessity for such reservations under close review and in their reports include a timetable for their removal.

Article 7

45. Measures that should be identified, implemented and monitored for effectiveness include, under article 7, paragraph (a), those designed to:

- (a) Achieve a balance between women and men holding publicly elected positions;

(b) Ensure that women understand their right to vote, the importance of this right and how to exercise it;

(c) Ensure that barriers to equality are overcome, including those resulting from illiteracy, language, poverty and impediments to women's freedom of movement;

(d) Assist women experiencing such disadvantages to exercise their right to vote and to be elected.

46. Under article 7, paragraph (b), such measures include those designed to ensure:

(a) Equality of representation of women in the formulation of government policy;

(b) Women's enjoyment in practice of the equal right to hold public office;

(c) Recruiting processes directed at women that are open and subject to appeal.

47. Under article 7, paragraph (c), such measures include those designed to:

(a) Ensure that effective legislation is enacted prohibiting discrimination against women;

(b) Encourage non-governmental organizations and public and political associations to adopt strategies that encourage women's representation and participation in their work.

48. When reporting under article 7, States parties should:

(a) Describe the legal provisions that give effect to the rights contained in article 7;

(b) Provide details of any restrictions to those rights, whether arising from legal provisions or from traditional, religious or cultural practices;

(c) Describe the measures introduced and designed to overcome barriers to the exercise of those rights;

(d) Include statistical data, disaggregated by sex, showing the percentage of women relative to men who enjoy those rights;

(e) Describe the types of policy formulation, including that associated with development programmes, in which women participate and the level and extent of their participation;

(f) Under article 7, paragraph (c), describe the extent to which women participate in non-governmental organizations in their countries, including in women's organizations;

(g) Analyse the extent to which the State party ensures that those organizations are consulted and the impact of their advice on all levels of government policy formulation and implementation;

(h) Provide information concerning, and analyse factors contributing to, the underrepresentation of women as members and officials of political parties, trade unions, employers' organizations and professional associations.

Article 8

49. Measures which should be identified, implemented and monitored for effectiveness include those designed to ensure a better gender balance in membership of all United Nations bodies, including the Main Committees of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and expert bodies, including treaty bodies, and in appointments to independent working groups or as country or special rapporteurs.

50. When reporting under article 8, States parties should:

(a) Provide statistics, disaggregated by sex, showing the percentage of women in their foreign service or regularly engaged in international representation or in work on behalf of the State, including membership in government delegations to international conferences and nominations for peacekeeping or conflict resolution roles, and their seniority in the relevant sector;

(b) Describe efforts to establish objective criteria and processes for appointment and promotion of women to relevant positions and official delegations;

(c) Describe steps taken to disseminate widely information on the Government's international commitments affecting women and official documents issued by multilateral forums, in particular, to both governmental and non-governmental bodies responsible for the advancement of women;

(d) Provide information concerning discrimination against women because of their political activities, whether as individuals or as members of women's or other organizations.

Notes

¹ General Assembly resolution 217 A (III).

² General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

³ General Assembly resolution 640 (VII).

⁴ *Report of the World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 14-25 June 1993 (A/CONF.157/24 (Part I)), chap. III.*

⁵ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20 and Add.1), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I.*

⁶ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/43/38), chap. V.*

⁷ CCPR/21/21/Rev.1/Add.7, 27 August 1996.

⁸ 96/694/EC, Brussels, 2 December 1996.

⁹ European Commission document V/1206/96-EN (March 1996).

¹⁰ See paragraph 141 of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20, chap. I, resolution 1, annex II). See also paragraph 134, which reads in part: “The equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.”

Twentieth session (1999)*

General recommendation No. 24: Article 12 of the Convention (women and health)

1. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, affirming that access to health care, including reproductive health, is a basic right under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, decided at its twentieth session, pursuant to article 21, to elaborate a general recommendation on article 12 of the Convention.

Background

2. States parties' compliance with article 12 of the Convention is central to the health and well-being of women. It requires States to eliminate discrimination against women in their access to health-care services throughout the life cycle, particularly in the areas of family planning, pregnancy and confinement and during the post-natal period. The examination of reports submitted by States parties pursuant to article 18 of the Convention demonstrates that women's health is an issue that is recognized as a central concern in promoting the health and well-being of women. For the benefit of States parties and those who have a particular interest in and concern with the issues surrounding women's health, the present general recommendation seeks to elaborate the Committee's understanding of article 12 and to address measures to eliminate discrimination in order to realize the right of women to the highest attainable standard of health.

3. Recent United Nations world conferences have also considered these objectives. In preparing this general recommendation, the Committee has taken into account relevant programmes of action adopted at United Nations world conferences and, in particular, those of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. The Committee has also noted the work of the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other United Nations bodies. It has collaborated with a large number of non-governmental organizations with a special expertise in women's health in preparing this general recommendation.

4. The Committee notes the emphasis that other United Nations instruments place on the right to health and to the conditions that enable good health to be achieved. Among such instruments

* Contained in document A/54/38/Rev.1, chap. I.

are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

5. The Committee refers also to its earlier general recommendations on female circumcision, human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS), disabled women, violence against women and equality in family relations, all of which refer to issues that are integral to full compliance with article 12 of the Convention.

6. While biological differences between women and men may lead to differences in health status, there are societal factors that are determinative of the health status of women and men and can vary among women themselves. For that reason, special attention should be given to the health needs and rights of women belonging to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, such as migrant women, refugee and internally displaced women, the girl child and older women, women in prostitution, indigenous women and women with physical or mental disabilities.

7. The Committee notes that the full realization of women's right to health can be achieved only when States parties fulfil their obligation to respect, protect and promote women's fundamental human right to nutritional well-being throughout their lifespan by means of a food supply that is safe, nutritious and adapted to local conditions. To this end, States parties should take steps to facilitate physical and economic access to productive resources, especially for rural women, and to otherwise ensure that the special nutritional needs of all women within their jurisdiction are met.

Article 12

8. Article 12 reads as follows:

“1. States parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health-care services, including those related to family planning.

“2. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article, States parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.”

States parties are encouraged to address the issue of women's health throughout the woman's lifespan. For the purposes of the present general recommendation, therefore, “women” includes girls and adolescents. The general recommendation will set out the Committee's analysis of the key elements of article 12.

Key elements

Article 12 (1)

9. States parties are in the best position to report on the most critical health issues affecting women in that country. Therefore, in order to enable the Committee to evaluate whether

measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care are appropriate, States parties must report on their health legislation, plans and policies for women with reliable data disaggregated by sex on the incidence and severity of diseases and conditions hazardous to women's health and nutrition and on the availability and cost-effectiveness of preventive and curative measures. Reports to the Committee must demonstrate that health legislation, plans and policies are based on scientific and ethical research and assessment of the health status and needs of women in that country and take into account any ethnic, regional or community variations or practices based on religion, tradition or culture.

10. States parties are encouraged to include in their reports information on diseases, health conditions and conditions hazardous to health that affect women or certain groups of women differently from men, as well as information on possible intervention in this regard.

11. Measures to eliminate discrimination against women are considered to be inappropriate if a health-care system lacks services to prevent, detect and treat illnesses specific to women. It is discriminatory for a State party to refuse to provide legally for the performance of certain reproductive health services for women. For instance, if health service providers refuse to perform such services based on conscientious objection, measures should be introduced to ensure that women are referred to alternative health providers.

12. States parties should report on their understanding of how policies and measures on health care address the health rights of women from the perspective of women's needs and interests and how it addresses distinctive features and factors that differ for women in comparison to men, such as:

(a) Biological factors that differ for women in comparison with men, such as their menstrual cycle, their reproductive function and menopause. Another example is the higher risk of exposure to sexually transmitted diseases that women face;

(b) Socio-economic factors that vary for women in general and some groups of women in particular. For example, unequal power relationships between women and men in the home and workplace may negatively affect women's nutrition and health. They may also be exposed to different forms of violence which can affect their health. Girl children and adolescent girls are often vulnerable to sexual abuse by older men and family members, placing them at risk of physical and psychological harm and unwanted and early pregnancy. Some cultural or traditional practices such as female genital mutilation also carry a high risk of death and disability;

(c) Psychosocial factors that vary between women and men include depression in general and post-partum depression in particular as well as other psychological conditions, such as those that lead to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia;

(d) While lack of respect for the confidentiality of patients will affect both men and women, it may deter women from seeking advice and treatment and thereby adversely affect their health and well-being. Women will be less willing, for that reason, to seek medical care for diseases of the genital tract, for contraception or for incomplete abortion and in cases where they have suffered sexual or physical violence.

13. The duty of States parties to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health-care services, information and education implies an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil women's rights to health care. States parties have the responsibility to ensure that legislation and executive action and policy comply with these three obligations. They must also put in place a system that ensures effective judicial action. Failure to do so will constitute a violation of article 12.

14. The obligation to respect rights requires States parties to refrain from obstructing action taken by women in pursuit of their health goals. States parties should report on how public and private health-care providers meet their duties to respect women's rights to have access to health care. For example, States parties should not restrict women's access to health services or to the clinics that provide those services on the ground that women do not have the authorization of husbands, partners, parents or health authorities, because they are unmarried* or because they are women. Other barriers to women's access to appropriate health care include laws that criminalize medical procedures only needed by women punish women who undergo those procedures.

15. The obligation to protect rights relating to women's health requires States parties, their agents and officials to take action to prevent and impose sanctions for violations of rights by private persons and organizations. Since gender-based violence is a critical health issue for women, States parties should ensure:

(a) The enactment and effective enforcement of laws and the formulation of policies, including health-care protocols and hospital procedures to address violence against women and sexual abuse of girl children and the provision of appropriate health services;

(b) Gender-sensitive training to enable health-care workers to detect and manage the health consequences of gender-based violence;

(c) Fair and protective procedures for hearing complaints and imposing appropriate sanctions on health-care professionals guilty of sexual abuse of women patients;

(d) The enactment and effective enforcement of laws that prohibit female genital mutilation and marriage of girl children.

16. States parties should ensure that adequate protection and health services, including trauma treatment and counselling, are provided for women in especially difficult circumstances, such as those trapped in situations of armed conflict and women refugees.

17. The duty to fulfil rights places an obligation on States parties to take appropriate legislative, judicial, administrative, budgetary, economic and other measures to the maximum extent of their available resources to ensure that women realize their rights to health care. Studies such as those that emphasize the high maternal mortality and morbidity rates worldwide and the

* See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/49/38)*, chap. I, sect. A, general recommendation 21, para. 29.

large numbers of couples who would like to limit their family size but lack access to or do not use any form of contraception provide an important indication for States parties of possible breaches of their duties to ensure women's access to health care. The Committee asks States parties to report on what they have done to address the magnitude of women's ill-health, in particular when it arises from preventable conditions, such as tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. The Committee is concerned about the evidence that States are relinquishing these obligations as they transfer State health functions to private agencies. States and parties cannot absolve themselves of responsibility in these areas by delegating or transferring these powers to private sector agencies. States parties should therefore report on what they have done to organize governmental processes and all structures through which public power is exercised to promote and protect women's health. They should include information on positive measures taken to curb violations of women's rights by third parties and to protect their health and the measures they have taken to ensure the provision of such services.

18. The issues of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases are central to the rights of women and adolescent girls to sexual health. Adolescent girls and women in many countries lack adequate access to information and services necessary to ensure sexual health. As a consequence of unequal power relations based on gender, women and adolescent girls are often unable to refuse sex or insist on safe and responsible sex practices. Harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, polygamy, as well as marital rape, may also expose girls and women to the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Women in prostitution are also particularly vulnerable to these diseases. States parties should ensure, without prejudice or discrimination, the right to sexual health information, education and services for all women and girls, including those who have been trafficked, even if they are not legally resident in the country. In particular, States parties should ensure the rights of female and male adolescents to sexual and reproductive health education by properly trained personnel in specially designed programmes that respect their right to privacy and confidentiality.

19. In their reports, States parties should identify the test by which they assess whether women have access to health care on a basis of equality of men and women in order to demonstrate compliance with article 12. In applying these tests, States parties should bear in mind the provisions of article 1 of the Convention. Reports should therefore include comments on the impact that health policies, procedures, laws and protocols have on women when compared with men.

20. Women have the right to be fully informed, by properly trained personnel, of their options in agreeing to treatment or research, including likely benefits and potential adverse effects of proposed procedures and available alternatives.

21. States parties should report on measures taken to eliminate barriers that women face in access to health-care services and what measures they have taken to ensure women timely and affordable access to such services. Barriers include requirements or conditions that prejudice women's access, such as high fees for health-care services, the requirement for preliminary authorization by spouse, parent or hospital authorities, distance from health facilities and the absence of convenient and affordable public transport.

22. States parties should also report on measures taken to ensure access to quality health-care services, for example, by making them acceptable to women. Acceptable services are those that

are delivered in a way that ensures that a woman gives her fully informed consent, respects her dignity, guarantees her confidentiality and is sensitive to her needs and perspectives. States parties should not permit forms of coercion, such as non-consensual sterilization, mandatory testing for sexually transmitted diseases or mandatory pregnancy testing as a condition of employment that violate women's rights to informed consent and dignity.

23. In their reports, States parties should state what measures they have taken to ensure timely access to the range of services that are related to family planning, in particular, and to sexual and reproductive health in general. Particular attention should be paid to the health education of adolescents, including information and counselling on all methods of family planning.*

24. The Committee is concerned about the conditions of health-care services for older women, not only because women often live longer than men and are more likely than men to suffer from disabling and degenerative chronic diseases, such as osteoporosis and dementia, but because they often have the responsibility for their ageing spouses. Therefore, States parties should take appropriate measures to ensure the access of older women to health services that address the handicaps and disabilities associated with ageing.

25. Women with disabilities, of all ages, often have difficulty with physical access to health services. Women with mental disabilities are particularly vulnerable, while there is limited understanding, in general, of the broad range of risks to mental health to which women are disproportionately susceptible as a result of gender discrimination, violence, poverty, armed conflict, dislocation and other forms of social deprivation. States parties should take appropriate measures to ensure that health services are sensitive to the needs of women with disabilities and are respectful of their human rights and dignity.

Article 12 (2)

26. Reports should also include what measures States parties have taken to ensure women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period. Information on the rates at which these measures have reduced maternal mortality and morbidity in their countries, in general, and in vulnerable groups, regions and communities, in particular, should also be included.

27. States parties should include in their reports how they supply free services where necessary to ensure safe pregnancies, childbirth and post-partum periods for women. Many women are at risk of death or disability from pregnancy-related causes because they lack the funds to obtain or access the necessary services, which include antenatal, maternity and post-natal services. The Committee notes that it is the duty of States parties to ensure women's right to safe motherhood and emergency obstetric services and they should allocate to these services the maximum extent of available resources.

* Health education for adolescents should further address, inter alia, gender quality, violence, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and reproductive and sexual health rights.

Other relevant articles in the Convention

28. When reporting on measures taken to comply with article 12, States parties are urged to recognize its interconnection with other articles in the Convention that have a bearing on women's health. Those articles include article 5 (b), which requires States parties to ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function; article 10, which requires States parties to ensure equal access to education, thus enabling women to access health care more readily and reducing female student drop-out rates, which are often a result of premature pregnancy; article 10 (h), which requires that States parties provide to women and girls access to specific educational information to help ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning; article 11, which is concerned, in part, with the protection of women's health and safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the reproductive function, special protection from harmful types of work during pregnancy and with the provision of paid maternity leave; article 14, paragraph 2 (b), which requires States parties to ensure access for rural women to adequate health-care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning, and (h), which obliges States parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure adequate living conditions, particularly housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications, all of which are critical for the prevention of disease and the promotion of good health care; and article 16, paragraph 1 (e), which requires States parties to ensure that women have the same rights as men to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise those rights. Article 16, paragraph 2, proscribes the betrothal and marriage of children, an important factor in preventing the physical and emotional harm which arise from early childbirth.

Recommendations for government action

29. States parties should implement a comprehensive national strategy to promote women's health throughout their lifespan. This will include interventions aimed at both the prevention and treatment of diseases and conditions affecting women, as well as responding to violence against women, and will ensure universal access for all women to a full range of high-quality and affordable health care, including sexual and reproductive health services.

30. States parties should allocate adequate budgetary, human and administrative resources to ensure that women's health receives a share of the overall health budget comparable with that for men's health, taking into account their different health needs.

31. States parties should also, in particular:

(a) Place a gender perspective at the centre of all policies and programmes affecting women's health and should involve women in the planning, implementation and monitoring of such policies and programmes and in the provision of health services to women;

(b) Ensure the removal of all barriers to women's access to health services, education and information, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health, and, in particular, allocate resources for programmes directed at adolescents for the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS;

(c) Prioritize the prevention of unwanted pregnancy through family planning and sex education and reduce maternal mortality rates through safe motherhood services and prenatal assistance. When possible, legislation criminalizing abortion should be amended, in order to withdraw punitive measures imposed on women who undergo abortion;

(d) Monitor the provision of health services to women by public, non-governmental and private organizations, to ensure equal access and quality of care;

(e) Require all health services to be consistent with the human rights of women, including the rights to autonomy, privacy, confidentiality, informed consent and choice;

(f) Ensure that the training curricula of health workers include comprehensive, mandatory, gender-sensitive courses on women's health and human rights, in particular gender-based violence.

Thirtieth session (2004)

General recommendation No. 25: Article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention (temporary special measures)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women decided at its twentieth session (1999), pursuant to article 21 of the Convention, to elaborate a general recommendation on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This new general recommendation would build, inter alia, on earlier general recommendations, including general recommendation No. 5 (seventh session, 1988), on temporary special measures, No. 8 (seventh session, 1988), on implementation of article 8 of the Convention, and No. 23 (sixteenth session, 1997), on women in public life, as well as on reports of States parties to the Convention and on the Committee's concluding comments to those reports.

2. With the present general recommendation, the Committee aims to clarify the nature and meaning of article 4, paragraph 1, in order to facilitate and ensure its full utilization by States parties in the implementation of the Convention. The Committee encourages States parties to translate this general recommendation into national and local languages and to disseminate it widely to the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, including their administrative structures, as well as civil society, including the media, academia, and human rights and women's associations and institutions.

II. BACKGROUND: THE OBJECT AND PURPOSE OF THE CONVENTION

3. The Convention is a dynamic instrument. Since the adoption of the Convention in 1979, the Committee, as well as other actors at the national and international levels, have contributed through progressive thinking to the clarification and understanding of the substantive content of the Convention's articles and the specific nature of discrimination against women and the instruments for combating such discrimination.

4. The scope and meaning of article 4, paragraph 1, must be determined in the context of the overall object and purpose of the Convention, which is to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women with a view to achieving women's de jure and de facto equality with men in the enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. States parties to the Convention are under a legal obligation to respect, protect, promote and fulfil this right to non-discrimination for women and to ensure the development and advancement of women in order to improve their position to one of de jure as well as de facto equality with men.

5. The Convention goes beyond the concept of discrimination used in many national and international legal standards and norms. While such standards and norms prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sex and protect both men and women from treatment based on arbitrary, unfair and/or unjustifiable distinctions, the Convention focuses on discrimination against women, emphasizing that women have suffered, and continue to suffer from various forms of discrimination because they are women.

6. A joint reading of articles 1 to 5 and 24, which form the general interpretative framework for all of the Convention's substantive articles, indicates that three obligations are central to States parties' efforts to eliminate discrimination against women. These obligations should be implemented in an integrated fashion and extend beyond a purely formal legal obligation of equal treatment of women with men.

7. Firstly, States parties' obligation is to ensure that there is no direct or indirect¹ discrimination against women in their laws and that women are protected against discrimination - committed by public authorities, the judiciary, organizations, enterprises or private individuals - in the public as well as the private spheres by competent tribunals as well as sanctions and other remedies. Secondly, States parties' obligation is to improve the de facto position of women through concrete and effective policies and programmes. Thirdly, States parties' obligation is to address prevailing gender relations² and the persistence of gender-based stereotypes that affect women not only through individual acts by individuals but also in law, and legal and societal structures and institutions.

8. In the Committee's view, a purely formal legal or programmatic approach is not sufficient to achieve women's de facto equality with men, which the Committee interprets as substantive equality. In addition, the Convention requires that women be given an equal start and that they be empowered by an enabling environment to achieve equality of results. It is not enough to guarantee women treatment that is identical to that of men. Rather, biological as well as socially and culturally constructed differences between women and men must be taken into account. Under certain circumstances, non-identical treatment of women and men will be required in order to address such differences. Pursuit of the goal of substantive equality also calls for an effective strategy aimed at overcoming underrepresentation of women and a redistribution of resources and power between men and women.

9. Equality of results is the logical corollary of de facto or substantive equality. These results may be quantitative and/or qualitative in nature; that is, women enjoying their rights in various fields in fairly equal numbers with men, enjoying the same income levels, equality in decision-making and political influence, and women enjoying freedom from violence.

10. The position of women will not be improved as long as the underlying causes of discrimination against women, and of their inequality, are not effectively addressed. The lives of women and men must be considered in a contextual way, and measures adopted towards a real transformation of opportunities, institutions and systems so that they are no longer grounded in historically determined male paradigms of power and life patterns.

11. Women's biologically determined permanent needs and experiences should be distinguished from other needs that may be the result of past and present discrimination against women by individual actors, the dominant gender ideology, or by manifestations of such discrimination in social and cultural structures and institutions. As steps are being taken to eliminate discrimination against women, women's needs may change or disappear, or become the needs of both women and men. Thus, continuous monitoring of laws, programmes and practices directed at the achievement of women's de facto or substantive equality is needed so as to avoid a perpetuation of non-identical treatment that may no longer be warranted.

12. Certain groups of women, in addition to suffering from discrimination directed against them as women, may also suffer from multiple forms of discrimination based on additional grounds such as race, ethnic or religious identity, disability, age, class, caste or other factors. Such discrimination may affect these groups of women primarily, or to a different degree or in different ways than men. States parties may need to take specific temporary special measures to eliminate such multiple forms of discrimination against women and its compounded negative impact on them.

13. In addition to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, other international human rights instruments and policy documents adopted in the United Nations system contain provisions on temporary special measures to support the achievement of equality. Such measures are described in different terminology, and the meaning and interpretation given to such measures also differs. It is the Committee's hope that the present general recommendation on article 4, paragraph 1, will contribute to a clarification of terminology.³

14. The Convention targets discriminatory dimensions of past and current societal and cultural contexts which impede women's enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. It aims at the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, including the elimination of the causes and consequences of their de facto or substantive inequality. Therefore, the application of temporary special measures in accordance with the Convention is one of the means to realize de facto or substantive equality for women, rather than an exception to the norms of non-discrimination and equality.

III. THE MEANING AND SCOPE OF TEMPORARY SPECIAL MEASURES IN THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Article 4, paragraph 1

Adoption by States parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the

present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.

Article 4, paragraph 2

Adoption by States parties of special measures, including those measures contained in the present Convention, aimed at protecting maternity shall not be considered discriminatory.

A. Relationship between paragraphs 1 and 2 of article 4

15. There is a clear difference between the purpose of the “special measures” under article 4, paragraph 1, and those of paragraph 2. The purpose of article 4, paragraph 1, is to accelerate the improvement of the position of women to achieve their de facto or substantive equality with men, and to effect the structural, social and cultural changes necessary to correct past and current forms and effects of discrimination against women, as well as to provide them with compensation. These measures are of a temporary nature.

16. Article 4, paragraph 2, provides for non-identical treatment of women and men due to their biological differences. These measures are of a permanent nature, at least until such time as the scientific and technological knowledge referred to in article 11, paragraph 3, would warrant a review.

B. Terminology

17. The *travaux préparatoires* of the Convention use different terms to describe the “temporary special measures” included in article 4, paragraph 1. The Committee itself, in its previous general recommendations, used various terms. States parties often equate “special measures” in its corrective, compensatory and promotional sense with the terms “affirmative action”, “positive action”, “positive measures”, “reverse discrimination”, and “positive discrimination”. These terms emerge from the discussions and varied practices found in different national contexts.⁴ In the present general recommendation, and in accordance with its practice in the consideration of reports of States parties, the Committee uses solely the term “temporary special measures”, as called for in article 4, paragraph 1.

C. Key elements of article 4, paragraph 1

18. Measures taken under article 4, paragraph 1, by States parties should aim to accelerate the equal participation of women in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. The Committee views the application of these measures not as an exception to the norm of non-discrimination, but rather as an emphasis that temporary special measures are part of a necessary strategy by States parties directed towards the achievement of de facto or substantive equality of women with men in the enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. While the application of temporary special measures often remedies the effects of past discrimination against women, the obligation of States parties under the Convention to improve the position of women to one of de facto or substantive equality with men exists irrespective of any proof of past discrimination. The Committee considers that States parties that adopt and implement such measures under the Convention do not discriminate against men.

19. States parties should clearly distinguish between temporary special measures taken under article 4, paragraph 1, to accelerate the achievement of a concrete goal for women of de facto or substantive equality, and other general social policies adopted to improve the situation of women and the girl child. Not all measures that potentially are, or will be, favourable to women are temporary special measures. The provision of general conditions in order to guarantee the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women and the girl child, designed to ensure for them a life of dignity and non-discrimination, cannot be called temporary special measures.

20. Article 4, paragraph 1, explicitly states the “temporary” nature of such special measures. Such measures should therefore not be deemed necessary forever, even though the meaning of “temporary” may, in fact, result in the application of such measures for a long period of time. The duration of a temporary special measure should be determined by its functional result in response to a concrete problem and not by a predetermined passage of time. Temporary special measures must be discontinued when their desired results have been achieved and sustained for a period of time.

21. The term “special”, though being in conformity with human rights discourse, also needs to be carefully explained. Its use sometimes casts women and other groups who are subject to discrimination as weak, vulnerable and in need of extra or “special” measures in order to participate or compete in society. However, the real meaning of “special” in the formulation of article 4, paragraph 1, is that the measures are designed to serve a specific goal.

22. The term “measures” encompasses a wide variety of legislative, executive, administrative and other regulatory instruments, policies and practices, such as outreach or support programmes; allocation and/or reallocation of resources; preferential treatment; targeted recruitment, hiring and promotion; numerical goals connected with time frames; and quota systems. The choice of a particular “measure” will depend on the context in which article 4, paragraph 1, is applied and on the specific goal it aims to achieve.

23. The adoption and implementation of temporary special measures may lead to a discussion of qualifications and merit of the group or individuals so targeted, and an argument against preferences for allegedly lesser-qualified women over men in areas such as politics, education and employment. As temporary special measures aim at accelerating achievement of de facto or substantive equality, questions of qualification and merit, in particular in the area of employment in the public and private sectors, need to be reviewed carefully for gender bias as they are normatively and culturally determined. For appointment, selection or election to public and political office, factors other than qualification and merit, including the application of the principles of democratic fairness and electoral choice, may also have to play a role.

24. Article 4, paragraph 1, read in conjunction with articles 1, 2, 3, 5 and 24, needs to be applied in relation to articles 6 to 16 which stipulate that States parties “shall take all appropriate measures”. Consequently, the Committee considers that States parties are obliged to adopt and implement temporary special measures in relation to any of these articles if such measures can be shown to be necessary and appropriate in order to accelerate the achievement of the overall, or a specific goal of, women’s de facto or substantive equality.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATES PARTIES

25. Reports of States parties should include information on the adoption, or lack thereof, of temporary special measures in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention, and States parties should preferably adhere to the terminology “temporary special measures”, to avoid confusion.
26. States parties should clearly distinguish between temporary special measures aimed at accelerating the achievement of a concrete goal of women’s de facto or substantive equality, and other general social policies adopted and implemented in order to improve the situation of women and the girl child. States parties should bear in mind that not all measures which potentially are or would be favourable to women qualify as temporary special measures.
27. States parties should analyse the context of women’s situation in all spheres of life, as well as in the specific, targeted area, when applying temporary special measures to accelerate achievement of women’s de facto or substantive equality. They should evaluate the potential impact of temporary special measures with regard to a particular goal within their national context and adopt those temporary special measures which they consider to be the most appropriate in order to accelerate the achievement of de facto or substantive equality for women.
28. States parties should explain the reasons for choosing one type of measure over another. The justification for applying such measures should include a description of the actual life situation of women, including the conditions and influences which shape their lives and opportunities - or that of a specific group of women, suffering from multiple forms of discrimination - and whose position the State party intends to improve in an accelerated manner with the application of such temporary special measures. At the same time, the relationship between such measures and general measures and efforts to improve the position of women should be clarified.
29. States parties should provide adequate explanations with regard to any failure to adopt temporary special measures. Such failures may not be justified simply by averring powerlessness, or by explaining inaction through predominant market or political forces, such as those inherent in the private sector, private organizations, or political parties. States parties are reminded that article 2 of the Convention, which needs to be read in conjunction with all other articles, imposes accountability on the State party for action by these actors.
30. States parties may report on temporary special measures under several articles. Under article 2, States parties are invited to report on the legal or other basis for such measures, and their justification for choosing a particular approach. States parties are further invited to give details about any legislation concerning temporary special measures, and in particular whether such legislation provides for the mandatory or voluntary nature of temporary special measures.
31. States parties should include, in their constitutions or in their national legislation, provisions that allow for the adoption of temporary special measures. The Committee reminds States parties that legislation, such as comprehensive anti-discrimination acts, equal opportunities acts or executive orders on women’s equality, can give guidance on the type of temporary special measures that should be applied to achieve a stated goal, or goals, in given

areas. Such guidance can also be contained in specific legislation on employment or education. Relevant legislation on non-discrimination and temporary special measures should cover governmental actors as well as private organizations or enterprises.

32. The Committee draws the attention of States parties to the fact that temporary special measures may also be based on decrees, policy directives and/or administrative guidelines formulated and adopted by national, regional or local executive branches of government to cover the public employment and education sectors. Such temporary special measures may include the civil service, the political sphere and the private education and employment sectors. The Committee further draws the attention of States parties to the fact that such measures may also be negotiated between social partners of the public or private employment sector or be applied on a voluntary basis by public or private enterprises, organizations, institutions and political parties.

33. The Committee reiterates that action plans for temporary special measures need to be designed, applied and evaluated within the specific national context and against the background of the specific nature of the problem which they are intended to overcome. The Committee recommends that States parties provide in their reports details of any action plans which may be directed at creating access for women and overcoming their underrepresentation in certain fields, at redistributing resources and power in particular areas, and/or at initiating institutional change to overcome past or present discrimination and accelerate the achievement of de facto equality. Reports should also explain whether such action plans include considerations of unintended potential adverse side-effects of such measures as well as on possible action to protect women against them. States parties should also describe in their reports the results of temporary special measures and assess the causes of the possible failure of such measures.

34. Under article 3, States parties are invited to report on the institution(s) responsible for designing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and enforcing such temporary special measures. Such responsibility may be vested in existing or planned national institutions, such as women's ministries, women's departments within ministries or presidential offices, ombudspersons, tribunals or other entities of a public or private nature with the requisite mandate to design specific programmes, monitor their implementation, and evaluate their impact and outcomes. The Committee recommends that States parties ensure that women in general, and affected groups of women in particular, have a role in the design, implementation and evaluation of such programmes. Collaboration and consultation with civil society and non-governmental organizations representing various groups of women is especially recommended.

35. The Committee draws attention to and reiterates its general recommendation 9, on statistical data concerning the situation of women, and recommends that States parties provide statistical data disaggregated by sex in order to measure the achievement of progress towards women's de facto or substantive equality and the effectiveness of temporary special measures.

36. States parties should report on the type of temporary special measures taken in specific fields under the relevant article(s) of the Convention. Reporting under the respective article(s) should include references to concrete goals and targets, timetables, the reasons for choosing particular measures, steps to enable women to access such measures, and the institution accountable for monitoring implementation and progress. States parties are also asked to

describe how many women are affected by a measure, how many would gain access and participate in a certain field because of a temporary special measure, or the amount of resources and power it aims to redistribute to how many women, and within what time frame.

37. The Committee reiterates its general recommendations 5, 8 and 23, wherein it recommended the application of temporary special measures in the fields of education, the economy, politics and employment, in the area of women representing their Governments at the international level and participating in the work of international organizations, and in the area of political and public life. States parties should intensify, within their national contexts, such efforts especially with regard to all facets of education at all levels as well as all facets and levels of training, employment and representation in public and political life. The Committee recalls that in all instances, but particularly in the area of health, States parties should carefully distinguish in each field between measures of an ongoing and permanent nature and those of a temporary nature.

38. States parties are reminded that temporary special measures should be adopted to accelerate the modification and elimination of cultural practices and stereotypical attitudes and behaviour that discriminate against or are disadvantageous for women. Temporary special measures should also be implemented in the areas of credit and loans, sports, culture and recreation, and legal awareness. Where necessary, such measures should be directed at women subjected to multiple discrimination, including rural women.

39. Although the application of temporary special measures may not be possible under all the articles of the Convention, the Committee recommends that their adoption be considered whenever issues of accelerating access to equal participation, on the one hand, and accelerating the redistribution of power and resources, on the other hand, are involved as well as where it can be shown that these measures will be necessary and most appropriate under the circumstances.

Notes

¹ Indirect discrimination against women may occur when laws, policies and programmes are based on seemingly gender-neutral criteria which in their actual effect have a detrimental impact on women. Gender-neutral laws, policies and programmes unintentionally may perpetuate the consequences of past discrimination. They may be inadvertently modelled on male lifestyles and thus fail to take into account aspects of women's life experiences which may differ from those of men. These differences may exist because of stereotypical expectations, attitudes and behaviour directed towards women which are based on the biological differences between women and men. They may also exist because of the generally existing subordination of women by men.

² "Gender is defined as the social meanings given to biological sex differences. It is an ideological and cultural construct, but is also reproduced within the realm of material practices; in turn it influences the outcomes of such practices. It affects the distribution of resources, wealth, work, decision-making and political power, and enjoyment of rights and entitlements within the family as well as public life. Despite variations across cultures and over time, gender relations throughout the world entail asymmetry of power between men and women as a pervasive trait. Thus, gender is a social stratifier, and in this sense it is similar to other stratifiers

such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and age. It helps us understand the social construction of gender identities and the unequal structure of power that underlies the relationship between the sexes.” *1999 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development*, United Nations, New York, 1999, page ix.

³ See, for example, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which mandates temporary special measures. The practice of treaty monitoring bodies, including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Human Rights Committee, shows that these bodies consider the application of temporary special measures as mandatory to achieve the purposes of the respective treaties. Conventions adopted under the auspices of the International Labour Organization, and various documents of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization also explicitly or implicitly provide for such measures. The Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights considered this question and appointed a Special Rapporteur to prepare reports for its consideration and action. The Commission on the Status of Women reviewed the use of temporary special measures in 1992. The outcome documents adopted by United Nations world conferences on women, including the Platform for Action of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and its follow-up review of 2000, contain references to positive action as a tool for achieving de facto equality. The use of temporary special measures by the Secretary-General of the United Nations is a practical example in the area of women’s employment, including through administrative instructions on the recruitment, promotion and placement of women in the Secretariat. These measures aim at achieving the goal of 50/50 gender distribution at all levels, but at the higher echelons in particular.

⁴ The term “affirmative action” is used in the United States of America and in a number of United Nations documents, whereas the term “positive action” is currently widely used in Europe as well as in many United Nations documents. However, the term “positive action” is used in yet another sense in international human rights law to describe “positive State action” (the obligation of a State to initiate action versus a State’s obligation to abstain from action). Hence, the term “positive action” is ambiguous inasmuch as its meaning is not confined to temporary special measures as understood in article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention. The terms “reverse discrimination” or “positive discrimination” are criticized by a number of commentators as inappropriate.

V. GENERAL COMMENTS ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE AGAINST TORTURE

1. The Committee against Torture at its sixteenth session decided, on 10 May 1996, to set up a working group to examine questions relating to articles 3 and 22 of the Convention. The Committee had noticed that most of the individual communications received under article 22 of the Convention in recent years had concerned cases of persons under an order of expulsion, return or extradition who alleged that they would have been in danger of being subjected to torture if they were expelled, returned or extradited. The Committee felt that some guidance should be given to the States parties and to the authors of communications to enable them to apply correctly the provisions of article 3 in the context of the procedure set forth in article 22 of the Convention. On 21 November 1997, the Committee adopted the general comment on the implementation of article 3 in the context of article 22 of the Convention (A/53/44, para. 258).

Sixteenth session (1996)*

General comment No. 1: Implementation of article 3 of the Convention in the context of article 22 (Refoulement and communications)

In view of the requirements of article 22, paragraph 4, of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment that the Committee against Torture “shall consider communications received under article 22 in the light of all information made available to it by or on behalf of the individual and by the State party concerned”,

In view of the need arising as a consequence of the application of rule 111, paragraph 3, of the rules of procedure of the Committee (CAT/C/3/Rev.2), and

In view of the need for guidelines for the implementation of article 3 under the procedure foreseen in article 22 of the Convention,

The Committee against Torture, at its nineteenth session, 317th meeting, held on 21 November 1997, adopted the following general comment for the guidance of States parties and authors of communications:

1. Article 3 is confined in its application to cases where there are substantial grounds for believing that the author would be in danger of being subjected to torture as defined in article 1 of the Convention.

2. The Committee is of the view that the phrase “another State” in article 3 refers to the State to which the individual concerned is being expelled, returned or extradited, as well as to any State to which the author may subsequently be expelled, returned or extradited.

* Contained in document A/53/44, annex IX.

3. Pursuant to article 1, the criterion, mentioned in article 3, paragraph 2, of “a consistent pattern or gross, flagrant or mass violations of human rights” refers only to violations by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.

Admissibility

4. The Committee is of the opinion that it is the responsibility of the author to establish a prima facie case for the purpose of admissibility of his or her communication under article 22 of the Convention by fulfilling each of the requirements of rule 107 of the rules of procedure of the Committee.

Merits

5. With respect to the application of article 3 of the Convention to the merits of a case, the burden is upon the author to present an arguable case. This means that there must be a factual basis for the author’s position sufficient to require a response from the State party.

6. Bearing in mind that the State party and the Committee are obliged to assess whether there are substantial grounds for believing that the author would be in danger of being subjected to torture were he/she to be expelled, returned or extradited, the risk of torture must be assessed on grounds that go beyond mere theory or suspicion. However, the risk does not have to meet the test of being highly probable.

7. The author must establish that he/she would be in danger of being tortured and that the grounds for so believing are substantial in the way described, and that such danger is personal and present. All pertinent information may be introduced by either party to bear on this matter.

8. The following information, while not exhaustive, would be pertinent:

(a) Is the State concerned one in which there is evidence of a consistent pattern of gross, flagrant or mass violations of human rights (see article 3, paragraph 2)?

(b) Has the author been tortured or maltreated by or at the instigation of or with the consent of acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity in the past? If so, was this the recent past?

(c) Is there medical or other independent evidence to support a claim by the author that he/she has been tortured or maltreated in the past? Has the torture had after-effects?

(d) Has the situation referred to in (a) above changed? Has the internal situation in respect of human rights altered?

(e) Has the author engaged in political or other activity within or outside the State concerned which would appear to make him/her particularly vulnerable to the risk of being placed in danger of torture were he/she to be expelled, returned or extradited to the State in question?

- (f) Is there any evidence as to the credibility of the author?
- (g) Are there factual inconsistencies in the claim of the author? If so, are they relevant?

9. Bearing in mind that the Committee against Torture is not an appellate, a quasi-judicial or an administrative body, but rather a monitoring body created by the States parties themselves with declaratory powers only, it follows that:

(a) Considerable weight will be given, in exercising the Committee's jurisdiction pursuant to article 3 of the Convention, to findings of fact that are made by organs of the State party concerned; but

(b) The Committee is not bound by such findings and instead has the power, provided by article 22, paragraph 4, of the Convention, of free assessment of the facts based upon the full set of circumstances in every case.

Thirty-ninth session (2007)

General comment No. 2: Implementation of article 2 by States parties

1. This general comment addresses the three parts of article 2, each of which identifies distinct interrelated and essential principles that undergird the Convention's absolute prohibition against torture. Since the adoption of the Convention against Torture, the absolute and non-derogable character of this prohibition has become accepted as a matter of customary international law. The provisions of article 2 reinforce this peremptory *jus cogens* norm against torture and constitute the foundation of the Committee's authority to implement effective means of prevention, including but not limited to those measures contained in the subsequent articles 3 to 16, in response to evolving threats, issues, and practices.

2. Article 2, paragraph 1, obliges each State party to take actions that will reinforce the prohibition against torture through legislative, administrative, judicial, or other actions that must, in the end, be effective in preventing it. To ensure that measures are in fact taken that are known to prevent or punish any acts of torture, the Convention outlines in subsequent articles obligations for the State party to take measures specified therein.

3. The obligation to prevent torture in article 2 is wide-ranging. The obligations to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (hereinafter "ill-treatment") under article 16, paragraph 1, are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The obligation to prevent ill-treatment in practice overlaps with and is largely congruent with the obligation to prevent torture. Article 16, identifying the means of prevention of ill-treatment, emphasizes "*in particular*" the measures outlined in articles 10 to 13, but does not limit effective prevention to these articles, as the Committee has explained, for example, with respect to compensation in article 14. In practice, the definitional threshold between ill-treatment and torture is often not clear. Experience demonstrates that the conditions that give rise to ill-treatment frequently facilitate torture and therefore the measures required to prevent torture must be applied to prevent ill-treatment. Accordingly, the Committee has considered the prohibition of ill-treatment to be likewise non-derogable under the Convention and its prevention to be an effective and non-derogable measure.

4. States parties are obligated to eliminate any legal or other obstacles that impede the eradication of torture and ill-treatment; and to take positive effective measures to ensure that such conduct and any recurrences thereof are effectively prevented. States parties also have the obligation continually to keep under review and improve their national laws and performance under the Convention in accordance with the Committee's concluding observations and views adopted on individual communications. If the measures adopted by the State party fail to accomplish the purpose of eradicating acts of torture, the Convention requires that they be revised and/or that new, more effective measures be adopted. Likewise, the Committee's understanding of and recommendations in respect of effective measures are in a process of continual evolution, as, unfortunately, are the methods of torture and ill-treatment.

II. ABSOLUTE PROHIBITION

5. Article 2, paragraph 2, provides that the prohibition against torture is absolute and non-derogable. It emphasizes that *no exceptional circumstances whatsoever* may be invoked by a State Party to justify acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction. The Convention identifies as among such circumstances a state of war or threat thereof, internal political instability or any other public emergency. This includes any threat of terrorist acts or violent crime as well as armed conflict, international or non-international. The Committee is deeply concerned at and rejects absolutely any efforts by States to justify torture and ill-treatment as a means to protect public safety or avert emergencies in these and all other situations. Similarly, it rejects any religious or traditional justification that would violate this absolute prohibition. The Committee considers that amnesties or other impediments which preclude or indicate unwillingness to provide prompt and fair prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of torture or ill-treatment violate the principle of non-derogability.

6. The Committee reminds all States parties to the Convention of the non-derogable nature of the obligations undertaken by them in ratifying the Convention. In the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001, the Committee specified that the obligations in articles 2 (whereby "no exceptional circumstances whatsoever... may be invoked as a justification of torture"), 15 (prohibiting confessions extorted by torture being admitted in evidence, except against the torturer), and 16 (prohibiting cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) are three such provisions that "must be observed in all circumstances".¹ The Committee considers that articles 3 to 15 are likewise obligatory as applied to both torture and ill-treatment. The Committee recognizes that States parties may choose the measures through which they fulfill these obligations, so long as they are effective and consistent with the object and purpose of the Convention.

7. The Committee also understands that the concept of "any territory under its jurisdiction," linked as it is with the principle of non-derogability, includes any territory or facilities and must be applied to protect any person, citizen or non-citizen without discrimination subject to the de jure or de facto control of a State party. The Committee emphasizes that the State's obligation to prevent torture also applies to all persons who act, de jure or de facto, in the name of, in conjunction with, or at the behest of the State party. It is a matter of urgency that each State party

should closely monitor its officials and those acting on its behalf and should identify and report to the Committee any incidents of torture or ill-treatment as a consequence of anti-terrorism measures, among others, and the measures taken to investigate, punish, and prevent further torture or ill-treatment in the future, with particular attention to the legal responsibility of both the direct perpetrators and officials in the chain of command, whether by acts of instigation, consent or acquiescence.

III. CONTENT OF THE OBLIGATION TO TAKE EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO PREVENT TORTURE

8. States parties must make the offence of torture punishable as an offence under its criminal law, in accordance, at a minimum, with the elements of torture as defined in article 1 of the Convention, and the requirements of article 4.

9. Serious discrepancies between the Convention's definition and that incorporated into domestic law create actual or potential loopholes for impunity. In some cases, although similar language may be used, its meaning may be qualified by domestic law or by judicial interpretation and thus the Committee calls upon each State party to ensure that all parts of its Government adhere to the definition set forth in the Convention for the purpose of defining the obligations of the State. At the same time, the Committee recognizes that broader domestic definitions also advance the object and purpose of this Convention so long as they contain and are applied in accordance with the standards of the Convention, at a minimum. In particular, the Committee emphasizes that elements of intent and purpose in article 1 do not involve a subjective inquiry into the motivations of the perpetrators, but rather must be objective determinations under the circumstances. It is essential to investigate and establish the responsibility of persons in the chain of command as well as that of the direct perpetrator(s).

10. The Committee recognizes that most States parties identify or define certain conduct as ill-treatment in their criminal codes. In comparison to torture, ill-treatment may differ in the severity of pain and suffering and does not require proof of impermissible purposes. The Committee emphasizes that it would be a violation of the Convention to prosecute conduct solely as ill-treatment where the elements of torture are also present.

11. By defining the offence of torture as distinct from common assault or other crimes, the Committee considers that States parties will directly advance the Convention's overarching aim of preventing torture and ill-treatment. Naming and defining this crime will promote the Convention's aim, inter alia, by alerting everyone, including perpetrators, victims, and the public, to the special gravity of the crime of torture. Codifying this crime will also (a) emphasize the need for appropriate punishment that takes into account the gravity of the offence, (b) strengthen the deterrent effect of the prohibition itself, (c) enhance the ability of responsible officials to track the specific crime of torture and (d) enable and empower the public to monitor and, when required, to challenge State action as well as State inaction that violates the Convention.

12. Through review of successive reports from States parties, the examination of individual communications, and monitoring of developments, the Committee has, in its concluding observations, articulated its understanding of what constitute effective measures, highlights of which we set forth here. In terms of both the principles of general application of article 2 and developments that build upon specific articles of the Convention, the Committee has recommended specific actions designed to enhance each State party's ability swiftly and effectively to implement measures necessary and appropriate to prevent acts of torture and ill-treatment and thereby assist States parties in bringing their law and practice into full compliance with the Convention.

13. Certain basic guarantees apply to all persons deprived of their liberty. Some of these are specified in the Convention, and the Committee consistently calls upon States parties to use them. The Committee's recommendations concerning effective measures aim to clarify the current baseline and are not exhaustive. Such guarantees include, *inter alia*, maintaining an official register of detainees, the right of detainees to be informed of their rights, the right promptly to receive independent legal assistance, independent medical assistance, and to contact relatives, the need to establish impartial mechanisms for inspecting and visiting places of detention and confinement, and the availability to detainees and persons at risk of torture and ill-treatment of judicial and other remedies that will allow them to have their complaints promptly and impartially examined, to defend their rights, and to challenge the legality of their detention or treatment.

14. Experience since the Convention came into force has enhanced the Committee's understanding of the scope and nature of the prohibition against torture, of the methodologies of torture, of the contexts and consequences in which it occurs, as well as of evolving effective measures to prevent it in different contexts. For example, the Committee has emphasized the importance of having same sex guards when privacy is involved. As new methods of prevention (e.g. videotaping all interrogations, utilizing investigative procedures such as the Istanbul Protocol of 1999,² or new approaches to public education or the protection of minors) are discovered, tested and found effective, article 2 provides authority to build upon the remaining articles and to expand the scope of measures required to prevent torture.

IV. SCOPE OF STATE OBLIGATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITY

15. The Convention imposes obligations on States parties and not on individuals. States bear international responsibility for the acts and omissions of their officials and others, including agents, private contractors, and others acting in official capacity or acting on behalf of the State, in conjunction with the State, under its direction or control, or otherwise under colour of law. Accordingly, each State party should prohibit, prevent and redress torture and ill-treatment in all contexts of custody or control, for example, in prisons, hospitals, schools, institutions that engage in the care of children, the aged, the mentally ill or disabled, in military service, and other institutions as well as contexts where the failure of the State to intervene encourages and enhances the danger of privately inflicted harm. The Convention does not, however, limit the international responsibility that States or individuals can incur for perpetrating torture and ill-treatment under international customary law and other treaties.

16. Article 2, paragraph 1, requires that each State party shall take effective measures to prevent acts of torture not only in its sovereign territory but also “in any territory under its jurisdiction.” The Committee has recognized that “any territory” includes all areas where the State party exercises, directly or indirectly, in whole or in part, de jure or de facto effective control, in accordance with international law. The reference to “any territory” in article 2, like that in articles 5, 11, 12, 13 and 16, refers to prohibited acts committed not only on board a ship or aircraft registered by a State party, but also during military occupation or peacekeeping operations and in such places as embassies, military bases, detention facilities, or other areas over which a State exercises factual or effective control. The Committee notes that this interpretation reinforces article 5, paragraph 1 (b), which requires that a State party must take measures to exercise jurisdiction “when the alleged offender is a national of the State.” The Committee considers that the scope of “territory” under article 2 must also include situations where a State party exercises, directly or indirectly, de facto or de jure control over persons in detention.

17. The Committee observes that States parties are obligated to adopt effective measures to prevent public authorities and other persons acting in an official capacity from directly committing, instigating, inciting, encouraging, acquiescing in or otherwise participating or being complicit in acts of torture as defined in the Convention. Thus, States parties should adopt effective measures to prevent such authorities or others acting in an official capacity or under colour of law, from consenting to or acquiescing in any acts of torture. The Committee has concluded that States parties are in violation of the Convention when they fail to fulfil these obligations. For example, where detention centres are privately owned or run, the Committee considers that personnel are acting in an official capacity on account of their responsibility for carrying out the State function without derogation of the obligation of State officials to monitor and take all effective measures to prevent torture and ill-treatment.

18. The Committee has made clear that where State authorities or others acting in official capacity or under colour of law, know or have reasonable grounds to believe that acts of torture or ill-treatment are being committed by non-State officials or private actors and they fail to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish such non-State officials or private actors consistently with the Convention, the State bears responsibility and its officials should be considered as authors, complicit or otherwise responsible under the Convention for consenting to or acquiescing in such impermissible acts. Since the failure of the State to exercise due diligence to intervene to stop, sanction and provide remedies to victims of torture facilitates and enables non-State actors to commit acts impermissible under the Convention with impunity, the State’s indifference or inaction provides a form of encouragement and/or de facto permission. The Committee has applied this principle to States parties’ failure to prevent and protect victims from gender-based violence, such as rape, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and trafficking.

19. Additionally, if a person is to be transferred or sent to the custody or control of an individual or institution known to have engaged in torture or ill-treatment, or has not implemented adequate safeguards, the State is responsible, and its officials subject to punishment for ordering, permitting or participating in this transfer contrary to the State’s obligation to take effective measures to prevent torture in accordance with article 2, paragraph 1. The Committee has expressed its concern when States parties send persons to such places without due process of law as required by articles 2 and 3.

**V. PROTECTION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS MADE
VULNERABLE BY DISCRIMINATION OR
MARGINALIZATION**

20. The principle of non-discrimination is a basic and general principle in the protection of human rights and fundamental to the interpretation and application of the Convention. Non-discrimination is included within the definition of torture itself in article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention, which explicitly prohibits specified acts when carried out for “*any reason based on discrimination of any kind ...*”. The Committee emphasizes that the discriminatory use of mental or physical violence or abuse is an important factor in determining whether an act constitutes torture.

21. The protection of certain minority or marginalized individuals or populations especially at risk of torture is a part of the obligation to prevent torture or ill-treatment. States parties must ensure that, insofar as the obligations arising under the Convention are concerned, their laws are in practice applied to all persons, regardless of race, colour, ethnicity, age, religious belief or affiliation, political or other opinion, national or social origin, gender, sexual orientation, transgender identity, mental or other disability, health status, economic or indigenous status, reason for which the person is detained, including persons accused of political offences or terrorist acts, asylum-seekers, refugees or others under international protection, or any other status or adverse distinction. States parties should, therefore, ensure the protection of members of groups especially at risk of being tortured, by fully prosecuting and punishing all acts of violence and abuse against these individuals and ensuring implementation of other positive measures of prevention and protection, including but not limited to those outlined above.

22. State reports frequently lack specific and sufficient information on the implementation of the Convention with respect to women. The Committee emphasizes that gender is a key factor. Being female intersects with other identifying characteristics or status of the person such as race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, age, immigrant status etc. to determine the ways that women and girls are subject to or at risk of torture or ill-treatment and the consequences thereof. The contexts in which females are at risk include deprivation of liberty, medical treatment, particularly involving reproductive decisions, and violence by private actors in communities and homes. Men are also subject to certain gendered violations of the Convention such as rape or sexual violence and abuse. Both men and women and boys and girls may be subject to violations of the Convention on the basis of their actual or perceived non-conformity with socially determined gender roles. States parties are requested to identify these situations and the measures taken to punish and prevent them in their reports.

23. Continual evaluation is therefore a crucial component of effective measures. The Committee has consistently recommended that States parties provide data disaggregated by age, gender and other key factors in their reports to enable the Committee to adequately evaluate the implementation of the Convention. Disaggregated data permits the States parties and the Committee to identify, compare and take steps to remedy discriminatory treatment that may otherwise go unnoticed and unaddressed. States parties are requested to describe, as far as possible, factors affecting the incidence and prevention of torture or ill-treatment, as well as the difficulties experienced in preventing torture or ill-treatment against specific relevant sectors of the population, such as minorities, victims of torture, children and women, taking into account the general and particular forms that such torture and ill-treatment may take.

24. Eliminating employment discrimination and conducting ongoing sensitization training in contexts where torture or ill-treatment is likely to be committed is also key to preventing such violations and building a culture of respect for women and minorities. States are encouraged to promote the hiring of persons belonging to minority groups and women, particularly in the medical, educational, prison/detention, law enforcement, judicial and legal fields, within State institutions as well as the private sector. States parties should include in their reports information on their progress in these matters, disaggregated by gender, race, national origin, and other relevant status.

VI. OTHER PREVENTIVE MEASURES REQUIRED BY THE CONVENTION

25. Articles 3 to 15 of the Convention constitute specific preventive measures that the States parties deemed essential to prevent torture and ill-treatment, particularly in custody or detention. The Committee emphasizes that the obligation to take effective preventive measures transcends the items enumerated specifically in the Convention or the demands of this general comment. For example, it is important that the general population be educated on the history, scope, and necessity of the non-derogable prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, as well as that law enforcement and other personnel receive education on recognizing and preventing torture and ill-treatment. Similarly, in light of its long experience in reviewing and assessing State reports on officially inflicted or sanctioned torture or ill-treatment, the Committee acknowledges the importance of adapting the concept of monitoring conditions to prevent torture and ill-treatment to situations where violence is inflicted privately. States parties should specifically include in their reports to the Committee detailed information on their implementation of preventive measures, disaggregated by relevant status.

VII. SUPERIOR ORDERS

26. The non-derogability of the prohibition of torture is underscored by the long-standing principle embodied in article 2, paragraph 3, that an order of a superior or public authority can never be invoked as a justification of torture. Thus, subordinates may not seek refuge in superior authority and should be held to account individually. At the same time, those exercising superior authority - including public officials - cannot avoid accountability or escape criminal responsibility for torture or ill-treatment committed by subordinates where they knew or should have known that such impermissible conduct was occurring, or was likely to occur, and they failed to take reasonable and necessary preventive measures. The Committee considers it essential that the responsibility of any superior officials, whether for direct instigation or encouragement of torture or ill-treatment or for consent or acquiescence therein, be fully investigated through competent, independent and impartial prosecutorial and judicial authorities. Persons who resist what they view as unlawful orders or who cooperate in the investigation of torture or ill-treatment, including by superior officials, should be protected against retaliation of any kind.

27. The Committee reiterates that this general comment has to be considered without prejudice to any higher degree of protection contained in any international instrument or national law, as long as they contain, as a minimum, the standards of the Convention.

Notes

¹ On 22 November 2001, the Committee adopted a statement in connection with the events of 11 September which was sent to each State party to the Convention (A/57/44, paras. 17-18).

² Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

VI. GENERAL COMMENTS ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-sixth session (2001)

General comment No. 1: The aims of education

The significance of article 29 (1)

1. Article 29, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is of far-reaching importance. The aims of education that it sets out, which have been agreed to by all States parties, promote, support and protect the core value of the Convention: the human dignity innate in every child and his or her equal and inalienable rights. These aims, set out in the five subparagraphs of article 29 (1), are all linked directly to the realization of the child's human dignity and rights, taking into account the child's special developmental needs and diverse evolving capacities. The aims are: the holistic development of the full potential of the child (29 (1) (a)), including development of respect for human rights (29 (1) (b)), an enhanced sense of identity and affiliation (29 (1) (c)), and his or her socialization and interaction with others (29 (1) (d)) and with the environment (29 (1) (e)).

2. Article 29 (1) not only adds to the right to education recognized in article 28 a qualitative dimension which reflects the rights and inherent dignity of the child; it also insists upon the need for education to be child-centred, child-friendly and empowering, and it highlights the need for educational processes to be based upon the very principles it enunciates.¹ The education to which every child has a right is one designed to provide the child with life skills, to strengthen the child's capacity to enjoy the full range of human rights and to promote a culture which is infused by appropriate human rights values. The goal is to empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence. "Education" in this context goes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes which enable children, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities and to live a full and satisfying life within society.

3. The child's right to education is not only a matter of access (art. 28) but also of content. An education with its contents firmly rooted in the values of article 29 (1) is for every child an indispensable tool for her or his efforts to achieve in the course of her or his life a balanced, human rights-friendly response to the challenges that accompany a period of fundamental change driven by globalization, new technologies and related phenomena. Such challenges include the tensions between, inter alia, the global and the local; the individual and the collective; tradition and modernity; long- and short-term considerations; competition and equality of opportunity; the expansion of knowledge and the capacity to assimilate it; and the spiritual and the material.² And yet, in the national and international programmes and policies on education that really count, the elements embodied in article 29 (1) seem all too often to be either largely missing or present only as a cosmetic afterthought.

4. Article 29 (1) states that the States parties agree that education should be directed to a wide range of values. This agreement overcomes the boundaries of religion, nation and culture

built across many parts of the world. At first sight, some of the diverse values expressed in article 29 (1) might be thought to be in conflict with one another in certain situations. Thus, efforts to promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all peoples, to which paragraph (1) (d) refers, might not always be automatically compatible with policies designed, in accordance with paragraph (1) (c), to develop respect for the child's own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own. But in fact, part of the importance of this provision lies precisely in its recognition of the need for a balanced approach to education and one which succeeds in reconciling diverse values through dialogue and respect for difference. Moreover, children are capable of playing a unique role in bridging many of the differences that have historically separated groups of people from one another.

The functions of article 29 (1)

5. Article 29 (1) is much more than an inventory or listing of different objectives which education should seek to achieve. Within the overall context of the Convention it serves to highlight, inter alia, the following dimensions.

6. First, it emphasizes the indispensable interconnected nature of the Convention's provisions. It draws upon, reinforces, integrates and complements a variety of other provisions and cannot be properly understood in isolation from them. In addition to the general principles of the Convention - non-discrimination (art. 2), the best interest of the child (art. 3), the right to life, survival and development (art. 6) and the right to express views and have them taken into account (art. 12) - many other provisions may be mentioned, such as but not limited to the rights and responsibilities of parents (arts. 5 and 18), freedom of expression (art. 13), freedom of thought (art. 14), the right to information (art. 17), the rights of children with disabilities (art. 23), the right to education for health (art. 24), the right to education (art. 28), and the linguistic and cultural rights of children belonging to minority groups (art. 30).

7. Children's rights are not detached or isolated values devoid of context, but exist within a broader ethical framework which is partly described in article 29 (1) and in the preamble to the Convention. Many of the criticisms that have been made of the Convention are specifically answered by this provision. Thus, for example, this article underlines the importance of respect for parents, of the need to view rights within their broader ethical, moral, spiritual, cultural or social framework and of the fact that most children's rights, far from being externally imposed, are embedded within the values of local communities.

8. Second, the article attaches importance to the process by which the right to education is to be promoted. Thus, efforts to promote the enjoyment of other rights must not be undermined, and should be reinforced, by the values imparted in the educational process. This includes not only the content of the curriculum but also the educational processes, the pedagogical methods and the environment within which education takes place, whether it be the home, school, or elsewhere. Children do not lose their human rights by virtue of passing through the school gates. Thus, for example, education must be provided in a way that respects the inherent dignity of the child and enables the child to express his or her views freely in accordance with article 12 (1) and to participate in school life. Education must also be provided in a way that respects the strict limits on discipline reflected in article 28 (2) and promotes non-violence in school. The

Committee has repeatedly made clear in its concluding observations that the use of corporal punishment does not respect the inherent dignity of the child nor the strict limits on school discipline. Compliance with the values recognized in article 29 (1) clearly requires that schools be child-friendly in the fullest sense of the term and that they be consistent in all respects with the dignity of the child. The participation of children in school life, the creation of school communities and student councils, peer education and peer counselling, and the involvement of children in school disciplinary proceedings should be promoted as part of the process of learning and experiencing the realization of rights.

9. Third, while article 28 focuses upon the obligations of State parties in relation to the establishment of educational systems and in ensuring access thereto, article 29 (1) underlies the individual and subjective right to a specific quality of education. Consistent with the Convention's emphasis on the importance of acting in the best interests of the child, this article emphasizes the message of child-centred education: that the key goal of education is the development of the individual child's personality, talents and abilities, in recognition of the fact that every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs.³ Thus, the curriculum must be of direct relevance to the child's social, cultural, environmental and economic context and to his or her present and future needs and take full account of the child's evolving capacities; teaching methods should be tailored to the different needs of different children. Education must also be aimed at ensuring that essential life skills are learnt by every child and that no child leaves school without being equipped to face the challenges that he or she can expect to be confronted with in life. Basic skills include not only literacy and numeracy but also life skills such as the ability to make well-balanced decisions; to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner; and to develop a healthy lifestyle, good social relationships and responsibility, critical thinking, creative talents, and other abilities which give children the tools needed to pursue their options in life.

10. Discrimination on the basis of any of the grounds listed in article 2 of the Convention, whether it is overt or hidden, offends the human dignity of the child and is capable of undermining or even destroying the capacity of the child to benefit from educational opportunities. While denying a child's access to educational opportunities is primarily a matter which relates to article 28 of the Convention, there are many ways in which failure to comply with the principles contained in article 29 (1) can have a similar effect. To take an extreme example, gender discrimination can be reinforced by practices such as a curriculum which is inconsistent with the principles of gender equality, by arrangements which limit the benefits girls can obtain from the educational opportunities offered, and by unsafe or unfriendly environments which discourage girls' participation. Discrimination against children with disabilities is also pervasive in many formal educational systems and in a great many informal educational settings, including in the home.⁴ Children with HIV/AIDS are also heavily discriminated against in both settings.⁵ All such discriminatory practices are in direct contradiction with the requirements in article 29 (1) (a) that education be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.

11. The Committee also wishes to highlight the links between article 29 (1) and the struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Racism and related phenomena thrive where there is ignorance, unfounded fears of racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic or other forms of difference, the exploitation of prejudices, or the teaching or dissemination of distorted values. A reliable and enduring antidote to all of these failings is the

provision of education which promotes an understanding and appreciation of the values reflected in article 29 (1), including respect for differences, and challenges all aspects of discrimination and prejudice. Education should thus be accorded one of the highest priorities in all campaigns against the evils of racism and related phenomena. Emphasis must also be placed upon the importance of teaching about racism as it has been practised historically, and particularly as it manifests or has manifested itself within particular communities. Racist behaviour is not something engaged in only by “others”. It is therefore important to focus on the child’s own community when teaching human and children’s rights and the principle of non-discrimination. Such teaching can effectively contribute to the prevention and elimination of racism, ethnic discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

12. Fourth, article 29 (1) insists upon a holistic approach to education which ensures that the educational opportunities made available reflect an appropriate balance between promoting the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional aspects of education, the intellectual, social and practical dimensions, and the childhood and lifelong aspects. The overall objective of education is to maximize the child’s ability and opportunity to participate fully and responsibly in a free society. It should be emphasized that the type of teaching that is focused primarily on accumulation of knowledge, prompting competition and leading to an excessive burden of work on children, may seriously hamper the harmonious development of the child to the fullest potential of his or her abilities and talents. Education should be child-friendly, inspiring and motivating the individual child. Schools should foster a humane atmosphere and allow children to develop according to their evolving capacities.

13. Fifth, it emphasizes the need for education to be designed and provided in such a way that it promotes and reinforces the range of specific ethical values enshrined in the Convention, including education for peace, tolerance, and respect for the natural environment, in an integrated and holistic manner. This may require a multidisciplinary approach. The promotion and reinforcement of the values of article 29 (1) are not only necessary because of problems elsewhere, but must also focus on problems within the child’s own community. Education in this regard should take place within the family, but schools and communities must also play an important role. For example, for the development of respect for the natural environment, education must link issues of environmental and sustainable development with socio-economic, sociocultural and demographic issues. Similarly, respect for the natural environment should be learnt by children at home, in school and within the community, encompass both national and international problems, and actively involve children in local, regional or global environmental projects.

14. Sixth, it reflects the vital role of appropriate educational opportunities in the promotion of all other human rights and the understanding of their indivisibility. A child’s capacity to participate fully and responsibly in a free society can be impaired or undermined not only by outright denial of access to education but also by a failure to promote an understanding of the values recognized in this article.

Human rights education

15. Article 29 (1) can also be seen as a foundation stone for the various programmes of human rights education called for by the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna in 1993, and promoted by international agencies. Nevertheless, the rights of the child have not always

been given the prominence they require in the context of such activities. Human rights education should provide information on the content of human rights treaties. But children should also learn about human rights by seeing human rights standards implemented in practice, whether at home, in school, or within the community. Human rights education should be a comprehensive, lifelong process and start with the reflection of human rights values in the daily life and experiences of children.⁶

16. The values embodied in article 29 (1) are relevant to children living in zones of peace but they are even more important for those living in situations of conflict or emergency. As the Dakar Framework for Action notes, it is important in the context of education systems affected by conflict, natural calamities and instability that educational programmes be conducted in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace and tolerance, and that help to prevent violence and conflict.⁷ Education about international humanitarian law also constitutes an important, but all too often neglected, dimension of efforts to give effect to article 29 (1).

Implementation, monitoring and review

17. The aims and values reflected in this article are stated in quite general terms and their implications are potentially very wide-ranging. This seems to have led many States parties to assume that it is unnecessary, or even inappropriate, to ensure that the relevant principles are reflected in legislation or in administrative directives. This assumption is unwarranted. In the absence of any specific formal endorsement in national law or policy, it seems unlikely that the relevant principles are or will be used to genuinely inform educational policies. The Committee therefore calls upon all States parties to take the necessary steps to formally incorporate these principles into their education policies and legislation at all levels.

18. The effective promotion of article 29 (1) requires the fundamental reworking of curricula to include the various aims of education and the systematic revision of textbooks and other teaching materials and technologies, as well as school policies. Approaches which do no more than seek to superimpose the aims and values of the article on the existing system without encouraging any deeper changes are clearly inadequate. The relevant values cannot be effectively integrated into, and thus be rendered consistent with, a broader curriculum unless those who are expected to transmit, promote, teach and, as far as possible, exemplify the values have themselves been convinced of their importance. Pre-service and in-service training schemes which promote the principles reflected in article 29 (1) are thus essential for teachers, educational administrators and others involved in child education. It is also important that the teaching methods used in schools reflect the spirit and educational philosophy of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the aims of education laid down in article 29 (1).

19. In addition, the school environment itself must thus reflect the freedom and the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin called for in article 29 (1) (b) and (d). A school which allows bullying or other violent and exclusionary practices to occur is not one which meets the requirements of article 29 (1). The term “human rights education” is too often used in a way which greatly oversimplifies its connotations. What is needed, in addition to formal human rights education, is the promotion of values and policies conducive to human rights not only within schools and universities but also within the broader community.

20. In general terms, the various initiatives that States parties are required to take pursuant to their Convention obligations will be insufficiently grounded in the absence of widespread dissemination of the text of the Convention itself, in accordance with the provisions of article 42. This will also facilitate the role of children as promoters and defenders of children's rights in their daily lives. In order to facilitate broader dissemination, States parties should report on the measures they have taken to achieve this objective and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights should develop a comprehensive database of the language versions of the Convention that have been produced.

21. The media, broadly defined, also have a central role to play, both in promoting the values and aims reflected in article 29 (1) and in ensuring that their activities do not undermine the efforts of others to promote those objectives. Governments are obligated by the Convention, pursuant to article 17 (a), to take all appropriate steps to "encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child".⁸

22. The Committee calls upon States parties to devote more attention to education as a dynamic process and to devising means by which to measure changes over time in relation to article 29 (1). Every child has the right to receive an education of good quality which in turn requires a focus on the quality of the learning environment, of teaching and learning processes and materials, and of learning outputs. The Committee notes the importance of surveys that may provide an opportunity to assess the progress made, based upon consideration of the views of all actors involved in the process, including children currently in or out of school, teachers and youth leaders, parents, and educational administrators and supervisors. In this respect, the Committee emphasizes the role of national-level monitoring which seeks to ensure that children, parents and teachers can have an input in decisions relevant to education.

23. The Committee calls upon States parties to develop a comprehensive national plan of action to promote and monitor realization of the objectives listed in article 29 (1). If such a plan is drawn up in the larger context of a national action plan for children, a national human rights action plan, or a national human rights education strategy, the Government must ensure that it nonetheless addresses all of the issues dealt with in article 29 (1) and does so from a child-rights perspective. The Committee urges that the United Nations and other international bodies concerned with educational policy and human rights education seek better coordination so as to enhance the effectiveness of the implementation of article 29 (1).

24. The design and implementation of programmes to promote the values reflected in this article should become part of the standard response by Governments to almost all situations in which patterns of human rights violations have occurred. Thus, for example, where major incidents of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance occur which involve those under 18, it can reasonably be presumed that the Government has not done all that it should to promote the values reflected in the Convention generally, and in article 29 (1) in particular. Appropriate additional measures under article 29 (1) should therefore be adopted which include research on and adoption of whatever educational techniques might have a positive impact in achieving the rights recognized in the Convention.

25. States parties should also consider establishing a review procedure which responds to complaints that existing policies or practices are not consistent with article 29 (1). Such review procedures need not necessarily entail the creation of new legal, administrative, or educational

bodies. They might also be entrusted to national human rights institutions or to existing administrative bodies. The Committee requests each State party when reporting on this article to identify the genuine possibilities that exist at the national or local level to obtain a review of existing approaches which are claimed to be incompatible with the Convention. Information should be provided as to how such reviews can be initiated and how many such review procedures have been undertaken within the reporting period.

26. In order to better focus the process of examining States parties' reports dealing with article 29 (1), and in accordance with the requirement in article 44 that reports shall indicate factors and difficulties, the Committee requests each State party to provide a detailed indication in its periodic reports of what it considers to be the most important priorities within its jurisdiction which call for a more concerted effort to promote the values reflected in this provision and to outline the programme of activities which it proposes to take over the succeeding five years in order to address the problems identified.

27. The Committee calls upon United Nations bodies and agencies and other competent bodies whose role is underscored in article 45 of the Convention to contribute more actively and systematically to the Committee's work in relation to article 29 (1).

28. Implementation of comprehensive national plans of action to enhance compliance with article 29 (1) will require human and financial resources which should be available to the maximum extent possible, in accordance with article 4. Therefore, the Committee considers that resource constraints cannot provide a justification for a State party's failure to take any, or enough, of the measures that are required. In this context, and in light of the obligations upon States parties to promote and encourage international cooperation both in general terms (articles 4 and 45 of the Convention) and in relation to education (art. 28 (3)), the Committee urges States parties providing development cooperation to ensure that their programmes are designed so as to take full account of the principles contained in article 29 (1).

Notes

¹ In this regard, the Committee takes note of general comment No. 13 (1999) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the right to education, which deals, inter alia, with the aims of education under article 13 (1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Committee also draws attention to the general guidelines regarding the form and contents of periodic reports to be submitted by States parties under article 44, paragraph 1 (b), of the Convention (CRC/C/58, paras. 112-116).

² United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Report of the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century, 1996, pp. 16-18.

³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*, 1994, p. viii.

⁴ See general comment No. 5 (1994) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on persons with disabilities.

⁵ See the recommendations adopted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child after its day of general discussion in 1998 on children living in a world with HIV/AIDS (A/55/41, para. 1536).

⁶ See General Assembly resolution 49/184 of 23 December 1994 proclaiming the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education.

⁷ Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments, adopted at the World Education Forum, Dakar, 26-28 April 2000.

⁸ The Committee recalls the recommendations in this respect which emerged from its day of general discussion in 1996 on the child and the media (see A/53/41, para. 1396).

Thirty-first session (2002)

General comment No. 2: The role of independent national human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child

1. Article 4 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges States parties to “undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention”. Independent national human rights institutions (NHRIs) are an important mechanism to promote and ensure the implementation of the Convention, and the Committee on the Rights of the Child considers the establishment of such bodies to fall within the commitment made by States parties upon ratification to ensure the implementation of the Convention and advance the universal realization of children’s rights. In this regard, the Committee has welcomed the establishment of NHRIs and children’s ombudspersons/children’s commissioners and similar independent bodies for the promotion and monitoring of the implementation of the Convention in a number of States parties.

2. The Committee issues this general comment in order to encourage States parties to establish an independent institution for the promotion and monitoring of implementation of the Convention and to support them in this regard by elaborating the essential elements of such institutions and the activities which should be carried out by them. Where such institutions have already been established, the Committee calls upon States to review their status and effectiveness for promoting and protecting children’s rights, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international instruments.

3. The World Conference on Human Rights, held in 1993, in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action reaffirmed “... the important and constructive role played by national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights”, and encouraged “... the establishment and strengthening of national institutions”. The General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights have repeatedly called for the establishment of national human rights institutions, underlining the important role NHRIs play in promoting and protecting human rights and enhancing public awareness of those rights. In its general guidelines for periodic reports, the Committee requires that States parties furnish

information on “any independent body established to promote and protect the rights of the child ...”,¹ hence, it consistently addresses this issue during its dialogue with States parties.

4. NHRIs should be established in compliance with the Principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the “Paris Principles”) adopted by the General Assembly in 1993² transmitted by the Commission on Human Rights in 1992.³ These minimum standards provide guidance for the establishment, competence, responsibilities, composition, including pluralism, independence, methods of operation, and quasi-judicial activities of such national bodies.

5. While adults and children alike need independent NHRIs to protect their human rights, additional justifications exist for ensuring that children’s human rights are given special attention. These include the facts that children’s developmental state makes them particularly vulnerable to human rights violations; their opinions are still rarely taken into account; most children have no vote and cannot play a meaningful role in the political process that determines Governments’ response to human rights; children encounter significant problems in using the judicial system to protect their rights or to seek remedies for violations of their rights; and children’s access to organizations that may protect their rights is generally limited.

6. Specialist independent human rights institutions for children, ombudspersons or commissioners for children’s rights have been established in a growing number of States parties. Where resources are limited, consideration must be given to ensuring that the available resources are used most effectively for the promotion and protection of everyone’s human rights, including children’s, and in this context development of a broad-based NHRI that includes a specific focus on children is likely to constitute the best approach. A broad-based NHRI should include within its structure either an identifiable commissioner specifically responsible for children’s rights, or a specific section or division responsible for children’s rights.

7. It is the view of the Committee that every State needs an independent human rights institution with responsibility for promoting and protecting children’s rights. The Committee’s principal concern is that the institution, whatever its form, should be able, independently and effectively, to monitor, promote and protect children’s rights. It is essential that promotion and protection of children’s rights is “mainstreamed” and that all human rights institutions existing in a country work closely together to this end.

Mandate and powers

8. NHRIs should, if possible, be constitutionally entrenched and must at least be legislatively mandated. It is the view of the Committee that their mandate should include as broad a scope as possible for promoting and protecting human rights, incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocols and other relevant international human rights instruments - thus effectively covering children’s human rights, in particular their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The legislation should include provisions setting out specific functions, powers and duties relating to children linked to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. If the NHRI was established before the existence of the Convention, or without expressly incorporating it, necessary arrangements, including the enactment or amendment of legislation, should be put in place so as to ensure conformity of the institution’s mandate with the principles and provisions of the Convention.

9. NHRI should be accorded such powers as are necessary to enable them to discharge their mandate effectively, including the power to hear any person and obtain any information and document necessary for assessing the situations falling within their competence. These powers should include the promotion and protection of the rights of all children under the jurisdiction of the State party in relation not only to the State but to all relevant public and private entities.

Establishment process

10. The NHRI establishment process should be consultative, inclusive and transparent, initiated and supported at the highest levels of Government and inclusive of all relevant elements of the State, the legislature and civil society. In order to ensure their independence and effective functioning, NHRIs must have adequate infrastructure, funding (including specifically for children's rights, within broad-based institutions), staff, premises, and freedom from forms of financial control that might affect their independence.

Resources

11. While the Committee acknowledges that this is a very sensitive issue and that State parties function with varying levels of economic resources, the Committee believes that it is the duty of States to make reasonable financial provision for the operation of national human rights institutions in light of article 4 of the Convention. The mandate and powers of national institutions may be meaningless, or the exercise of their powers limited, if the national institution does not have the means to operate effectively to discharge its powers.

Pluralistic representation

12. NHRIs should ensure that their composition includes pluralistic representation of the various elements of civil society involved in the promotion and protection of human rights. They should seek to involve, among others, the following: human rights, anti-discrimination and children's rights, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including child- and youth-led organizations; trade unions; social and professional organizations (of doctors, lawyers, journalists, scientists, etc.); universities and experts, including children's rights experts. Government departments should be involved in an advisory capacity only. NHRIs should have appropriate and transparent appointment procedures, including an open and competitive selection process.

Providing remedies for breaches of children's rights

13. NHRIs must have the power to consider individual complaints and petitions and carry out investigations, including those submitted on behalf of or directly by children. In order to be able to effectively carry out such investigations, they must have the powers to compel and question witnesses, access relevant documentary evidence and access places of detention. They also have a duty to seek to ensure that children have effective remedies - independent advice, advocacy and complaints procedures - for any breaches of their rights. Where appropriate, NHRIs should undertake mediation and conciliation of complaints.

14. NHRIs should have the power to support children taking cases to court, including the power (a) to take cases concerning children's issues in the name of the NHRI and (b) to intervene in court cases to inform the court about the human rights issues involved in the case.

Accessibility and participation

15. NHRIs should be geographically and physically accessible to all children. In the spirit of article 2 of the Convention, they should proactively reach out to all groups of children, in particular the most vulnerable and disadvantaged, such as (but not limited to) children in care or detention, children from minority and indigenous groups, children with disabilities, children living in poverty, refugee and migrant children, street children and children with special needs in areas such as culture, language, health and education. NHRI legislation should include the right of the institution to have access in conditions of privacy to children in all forms of alternative care and to all institutions that include children.

16. NHRIs have a key role to play in promoting respect for the views of children in all matters affecting them, as articulated in article 12 of the Convention, by Government and throughout society. This general principle should be applied to the establishment, organization and activities of national human rights institutions. Institutions must ensure that they have direct contact with children and that children are appropriately involved and consulted. Children's councils, for example, could be created as advisory bodies for NHRIs to facilitate the participation of children in matters of concern to them.

17. NHRIs should devise specially tailored consultation programmes and imaginative communication strategies to ensure full compliance with article 12 of the Convention. A range of suitable ways in which children can communicate with the institution should be established.

18. NHRIs must have the right to report directly, independently and separately on the state of children's rights to the public and to parliamentary bodies. In this respect, States parties must ensure that an annual debate is held in Parliament to provide parliamentarians with an opportunity to discuss the work of the NHRI in respect of children's rights and the State's compliance with the Convention.

Recommended activities

19. The following is an indicative, but not exhaustive, list of the types of activities which NHRIs should carry out in relation to the implementation of children's rights in light of the general principles of the Convention. They should:

- (a) Undertake investigations into any situation of violation of children's rights, on complaint or on their own initiative, within the scope of their mandate;
- (b) Conduct inquiries on matters relating to children's rights;
- (c) Prepare and publicize opinions, recommendations and reports, either at the request of national authorities or on their own initiative, on any matter relating to the promotion and protection of children's rights;

(d) Keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice relating to the protection of children's rights;

(e) Promote harmonization of national legislation, regulations and practices with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, its Optional Protocols and other international human rights instruments relevant to children's rights and promote their effective implementation, including through the provision of advice to public and private bodies in construing and applying the Convention;

(f) Ensure that national economic policy makers take children's rights into account in setting and evaluating national economic and development plans;

(g) Review and report on the Government's implementation and monitoring of the state of children's rights, seeking to ensure that statistics are appropriately disaggregated and other information collected on a regular basis in order to determine what must be done to realize children's rights;

(h) Encourage ratification of or accession to any relevant international human rights instruments;

(i) In accordance with article 3 of the Convention requiring that the best interests of children should be a primary consideration in all actions concerning them, ensure that the impact of laws and policies on children is carefully considered from development to implementation and beyond;

(j) In light of article 12, ensure that the views of children are expressed and heard on matters concerning their human rights and in defining issues relating to their rights;

(k) Advocate for and facilitate meaningful participation by children's rights NGOs, including organizations comprised of children themselves, in the development of domestic legislation and international instruments on issues affecting children;

(l) Promote public understanding and awareness of the importance of children's rights and, for this purpose, work closely with the media and undertake or sponsor research and educational activities in the field;

(m) In accordance with article 42 of the Convention which obligates State parties to "make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike", sensitize the Government, public agencies and the general public to the provisions of the Convention and monitor ways in which the State is meeting its obligations in this regard;

(n) Assist in the formulation of programmes for the teaching of, research into and integration of children's rights in the curricula of schools and universities and in professional circles;

(o) Undertake human rights education which specifically focuses on children (in addition to promoting general public understanding about the importance of children's rights);

- (p) Take legal proceedings to vindicate children's rights in the State or provide legal assistance to children;
- (q) Engage in mediation or conciliation processes before taking cases to court, where appropriate;
- (r) Provide expertise in children's rights to the courts, in suitable cases as *amicus curiae* or intervenor;
- (s) In accordance with article 3 of the Convention which obliges States parties to "ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision", undertake visits to juvenile homes (and all places where children are detained for reform or punishment) and care institutions to report on the situation and to make recommendations for improvement;
- (t) Undertake such other activities as are incidental to the above.

Reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and cooperation between NHRIs and United Nations agencies and human rights mechanisms

20. NHRIs should contribute independently to the reporting process under the Convention and other relevant international instruments and monitor the integrity of government reports to international treaty bodies with respect to children's rights, including through dialogue with the Committee on the Rights of the Child at its pre-sessional working group and with other relevant treaty bodies.

21. The Committee requests that States parties include detailed information on the legislative basis and mandate and principal relevant activities of NHRIs in their reports to the Committee. It is appropriate for States parties to consult with independent human rights institutions during the preparation of reports to the Committee. However, States parties must respect the independence of these bodies and their independent role in providing information to the Committee. It is not appropriate to delegate to NHRIs the drafting of reports or to include them in the government delegation when reports are examined by the Committee.

22. NHRIs should also cooperate with the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights, including country and thematic mechanisms, in particular the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

23. The United Nations has a long-standing programme of assistance for the establishment and strengthening of national human rights institutions. This programme, which is based in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), provides technical assistance and facilitates regional and global cooperation and exchanges among national human rights institutions. States parties should avail themselves of this assistance where necessary. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also offers expertise and technical cooperation in this area.

24. As articulated in article 45 of the Convention, the Committee may also transmit, as it considers appropriate, to any specialized United Nations agency, OHCHR and any other competent body any reports from States parties that contain a request or indicate a need for technical advice or assistance in the establishment of NHRIs.

NHRIs and States parties

25. The State ratifies the Convention on the Rights of the Child and takes on obligations to implement it fully. The role of NHRIs is to monitor independently the State's compliance and progress towards implementation and to do all it can to ensure full respect for children's rights. While this may require the institution to develop projects to enhance the promotion and protection of children's rights, it should not lead to the Government delegating its monitoring obligations to the national institution. It is essential that institutions remain entirely free to set their own agenda and determine their own activities.

NHRIs and NGOs

26. Non-governmental organizations play a vital role in promoting human rights and children's rights. The role of NHRIs, with their legislative base and specific powers, is complementary. It is essential that institutions work closely with NGOs and that Governments respect the independence of both NHRIs and NGOs.

Regional and international cooperation

27. Regional and international processes and mechanisms can strengthen and consolidate NHRIs through shared experience and skills, as NHRIs share common problems in the promotion and protection of human rights in their respective countries.

28. In this respect, NHRIs should consult and cooperate with relevant national, regional and international bodies and institutions on children's rights issues.

29. Children's human rights issues are not constrained by national borders and it has become increasingly necessary to devise appropriate regional and international responses to a variety of child rights issues (including, but not limited to, the trafficking of women and children, child pornography, child soldiers, child labour, child abuse, refugee and migrant children, etc.). International and regional mechanisms and exchanges are encouraged, as they provide NHRIs with an opportunity to learn from each other's experience, collectively strengthen each other's positions and contribute to resolving human rights problems affecting both countries and region.

Notes

¹ General guidelines regarding the form and contents of periodic reports to be submitted by States parties under article 44, paragraph 1 (b), of the Convention (CRC/C/58), para. 18.

² Principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (the "Paris Principles"), General Assembly resolution 48/134 of 20 December 1993, annex.

³ Commission on Human Rights resolution 1992/54 of 3 March 1992, annex.

Thirty-second session (2003)

General comment No. 3: HIV/AIDS and the rights of the child

I. INTRODUCTION¹

1. The HIV/AIDS epidemics have drastically changed the world in which children live. Millions of children have been infected and have died and many more are gravely affected as HIV spreads through their families and communities. The epidemics impact on the daily life on younger children, and increase the victimization and marginalization of children especially on those living in particularly difficult circumstances. HIV/AIDS is not a problem of some countries but of the entire world. To truly bring its impact on children under control will require concerted and well-targeted efforts from all countries at all stages of development.

Initially children were considered to be only marginally affected by the epidemic. However, the international community has discovered that unfortunately, children are at the heart of the problem. According to UNAIDS - the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS - the most recent trends are alarming: in most parts of the world the majority of new infections are in young people between the ages of 15 and 24, sometimes younger. Women including young girls are also increasingly becoming infected. In most regions of the world, the vast majority of infected women do not know that they are infected and may unknowingly infect their children. Consequently many States have recently registered an increase in their infant and child mortality rates and child mortality rate. Adolescents are also vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because their first sexual experience may take place in an environment in which they have no access to proper information and guidance. Children who use drugs are at high risk.

Yet all children can be rendered vulnerable by the particular circumstances of their lives being mainly: (a) children who are themselves HIV-infected; (b) children who are affected by the epidemics because the loss of parental caregiver or teacher and/or because their families or communities are severely strained by its consequences; and (c) children who are most vulnerable to be infected or affected.

II. THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS GENERAL COMMENT

2. The objectives of this general comment are:

(a) To strengthen the identification and understanding of all the human rights of children in the context of HIV/AIDS;

(b) To promote the realization of human rights of children in the context of HIV/AIDS as guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter, the Convention);

(c) To identify measures and good practices to increase the level of implementation by the States of rights related to the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the support, care and protection of children infected with or affected by this pandemic;

(d) To contribute to the formulation and promotion of child oriented Plans of Action, strategies, laws, policies and programmes to combat the spread and mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS at the national and international level.

III. THE CONVENTION'S PERSPECTIVES TO HIV/AIDS - THE HOLISTIC CHILD RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

3. The issue of children and HIV/AIDS is perceived as mainly a medical or health problem, although in reality it involves a much wider range of issues. In this regard the right to health (article 24 of the Convention) is, however, central. But HIV/AIDS impacts so heavily on the lives of all children that it affects all their rights - civil, political, economic, social and cultural. The rights in the general principles of the Convention - the right to non-discrimination, (art. 2), the rights of the child to have her/his interest to be a primary consideration (art. 3), the right to life, survival and development (art. 6) and the rights to have her/his views respected (art. 12) - should therefore be the guiding themes in the consideration of HIV/AIDS at all levels of prevention, treatment, care and support.

4. Adequate measures to address HIV/AIDS can be provided to children and adolescents only if their rights are fully respected. The most relevant rights in this regard are - in addition to the four above-referred general principles - the following: the right to access information and material aimed at the promotion of their social, spiritual and moral well-being, physical and mental health (art. 17), their right to preventive health care, sex education and family planning education and services (art. 24 (f)), their right to an appropriate standard of living (art. 27) their rights to privacy (art. 6), the right not to be separated from parents (art. 9), the right to be protected from violence (art. 19), the rights to special protection and assistance by the State (art. 20), the rights of children with disabilities (art. 23), the right to health (art. 24), the right to social security, including social insurance (art. 26), the right to education and leisure (arts. 28 and 31), the right to be protected from economic and sexual exploitation and abuse, from illicit use of narcotic drugs (arts. 32, 33, 34 and 36), the right to be protected from abduction, sale and trafficking as well as torture or other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (arts. 35 and 37) and the right to physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (art. 39). Children are confronted with serious challenges to their above-mentioned rights as a result of the epidemics. The Convention and in particular the four general principles with its comprehensive approach provide a powerful framework for efforts to reduce the negative impact of the pandemic on the lives of children. The holistic rights-based approach required to implement the Convention is the optimal tool to address the broader range of issues that relate to prevention, treatment and care efforts.

(a) The right to non-discrimination (art. 2)

5. Discrimination is responsible for heightening the vulnerability of children to HIV and AIDS, as well as seriously impacting the lives of children who are affected by HIV/AIDS, or are themselves HIV infected. Girls and boys of parents living with HIV/AIDS are often the victims of stigma and discrimination as they too are often assumed to be infected. As a result of discrimination children are denied access to information, education (reference to general comment No. 1 on the aims of education), health or social care services or from community life. At its extreme, discrimination against HIV-infected children has resulted in their abandonment by their family, community and/or society. Discrimination also fuels the epidemic

by making children in particular those belonging to certain groups like children living in remote or rural areas where services are less accessible, more vulnerable to infection. These children are thereby doubly victimized.

6. Of particular concern is gender-based discrimination combined with taboos or negative or judgemental attitudes to sexual activity of girls, often limiting their access to preventive measures and other services. Of concern also is discrimination based on sexual orientation. In the design of HIV/AIDS related strategies, and in keeping with their obligations under the Convention, State parties must give careful consideration to prescribed gender norms within their societies with a view to eliminating gender-based discrimination as these impact on the vulnerability of both girls and boys to HIV/AIDS. States parties should in particular recognize that discrimination in the context of HIV/AIDS often impacts girls more severely than boys.

7. All the above-mentioned discriminatory practices are violations of children's rights under the Convention. Article 2 of the Convention obliges States to ensure all the rights under the Convention without discrimination of any kind, and "irrespective of the child's or her or his parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status". The Committee interprets "other status" under article 2 of the Convention to include HIV/AIDS status of the child or her/his parent(s). Laws, policies, strategies and practices should address all forms of discrimination that contribute to increasing the impact of the epidemics. Strategies should also promote education and training programmes explicitly designed to change attitudes of discrimination and stigmatization associated with HIV/AIDS.

(b) Best interests of the child (art. 3)

8. Policies and programmes for prevention, care and treatment of HIV/AIDS have generally been designed for adults with scarce attention to the principle of the best interest of the child as a primary consideration. Article 3 of the CRC, states: "In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration." The obligations attached to this right are fundamental to guiding the action of States in relation to HIV/AIDS. The child should be put at the centre of the response to the pandemic, adapting strategies to children's rights and needs.

(c) The right to survival, life and development (art. 6)

9. Children have the right not to have their lives arbitrarily taken, as well as to benefit from economic and social policies which will allow them to survive into adulthood and develop in the broadest sense of the word. State obligation to realize the right to survival, life and development also highlights the need to give careful attention to sexuality as well as to the behaviours and lifestyle of children, even if they do not conform to the society's determination of what is acceptable under prevailing cultural norms for a particular age group. In this regard, the female child is often subject to harmful traditional practices such as early and or forced marriage, which violate her rights and make her more vulnerable to HIV infection, including because such practices often interrupt access to education and information. Effective prevention programmes are only those that acknowledge the realities of the lives of adolescents, while addressing sexuality by ensuring equal access to appropriate information, life-skills, and to preventive measures.

(d) The right to express views and have them taken into account (art. 12)

10. Children are rights holders and have a right to participate, in accordance with their evolving capacities, in raising awareness by speaking out about the impact of HIV/AIDS on their lives and in the development of HIV/AIDS policies and programmes. Interventions have been found to benefit children most when they are actively involved in assessing needs, devising solutions, shaping strategies and carrying them out rather than being seen as objects for whom decisions are made. In this regard, the participation of children as peer educators, both within and outside schools, should be actively promoted. States, international agencies and NGOs must provide children with a supportive and enabling environment to carry out their own initiatives, and to fully participate at both community and national levels in HIV policy and programme conceptualization, design, implementation, coordination, monitoring and review. A variety of approaches are likely to be necessary to ensure the participation of children from all sectors of society, including mechanisms which encourage children, consistent with their evolving capacities, to express their views, have them heard, and given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity (art. 12 (1)). Where appropriate, the involvement of children living with HIV/AIDS in raising awareness, by sharing their experiences with their peers and others is critical both to effective prevention and to reduce stigma and discrimination. States parties must ensure that children who participate in these awareness efforts do so voluntarily, after being counselled, and also that these children receive both the social support and legal protection to allow them to lead normal lives during and after their involvement.

(e) Obstacles

11. Experience has shown that many obstacles hinder delivery of effective prevention and care services and the support of community initiatives on HIV/AIDS. These are mainly cultural, structural and financial. Denial that a problem exists, cultural practices and attitudes, including taboos and stigmatization, poverty, patronizing attitudes towards children, are just some of the obstacles that may block the political and individual commitment needed for effective programmes. Concerning financial, technical and human resources, the Committee is aware that those resources may not be immediately available. But with regard to this obstacle the Committee likes to remind the States parties of their obligation under article 4. It further notes that resources constraints should not be used to justify States parties failure to take any or enough of the technical or financial measures required. Finally, the Committee wants to emphasize in this regard the essential role of international cooperation.

IV. PREVENTION, CARE, TREATMENT AND SUPPORT

12. The Committee wishes to stress that prevention, care, treatment and support are mutually reinforcing elements and provide a continuum within an effective response to HIV/AIDS.

(a) Information for HIV prevention and raising awareness

13. Consistent with State party obligations in relation to the rights to health and information (arts. 24, 13 and 17), children should have the right to access adequate information related to HIV/AIDS prevention and care, through formal channels (e.g. through educational opportunities and child-targeted media) as well as informal channels (e.g. targeted to street children, institutionalized children or children living in difficult circumstances). States parties are

reminded that children require relevant, appropriate and timely information which recognizes the differences in levels of understanding among them, is tailored appropriately to age level and capacity and enables them to deal positively and responsibly with their sexuality in order to protect themselves from HIV infection. The Committee wishes to emphasize that effective HIV/AIDS prevention requires States to refrain from censoring, withholding or intentionally misrepresenting health-related information, including sexual education and information, and that consistent with their obligations to ensure the survival, life and development of the child (art. 6), States parties must ensure children have the ability to acquire the knowledge and skills to protect themselves and others as they begin to express their sexuality.

14. Dialogue with community, family and peer counsellors, and the provision of “life skills” education within schools, including skills in communicating on sexuality and healthy living, have been found to be useful approaches for delivering HIV prevention messages to both girls and boys, but different approaches may be necessary to reach different groups of children. States parties must make efforts to address gender differences as they may impact the access children have to prevention messages, and ensure that children are reached with appropriate prevention messages even if they face constraints due to language, religion, disability or other factors of discrimination. Particular attention must be paid to raising awareness in hard to reach populations. In this respect, the role of the mass-media and/or oral tradition in ensuring children have access to information and material, as recognized in article 17 of the Convention, is crucial both to provide appropriate information and to reduce stigma and discrimination. States parties should support the regular monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns to ascertain their effectiveness in providing information, reducing ignorance, stigma and discrimination, as well as addressing fear and misperceptions concerning HIV and its transmission among children, including adolescents.

(b) The role of education

15. Education plays a critical role in providing children with relevant and appropriate information on HIV/AIDS which can contribute to a better awareness and understanding of this phenomenon and prevent negative attitudes towards victims of HIV/AIDS (see also the Committee’s general comment No. 1 on the aims of education). Furthermore, education can and should empower children to protect themselves from the risk of HIV infection. In this regard, the Committee wants to remind the States parties of their obligation to ensure that primary education is available to all children, whether infected, orphaned or otherwise affected by HIV/AIDS. In many communities where HIV has spread widely, children from affected families, in particular girls, are facing serious difficulties staying in school and the number of teachers and other school employees lost to AIDS is limiting and threatening to destroy the ability of children to access education. States parties must make adequate provision to ensure children affected by HIV/AIDS can stay in school and ensure the qualified replacement of sick teachers so that children’s regular attendance at schools is not affected, and that the right to education (art. 28) of all children living within these communities is fully protected.

16. States parties must make every effort to ensure that schools are safe places for children, which offer them security and do not contribute to their vulnerability to HIV infection. In accordance with article 34 of the Convention, States parties are obliged to take all appropriate measures to prevent, inter alia, the inducement or coercion of any child to engage in unlawful sexual activity.

(c) Child and adolescent sensitive health services

17. The Committee is concerned that health services are generally still insufficiently responsive to the needs of human beings below 18 years old, in particular adolescents. As the Committee has noted on numerous occasions, children are more likely to use services that are friendly and supportive, provide a range of services and information, are geared to their needs, ensure their opportunity to participate in decisions affecting their health, and are accessible, affordable, confidential, non-judgemental, do not require parental consent and do not discriminate. In the context of HIV/AIDS and taking into account the evolving capacities of the child, States parties are encouraged to ensure that health services employ trained personnel who fully respect the rights of children to privacy (art. 6) and non-discrimination in offering them access to HIV-related information, voluntary counselling and testing, knowledge of their HIV status, confidential sexual and reproductive health services, free or low cost contraception, condoms and services, as well as HIV-related care and treatment if and when needed, including for the prevention and treatment of health problems related to HIV/AIDS e.g. tuberculosis and opportunistic infections.

18. In some countries, even when child and adolescent friendly HIV-related services are available, they are not sufficiently accessible to children with disabilities, indigenous children, children belonging to minorities, children living in rural areas, children living in extreme poverty or children who are otherwise marginalized within the society. In others, where the health system's overall capacity is already strained, children with HIV have been routinely denied access to basic health care. States parties must ensure that services are provided to the maximum extent possible to all children living within their borders, without discrimination, and that they sufficiently take into account differences in gender, age, and the social, economic, cultural and political context in which children live.

(d) HIV counselling and testing

19. The accessibility of voluntary, confidential HIV-counselling and testing services, with due attention to the evolving capacities of the child, is fundamental to the rights and health of children. These services are critical to children's ability to reduce their risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV, to accessing HIV-specific care, treatment and support, and to better plan for their futures. Consistent with the obligation under article 24 of the Convention to ensure that no child is deprived of her or his right of access to necessary health services, States parties should ensure access to voluntary, confidential HIV counselling and testing for all children.

20. The Committee wishes to stress that as the duty of States parties is first and foremost to ensure that the rights of the child are protected, States parties must refrain from imposing mandatory HIV/AIDS testing of children in all circumstances and ensure protection against it. While the evolving capacities of the child will determine whether consent is required from the child directly or from their parent or guardian, in all cases, consistent with the child's right to receive information under articles 13 and 17 of the Convention, States parties must ensure that prior to any HIV-testing, whether by health-care providers in relation to children who are accessing health services for another medical condition or otherwise, the risks and benefits of such testing are sufficiently conveyed so that an informed decision can be made.

21. States parties must protect the confidentiality of HIV test results consistent with the obligation to protect the right to privacy of children (art. 16), including within health and social welfare settings, and information on the HIV status of children may not be disclosed to third parties including parents without consent.

(e) Mother-to-child transmission

22. Mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) is responsible for the majority of HIV infections in infants and young children. Infants and young children can be infected with HIV during pregnancy, labour and delivery, and through breastfeeding. States parties are requested to ensure implementation of the strategies recommended by the United Nations agencies to prevent HIV infection in infants and young children. These include: (1) the primary prevention of HIV infection among parents-to-be, (2) the prevention of unintended pregnancies in HIV-infected women, (3) the prevention of HIV transmission from HIV-infected women to their infants and (4) the provision of care, treatment and support to HIV-infected women, their infants and families.

23. To prevent MTCT of HIV, States parties must take steps, including the provision of essential drugs, e.g. antiretroviral drugs, appropriate antenatal, delivery and post-partum care, and making HIV voluntary counselling and testing services available to pregnant women and their partners. The Committee recognizes that antiretroviral drugs given to a woman during pregnancy and/or labour and, in some regimens, to her infant, has been shown to significantly reduce the risk of transmission from mother to child. However, in addition, State parties should provide support for mothers and children, including counselling on infant feeding options. States parties are reminded that counselling of HIV-positive mothers should include information about the risks and benefits of different infant feeding options, and guidance in selecting the option most likely to be suitable for their situation. Follow-up support is also required in order for women to be able to implement their selected option as safely as possible.

24. Even in populations with high HIV prevalence, the majority of infants are born to women who are not HIV-infected. For the infants of HIV-negative women and women who do not know their HIV status, the Committee wishes to emphasize, consistent with articles 6 and 24 that breastfeeding remains the best feeding choice. For the infants of HIV-positive mothers, available evidence indicates that breastfeeding can add to the risk of HIV transmission by 10-20 per cent, but that lack of breastfeeding can expose children to an increased risk of malnutrition or infectious disease other than HIV. United Nations agencies have recommended that where replacement feeding is affordable, feasible, acceptable, sustainable and safe, avoidance of all breastfeeding by HIV-infected mothers is recommended - otherwise exclusive breastfeeding is recommended during the first months of life and should then be discontinued as soon as it is feasible.

(f) Treatment and care

25. The obligations of States parties under the Convention extend to ensuring that children have sustained and equal access to comprehensive treatment and care, including necessary HIV-related drugs, goods and services on a basis of non-discrimination. It is now widely recognized that comprehensive treatment and care includes antiretroviral and other medicines, diagnostics and related technologies for the care of HIV/AIDS, related opportunistic infections

and other conditions, good nutrition, and social, spiritual, and psychological support, as well as family, community and home-based care. In this regard, States parties should negotiate with the pharmaceutical industry in order to make the necessary medicines available at the lowest costs possible at local level. Furthermore States parties are requested to affirm, support and facilitate the involvement of communities as part of comprehensive HIV/AIDS treatment, care and support, while nonetheless complying with their own obligations under the Convention. States parties are asked to pay special attention to addressing those factors within their societies that hinder equal access to treatment, care and support for all children.

(g) Involvement of children in research

26. Consistent with article 24 of the Convention, States parties must ensure that HIV/AIDS research programmes include specific studies that contribute to effective prevention, care, treatment, and impact reduction for children. States parties must nonetheless ensure that children do not serve as research subjects until an intervention has already been thoroughly tested on adults. Rights and ethical concerns have arisen in relation to HIV/AIDS biomedical research, as well as HIV/AIDS operations, social, cultural and behavioural research. Children have been subjected to unnecessary or inappropriately designed research with little or no voice to either refuse or consent to participation. In line with the child's evolving capacities, consent of the child should be sought and consent may be sought from parents or guardians if necessary, but in all cases consent must be based on full disclosure of the risks and benefits of research to the child. States parties are further reminded to ensure that the privacy rights of children, in line with their obligation under article 16 of the Convention, are not inadvertently violated through the research process and that personal information about children which is accessed through research is, under no circumstances, used for purposes other than that for which consent was given. States parties must make every effort to ensure that children, and according to their evolving capacities their parents and/or their guardians, participate in decisions on research priorities and that a supportive environment is created for children that participate in such research.

V. VULNERABILITY AND CHILDREN NEEDING SPECIAL PROTECTION

27. The vulnerability of children to HIV/AIDS resulting from political, economic, social, cultural and other factors determines their likelihood of being left with insufficient support to cope with the impact of HIV/AIDS on their families and communities, exposed to a risk of acquiring infection, subjected to inappropriate research, or deprived of access to treatment, care and support if HIV infection sets in. HIV/AIDS-related vulnerability is most acute for children living in refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, children in detention, children living in institutions, as well as children living in extreme poverty, children living in situations of armed conflict, child-soldiers, economically and sexually exploited children, disabled, migrant, minority, indigenous, and street children, but all children can be rendered vulnerable by the particular circumstances of their lives. Even in times of severe resource constraints, the Committee wishes to note that the rights of vulnerable members of society must be protected and that many measures can be pursued with minimum resource implications. Reducing HIV/AIDS-related vulnerability requires first and foremost that children, their families and communities be empowered to make informed choices about decisions, practices or policies affecting them in relation to HIV/AIDS.

(a) Children affected and orphaned by HIV/AIDS

28. Special attention must be given to children orphaned by AIDS, children from affected families, including child-headed households, as these impact on vulnerability to HIV infection. For children from families affected by HIV/AIDS, the stigmatization and social isolation they experience may be accentuated by the neglect or violation of their rights, in particular discrimination resulting in a decrease or loss of access to education, health and social services. The Committee wishes to underline the necessity of legal, economic and social protections for affected children to ensure their access to education, inheritance, shelter, health and social services, as well as to feel secure in disclosing their HIV status and that of their family members when the children deem it appropriate. In this respect, States parties are reminded that these measures are critical to realization of the rights of children and to give them the skills and support necessary to reduce their vulnerability and risk of becoming infected.

29. The Committee wishes to emphasize the critical implications of proof of identity for children affected by HIV/AIDS, as it relates to securing recognition as a person before the law, safeguarding the protection of rights, in particular to inheritance, education, health and other social services, as well as to making children less vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, particularly if separated from their families due to illness or death. In this respect, birth registration is critical to ensure the rights of the child and is also necessary to minimize the impact of HIV/AIDS on the lives of affected children. States parties are therefore reminded of their obligation under article 7 of the Convention to ensure that systems are in place for the registration of every child at or shortly after birth.

30. The trauma HIV/AIDS brings to the lives of orphans often begins with the illness and death of one of their parents, and is frequently compounded by the effects of stigma and discrimination. In this respect, States parties are particularly reminded to ensure that both law and practice support the inheritance and property rights of orphans, with particular attention to underlying gender-based discrimination as it may interfere with the fulfilment of these rights. Consistent with their obligations under article 27 of the Convention, States parties must also support and strengthen the capacity of families and communities of children orphaned by AIDS to provide them with a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral, economic and social development, including access to psychosocial care as needed.

31. Orphans are best protected and cared for when efforts are made to enable siblings to remain together, and in the care of relatives or family members. The extended family, with the support of the surrounding community, may be the least traumatic and therefore the best way to care for orphans when there are no other feasible alternatives. Assistance must be provided so that, to the maximum extent possible, children can remain within existing family structures. This option may not be available due to the impact HIV/AIDS has on the extended family. In that case, States parties should provide as far as possible for family-type alternative care (e.g. foster care). States parties are encouraged to provide support, financial and otherwise, when necessary, to child-headed households. States parties must ensure that their strategies recognize that communities are at the front line of the response to HIV/AIDS and that these strategies are designed to support communities in their determinations as to how best to provide support to the orphans living there.

32. Although institutionalized care may have detrimental effects on child development, States parties may nonetheless determine that it has an interim role to play in caring for children orphaned by HIV/AIDS when family-based care within their own communities is not a possibility. It is the opinion of the Committee, that any form of institutionalized care for children can only serve as a last resort, and measures must be fully in place to protect the rights of the child and guard against all forms of abuse and exploitation. In keeping with the right of children to special protection and assistance when within these environments, and consistent with articles 3, 20 and 25 under the Convention, strict measures are needed to ensure that such institutions meet specific standards of care and comply with legal protections. States parties are reminded that limits must be placed on the length of time children spend in these institutions, and programmes must be developed to support any children who stay in these institutions, whether infected or affected by HIV/AIDS, to successfully reintegrate into their communities.

(b) Victims of sexual and economic exploitation

33. Girls and boys who are deprived of the means of survival and development, particularly children orphaned by AIDS, may be subjected to sexual and economic exploitation in a variety of forms, including the exchange of sexual services or hazardous work for money to survive, support their sick or dying parents and younger siblings, or to pay for school fees. Children who are infected or immediately affected by HIV/AIDS may find themselves at a double disadvantage, experiencing discrimination on the basis of both their social and economic marginalization and their, or their parents, HIV status. Consistent with the right of children under articles 32, 34, 35 and 36 of the Convention, and in order to decrease children's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, States parties are obliged to protect children from all forms of economic and sexual exploitation, including ensuring they do not fall prey to prostitution networks, and that they are protected from performing any work likely to be hazardous or to interfere with their education, health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. States parties must take bold action to protect children from sexual and economic exploitation, trafficking and sale and consistent with the rights under article 39, create opportunities for those who have been subjected to such treatment to benefit from the support and caring services of the State and non-governmental entities engaged in these issues.

(c) Victims of violence and abuse

34. Children may be exposed to various forms of violence and abuse which may increase their risk of becoming HIV-infected, and they may also be subjected to violence as a result of their being infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. Violence, including rape and other forms of sexual abuse, can occur in the family or foster setting or be perpetrated by those with specific responsibilities towards children, including teachers and employees of institutions working with children, such as prisons and institutions concerned with mental health and other disabilities. In keeping with the rights of the child according to article 19 of the Convention, States parties have the obligation to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse, whether at home, in school or other institutions, or in the community. Programmes must be specifically adapted to the environment in which children live, their ability to recognize and disclose abuses and their individual capacity and autonomy. The Committee considers that the relationship between HIV/AIDS and the violence or abuse suffered by children in the context of war and armed conflict requires specific attention. Measures to prevent violence and abuse in these situations are critical, and States parties must ensure the incorporation of HIV/AIDS and child rights issues

in addressing and supporting children - girls and boys - who were used by military or other uniformed personnel to provide domestic help or sexual services, or who are internally displaced or living in refugee camps. In keeping with States parties obligations, including under articles 38 and 39 of the Convention, active information campaigns combined with the counselling of children and mechanisms for prevention and early detection of violence and abuse must be put in place within conflict and disaster affected regions, as well as within national and community responses to HIV/AIDS.

Substance abuse

35. The use of substances, including alcohol and drugs, may reduce the ability of children to exert control over their sexual conduct and, as a result, may increase their vulnerability to HIV infection. Injecting practices with unsterile equipment further enhances the risk of HIV transmission. The Committee notes that greater understanding is needed of substance-use behaviours among children, including the impact that neglect and violation of the rights of the child has on these behaviours. In most countries, children have not benefited from pragmatic HIV prevention programmes related to substance use, which even when they do exist have largely been targeted at adults. The Committee wishes to emphasize that policies and programmes aimed at reducing substance use and HIV transmission must recognize the particular sensitivities and lifestyles of children, including adolescents, in the context of HIV/AIDS prevention. Consistent with the right of children under articles 33 and 24 of the Convention, States parties are obliged to ensure the implementation of programmes that aim to reduce the factors that expose children to the use of substances, as well as those that provide children that are abusing substances treatment and support.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

36. The Committee hereby reaffirms the recommendations, which emerged at the day of general discussion on HIV/AIDS (CRC/C/80) and calls upon States parties to:

1. Adopt and implement national and local HIV/AIDS-related policies, including effective Plans of Action, strategies, and programmes that are child-centred rights-based and incorporating the rights of the child under the Convention including by taking into account the recommendations made in the previous paragraphs of this general comment and those adopted at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children (2002).

2. Allocate financial, technical and human resources to the maximum extent available to support national and community-based action (art. 4), and when appropriate within the context of international cooperation (see hereafter under 7).

3. Review existing laws or enact new legislation with the view to implement fully article 2 of the Convention and in particular to prohibit expressly discrimination based on real or perceived HIV/AIDS status as to guarantee equal access of all children to all relevant services with particular attention for the child's right to privacy and confidentiality and other recommendations the Committee made in the previous paragraphs relevant to legislation.

4. Include HIV/AIDS Plans of Action, strategies, policies and programmes in the work of national mechanisms for monitoring and coordinating children's rights and to consider the establishment of a review procedure, which responds specifically to complaints of neglect or violation of the rights of the child in relation to HIV/AIDS, whether this entails the creation of a new legislative or administrative body or is entrusted to an existing national institution.

5. Reassess their HIV-related data collection and evaluation to ensure that they adequately cover children as defined under the Convention, disaggregated by age and gender and ideally be done in five-year age groups, and as far as possible reflect children belonging to vulnerable groups and in need of special protection.

6. Include in their reporting process under article 44 of the CRC information on national HIV/AIDS policies and programmes and, to the extent possible, budgeting and resource allocations at national, regional and local levels, as well as within these breakdowns the proportions allocated to prevention, care, research and impact reduction. Specific attention must be given to the extent to which these programmes and policies explicitly recognize children (in light of their evolving capacities) and their rights, and the extent to which HIV-related rights of children are dealt with in laws, policies and practices, with specific attention to discrimination against children on the basis of their HIV status, as well as because they are orphans or the children of parents living with HIV/AIDS. The Committee requests States parties to provide a detailed indication in their reports of what it considers to be the most important priorities within its jurisdiction in relation to children and HIV/AIDS, and to outline the programme of activities it proposes to take over the succeeding five years in order to address the problems identified. This will allow these to be progressively assessed over time.

7. In order to promote international cooperation, the Committee calls upon UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS and other relevant international bodies, organizations and agencies to contribute systematically, at the national level, to efforts to ensure the rights of children in the context of HIV/AIDS, and also to continue to work with the Committee to improve the rights of the child in the context of HIV/AIDS. Further the Committee urges States providing development cooperation to ensure that HIV/AIDS strategies are designed so as to fully take into account the rights of the child.

8. Non-governmental organizations, as well as community-based groups and other civil society actors, such as youth groups, faith-based organizations, women's organizations, traditional leaders, including religious and cultural leaders, all have a vital role to play in the response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. States parties are requested to ensure an enabling environment for civil society participation, which includes facilitating collaboration and coordination among different players and that they are given the support to be able to operate effectively without impediment. (In this regard, States parties are specifically encouraged to support the full involvement of People Living with HIV/AIDS, with particular attention to the inclusion of children, in the provision of HIV/AIDS prevention, care, treatment and support services.)

Note

¹ In its seventeenth session (1998), the Committee on the Rights of the Child held a day of general discussion on the theme of HIV/AIDS and children's rights in which it recommended a number of actions be taken including facilitating the engagement of States parties on HIV/AIDS issues in relation to the rights of the child. Human rights in relation to HIV/AIDS has also been discussed at the Eighth Meeting of Persons Chairing the Human Rights Treaty Bodies in 1997 and been taken up by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Similarly, HIV/AIDS has been discussed annually by the Commission on Human Rights for over a decade. UNAIDS and UNICEF have emphasized the rights of the child in relation to HIV/AIDS in all aspects of their work, and the World AIDS Campaign for 1997 focused on "Children Living in a World with AIDS" and for 1998 on "Force for Change: World AIDS Campaign with Young People". UNAIDS and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have also produced *The International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights* (1998) and its *Revised Guideline 6* (2002) to promote and protect human rights in the context of HIV/AIDS. At the international political level, HIV/AIDS - related rights have been recognized in the United Nations General Assembly Special Session *Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, A World Fit for Children* of the United Nations Assembly Special Session on Children, and in other international and regional documents

Thirty-third session (2003)

General comment No. 4: Adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Introduction

The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as "every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable, majority is attained earlier" (art. 1). Consequently, adolescents up to 18 years old are holders of all the rights enshrined in the Convention; they are entitled to special protection measures and, according to their evolving capacities, they can progressively exercise their rights (art. 5).

Adolescence is a period characterized by rapid physical, cognitive and social changes, including sexual and reproductive maturation; the gradual building up of the capacity to assume adult behaviours and roles involving new responsibilities requiring new knowledge and skills. While adolescents are in general a healthy population group, adolescence also poses new challenges to health and development owing to their relative vulnerability and pressure from society, including peers, to adopt risky health behaviour. These challenges include developing an individual identity and dealing with one's sexuality. The dynamic transition period to adulthood is also generally a period of positive changes, prompted by the significant capacity of adolescents to learn rapidly, to experience new and diverse situations, to develop and use critical thinking, to familiarize themselves with freedom, to be creative and to socialize.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child notes with concern that in implementing their obligations under the Convention, States parties have not given sufficient attention to the specific concerns of adolescents as rights holders and to promoting their health and development. This

has motivated the Committee to adopt the present general comment in order to raise awareness and provide States parties with guidance and support in their efforts to guarantee the respect for, protection and fulfilment of the rights of adolescents, including through the formulation of specific strategies and policies.

The Committee understands the concepts of “health and development” more broadly than being strictly limited to the provisions defined in articles 6 (right to life, survival and development) and 24 (right to health) of the Convention. One of the aims of this general comment is precisely to identify the main human rights that need to be promoted and protected in order to ensure that adolescents do enjoy the highest attainable standard of health, develop in a well-balanced manner, and are adequately prepared to enter adulthood and assume a constructive role in their communities and in society at large. This general comment should be read in conjunction with the Convention and its two Optional Protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on the involvement of children in armed conflict, as well as other relevant international human rights norms and standards.¹

I. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND OTHER OBLIGATIONS OF STATES PARTIES

1. As recognized by the World Conference on Human Rights (1993) and repeatedly stated by the Committee, children’s rights too are indivisible and interrelated. In addition to articles 6 and 24, other provisions and principles of the Convention are crucial in guaranteeing that adolescents fully enjoy their right to health and development.

The right to non-discrimination

2. States parties have the obligation to ensure that all human beings below 18 enjoy all the rights set forth in the Convention without discrimination (art. 2), including with regard to “race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status”. These grounds also cover adolescents’ sexual orientation and health status (including HIV/AIDS and mental health). Adolescents who are subject to discrimination are more vulnerable to abuse, other types of violence and exploitation, and their health and development are put at greater risk. They are therefore entitled to special attention and protection from all segments of society.

Appropriate guidance in the exercise of rights

3. The Convention acknowledges the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents (or other persons legally responsible for the child) “to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the Convention” (art. 5). The Committee believes that parents or other persons legally responsible for the child need to fulfil with care their right and responsibility to provide direction and guidance to their adolescent children in the exercise by the latter of their rights. They have an obligation to take into account the adolescents’ views, in accordance with their age and maturity, and to provide a safe and supportive environment in which the adolescent can develop. Adolescents need to be recognized by the members of their family environment as active rights holders who have the capacity to become full and responsible citizens, given the proper guidance and direction.

Respect for the views of the child

4. The right to express views freely and have them duly taken into account (art. 12) is also fundamental in realizing adolescents' right to health and development. States parties need to ensure that adolescents are given a genuine chance to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, especially within the family, in school, and in their communities. In order for adolescents to be able safely and properly to exercise this right, public authorities, parents and other adults working with or for children need to create an environment based on trust, information-sharing, the capacity to listen and sound guidance that is conducive for adolescents' participating equally including in decision-making processes.

Legal and judicial measures and processes

5. Under article 4 of the Convention, "States parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized" therein. In the context of the rights of adolescents to health and development, States parties need to ensure that specific legal provisions are guaranteed under domestic law, including with regard to setting a minimum age for sexual consent, marriage and the possibility of medical treatment without parental consent. These minimum ages should be the same for boys and girls (article 2 of the Convention) and closely reflect the recognition of the status of human beings under 18 years of age as rights holders, in accordance with their evolving capacity, age and maturity (arts. 5 and 12 to 17). Further, adolescents need to have easy access to individual complaint systems as well as judicial and appropriate non-judicial redress mechanisms that guarantee fair and due process, with special attention to the right to privacy (art. 16).

Civil rights and freedoms

6. The Convention defines the civil rights and freedoms of children and adolescents in its articles 13 to 17. These are fundamental in guaranteeing the right to health and development of adolescents. Article 17 states that the child has the right to "access information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health". The right of adolescents to access appropriate information is crucial if States parties are to promote cost-effective measures, including through laws, policies and programmes, with regard to numerous health-related situations, including those covered in articles 24 and 33 such as family planning, prevention of accidents, protection from harmful traditional practices, including early marriages and female genital mutilation, and the abuse of alcohol, tobacco and other harmful substances.

7. In order to promote the health and development of adolescents, States parties are also encouraged to respect strictly their right to privacy and confidentiality, including with respect to advice and counselling on health matters (art. 16). Health-care providers have an obligation to keep confidential medical information concerning adolescents, bearing in mind the basic principles of the Convention. Such information may only be disclosed with the consent of the adolescent, or in the same situations applying to the violation of an adult's confidentiality. Adolescents deemed mature enough to receive counselling without the presence of a parent or other person are entitled to privacy and may request confidential services, including treatment.

Protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation²

8. States parties must take effective measures to ensure that adolescents are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation (arts. 19, 32-36 and 38), paying increased attention to the specific forms of abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation that affects this age group. In particular, they should adopt special measures to ensure the physical, sexual and mental integrity of adolescents with disabilities, who are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. States parties should also ensure that adolescents affected by poverty who are socially marginalized are not criminalized. In this regard, financial and human resources need to be allocated to promote research that would inform the adoption of effective local and national laws, policies and programmes. Policies and strategies should be reviewed regularly and revised accordingly. In taking these measures, States parties have to take into account the evolving capacities of adolescents and involve them in an appropriate manner in developing measures, including programmes, designed to protect them. In this context, the Committee emphasizes the positive impact that peer education can have, and the positive influence of proper role models, especially those in the worlds of arts, entertainment and sports.

Data collection

9. Systematic data collection is necessary for States parties to be able to monitor the health and development of adolescents. States parties should adopt data-collection mechanisms that allow desegregation by sex, age, origin and socio-economic status so that the situation of different groups can be followed. Data should also be collected to study the situation of specific groups such as ethnic and/or indigenous minorities, migrant or refugee adolescents, adolescents with disabilities, working adolescents, etc. Where appropriate, adolescents should participate in the analysis to ensure that the information is understood and utilized in an adolescent-sensitive way.

II. CREATING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

10. The health and development of adolescents are strongly determined by the environments in which they live. Creating a safe and supportive environment entails addressing attitudes and actions of both the immediate environment of the adolescent - family, peers, schools and services - as well as the wider environment created by, inter alia, community and religious leaders, the media, national and local policies and legislation. The promotion and enforcement of the provisions and principles of the Convention, especially articles 2-6, 12-17, 24, 28, 29 and 31, are key to guaranteeing adolescents' right to health and development. States parties should take measures to raise awareness and stimulate and/or regulate action through the formulation of policy or the adoption of legislation and the implementation of programmes specifically for adolescents.

11. The Committee stresses the importance of the family environment, including the members of the extended family and community or other persons legally responsible for the child or adolescent (arts. 5 and 18). While most adolescents grow up in well-functioning family environments, for some the family does not constitute a safe and supportive milieu.

12. The Committee calls upon States parties to develop and implement, in a manner consistent with adolescents' evolving capacities, legislation, policies and programmes to promote the health

and development of adolescents by (a) providing parents (or legal guardians) with appropriate assistance through the development of institutions, facilities and services that adequately support the well-being of adolescents, including, when needed, the provision of material assistance and support with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing (art. 27 (3)); (b) providing adequate information and parental support to facilitate the development of a relationship of trust and confidence in which issues regarding, for example, sexuality and sexual behaviour and risky lifestyles can be openly discussed and acceptable solutions found that respect the adolescent's rights (art. 27 (3)); (c) providing adolescent mothers and fathers with support and guidance for both their own and their children's well-being (art. 24 (f), 27 (2-3)); (d) giving, while respecting the values and norms of ethnic and other minorities, special attention, guidance and support to adolescents and parents (or legal guardians), whose traditions and norms may differ from those in the society where they live; and (e) ensuring that interventions in the family to protect the adolescent and, when necessary, separate her/him from the family, e.g. in case of abuse or neglect, are in accordance with applicable laws and procedures. Such laws and procedures should be reviewed to ensure that they conform to the principles of the Convention.

13. The school plays an important role in the life of many adolescents, as the venue for learning, development and socialization. Article 29 (1) states that education must be directed to "the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential". In addition, general comment No. 1 on the aims of education states that "Education must also be aimed at ensuring that ... no child leaves school without being equipped to face the challenges that he or she can expect to be confronted with in life. Basic skills should include ... the ability to make well-balanced decisions; to resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner; and to develop a healthy lifestyle [and] good social relationships ...". Considering the importance of appropriate education for the current and future health and development of adolescents, as well as for their children, the Committee urges States parties, in line with articles 28 and 29 of the Convention to (a) ensure that quality primary education is compulsory and available, accessible and free to all and that secondary and higher education are available and accessible to all adolescents; (b) provide well-functioning school and recreational facilities which do not pose health risks to students, including water and sanitation and safe journeys to school; (c) take the necessary actions to prevent and prohibit all forms of violence and abuse, including sexual abuse, corporal punishment and other inhuman, degrading or humiliating treatment or punishment in school, by school personnel as well as among students; (d) initiate and support measures, attitudes and activities that promote healthy behaviour by including relevant topics in school curricula.

14. During adolescence, an increasing number of young people are leaving school to start working to help support their families or for wages in the formal or informal sector. Participation in work activities in accordance with international standards, as long as it does not jeopardize the enjoyment of any of the other rights of adolescents, including health and education, may be beneficial for the development of the adolescent. The Committee urges States parties to take all necessary measures to abolish all forms of child labour, starting with the worst forms, to continuously review national regulations on minimum ages for employment with a view to making them compatible with international standards, and to regulate the working environment and conditions for adolescents who are working (in accordance with article 32 of the Convention, as well as ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182), so as to ensure that they are fully protected and have access to legal redress mechanisms.

15. The Committee also stresses that in accordance with article 23 (3) of the Convention, the special rights of adolescents with disabilities should be taken into account and assistance provided to ensure that the disabled child/adolescent has effective access to and receives good quality education. States should recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for disabled children/adolescents, where possible in regular schools.

16. The Committee is concerned that early marriage and pregnancy are significant factors in health problems related to sexual and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS. Both the legal minimum age and actual age of marriage, particularly for girls, are still very low in several States parties. There are also non-health-related concerns: children who marry, especially girls, are often obliged to leave the education system and are marginalized from social activities. Further, in some States parties married children are legally considered adults, even if they are under 18, depriving them of all the special protection measures they are entitled under the Convention. The Committee strongly recommends that States parties review and, where necessary, reform their legislation and practice to increase the minimum age for marriage with and without parental consent to 18 years, for both girls and boys. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has made a similar recommendation (general comment No. 21 of 1994).

17. In most countries accidental injuries or injuries due to violence are a leading cause of death or permanent disability among adolescents. In that respect, the Committee is concerned about the injuries and death resulting from road traffic accidents, which affect adolescents disproportionately. States parties should adopt and enforce legislation and programmes to improve road safety, including driving education for and examination of adolescents and the adoption or strengthening of legislation known to be highly effective such as the obligations to have a valid driver's licence, wear seat belts and crash helmets, and the designation of pedestrian areas.

18. The Committee is also very concerned about the high rate of suicide among this age group. Mental disorders and psychosocial illness are relatively common among adolescents. In many countries symptoms such as depression, eating disorders and self-destructive behaviours, sometimes leading to self-inflicted injuries and suicide, are increasing. They may be related to, inter alia, violence, ill-treatment, abuse and neglect, including sexual abuse, unrealistically high expectations, and/or bullying or hazing in and outside school. States parties should provide these adolescents with all the necessary services.

19. Violence results from a complex interplay of individual, family, community and societal factors. Vulnerable adolescents such as those who are homeless or who are living in institutions, who belong to gangs or who have been recruited as child soldiers are especially exposed to both institutional and interpersonal violence. Under article 19 of the Convention, States parties must take all appropriate measures³ to prevent and eliminate: (a) institutional violence against adolescents, including through legislation and administrative measures in relation to public and private institutions for adolescents (schools, institutions for disabled adolescents, juvenile reformatories, etc.), and training and monitoring of personnel in charge of institutionalized children or who otherwise have contact with children through their work, including the police;

and (b) interpersonal violence among adolescents, including by supporting adequate parenting and opportunities for social and educational development in early childhood, fostering non-violent cultural norms and values (as foreseen in article 29 of the Convention), strictly controlling firearms and restricting access to alcohol and drugs.

20. In light of articles 3, 6, 12, 19 and 24 (3) of the Convention, States parties should take all effective measures to eliminate all acts and activities which threaten the right to life of adolescents, including honour killings. The Committee strongly urges States parties to develop and implement awareness-raising campaigns, education programmes and legislation aimed at changing prevailing attitudes, and address gender roles and stereotypes that contribute to harmful traditional practices. Further, States parties should facilitate the establishment of multidisciplinary information and advice centres regarding the harmful aspects of some traditional practices, including early marriage and female genital mutilation.

21. The Committee is concerned about the influence exerted on adolescent health behaviours by the marketing of unhealthy products and lifestyles. In line with article 17 of the Convention, States parties are urged to protect adolescents from information that is harmful to their health and development, while underscoring their right to information and material from diverse national and international sources. States parties are therefore urged to regulate or prohibit information on and marketing of substances such as alcohol and tobacco, particularly when it targets children and adolescents.⁴

III. INFORMATION, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, COUNSELLING, AND HEALTH SERVICES

22. Adolescents have the right to access adequate information essential for their health and development and for their ability to participate meaningfully in society. It is the obligation of States parties to ensure that all adolescent girls and boys, both in and out of school, are provided with, and not denied, accurate and appropriate information on how to protect their health and development and practise healthy behaviours. This should include information on the use and abuse, of tobacco, alcohol and other substances, safe and respectful social and sexual behaviours, diet and physical activity.

23. In order to act adequately on the information, adolescents need to develop the skills necessary, including self-care skills, such as how to plan and prepare nutritionally balanced meals and proper personal hygiene habits, and skills for dealing with particular social situations such as interpersonal communication, decision-making, and coping with stress and conflict. States parties should stimulate and support opportunities to build such skills through, inter alia, formal and informal education and training programmes, youth organizations and the media.

24. In light of articles 3, 17 and 24 of the Convention, States parties should provide adolescents with access to sexual and reproductive information, including on family planning and contraceptives, the dangers of early pregnancy, the prevention of HIV/AIDS and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). In addition, States parties should ensure that they have access to appropriate information, regardless of their marital status and whether their parents or guardians consent. It is essential to find proper means and methods of providing information that is adequate and sensitive to the particularities and specific rights of adolescent girls and boys. To this end, States parties are encouraged to ensure that adolescents

are actively involved in the design and dissemination of information through a variety of channels beyond the school, including youth organizations, religious, community and other groups and the media.

25. Under article 24 of the Convention, States parties are urged to provide adequate treatment and rehabilitation for adolescents with mental disorders, to make the community aware of the early signs and symptoms and the seriousness of these conditions, and to protect adolescents from undue pressures, including psychosocial stress. States parties are also urged to combat discrimination and stigma surrounding mental disorders, in line with their obligations under article 2. Every adolescent with a mental disorder has the right to be treated and cared for, as far as possible, in the community in which he or she lives. Where hospitalization or placement in a psychiatric institution is necessary, this decision should be made in accordance with the principle of the best interests of the child. In the event of hospitalization or institutionalization, the patient should be given the maximum possible opportunity to enjoy all his or her rights as recognized under the Convention, including the rights to education and to have access to recreational activities.⁵ Where appropriate, adolescents should be separated from adults. States parties must ensure that adolescents have access to a personal representative other than a family member to represent their interests, when necessary and appropriate.⁶ In accordance with article 25 of the Convention, States parties should undertake periodic review of the placement of adolescents in hospitals or psychiatric institutions.

26. Adolescents, both girls and boys, are at risk of being infected with and affected by STDs, including HIV/AIDS.⁷ States should ensure that appropriate goods, services and information for the prevention and treatment of STDs, including HIV/AIDS, are available and accessible. To this end, States parties are urged (a) to develop effective prevention programmes, including measures aimed at changing cultural views about adolescents' need for contraception and STD prevention and addressing cultural and other taboos surrounding adolescent sexuality; (b) to adopt legislation to combat practices that either increase adolescents' risk of infection or contribute to the marginalization of adolescents who are already infected with STDs, including HIV; (c) to take measures to remove all barriers hindering the access of adolescents to information, preventive measures such as condoms, and care.

27. Adolescent girls should have access to information on the harm that early marriage and early pregnancy can cause, and those who become pregnant should have access to health services that are sensitive to their rights and particular needs. States parties should take measures to reduce maternal morbidity and mortality in adolescent girls, particularly caused by early pregnancy and unsafe abortion practices, and to support adolescent parents. Young mothers, especially where support is lacking, may be prone to depression and anxiety, compromising their ability to care for their child. The Committee urges States parties (a) to develop and implement programmes that provide access to sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning, contraception and safe abortion services where abortion is not against the law, adequate and comprehensive obstetric care and counselling; (b) to foster positive and supportive attitudes towards adolescent parenthood for their mothers and fathers; and (c) to develop policies that will allow adolescent mothers to continue their education.

28. Before parents give their consent, adolescents need to have a chance to express their views freely and their views should be given due weight, in accordance with article 12 of the Convention. However, if the adolescent is of sufficient maturity, informed consent shall be obtained from the adolescent her/himself, while informing the parents if that is in the “best interest of the child” (art. 3).

29. With regard to privacy and confidentiality, and the related issue of informed consent to treatment, States parties should (a) enact laws or regulations to ensure that confidential advice concerning treatment is provided to adolescents so that they can give their informed consent. Such laws or regulations should stipulate an age for this process, or refer to the evolving capacity of the child; and (b) provide training for health personnel on the rights of adolescents to privacy and confidentiality, to be informed about planned treatment and to give their informed consent to treatment.

IV. VULNERABILITY AND RISK

30. In ensuring respect for the right of adolescents to health and development, both individual behaviours and environmental factors which increase their vulnerability and risk should be taken into consideration. Environmental factors, such as armed conflict or social exclusion, increase the vulnerability of adolescents to abuse, other forms of violence and exploitation, thereby severely limiting adolescents’ abilities to make individual, healthy behaviour choices. For example, the decision to engage in unsafe sex increases adolescents’ risk of ill-health.

31. In accordance with article 23 of the Convention, adolescents with mental and/or physical disabilities have an equal right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States parties have an obligation to provide adolescents with disabilities with the means necessary to realize their rights.⁸ States parties should (a) ensure that health facilities, goods and services are available and accessible to all adolescents with disabilities and that these facilities and services promote their self-reliance and their active participation in the community; (b) ensure that the necessary equipment and personal support are available to enable them to move around, participate and communicate; (c) pay specific attention to the special needs relating to the sexuality of adolescents with disabilities; and (d) remove barriers that hinder adolescents with disabilities in realizing their rights.

32. States parties have to provide special protection to homeless adolescents, including those working in the informal sector. Homeless adolescents are particularly vulnerable to violence, abuse and sexual exploitation from others, self-destructive behaviour, substance abuse and mental disorders. In this regard, States parties are required to (a) develop policies and enact and enforce legislation that protect such adolescents from violence, e.g. by law enforcement officials; (b) develop strategies for the provision of appropriate education and access to health care, and of opportunities for the development of livelihood skills.

33. Adolescents who are sexually exploited, including in prostitution and pornography, are exposed to significant health risks, including STDs, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, violence and psychological distress. They have the right to physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration in an environment that fosters health, self-respect and dignity (art. 39). It is the obligation of States parties to enact and enforce laws to prohibit all forms of sexual exploitation and related trafficking; to collaborate with other States parties to eliminate

intercountry trafficking; and to provide appropriate health and counselling services to adolescents who have been sexually exploited, making sure that they are treated as victims and not as offenders.

34. Additionally, adolescents experiencing poverty, armed conflicts, all forms of injustice, family breakdown, political, social and economic instability and all types of migration may be particularly vulnerable. These situations might seriously hamper their health and development. By investing heavily in preventive policies and measures States parties can drastically reduce levels of vulnerability and risk factors; they will also provide cost-effective ways for society to help adolescents develop harmoniously in a free society.

V. NATURE OF STATES' OBLIGATIONS

35. In exercising their obligations in relation to the health and development of adolescents, States parties shall always take fully into account the four general principles of the Convention. It is the view of the Committee that States parties must take all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the realization and monitoring of the rights of adolescents to health and development as recognized in the Convention. To this end, States parties must notably fulfil the following obligations:

(a) To create a safe and supportive environment for adolescents, including within their family, in schools, in all types of institutions in which they may live, within their workplace and/or in the society at large;

(b) To ensure that adolescents have access to the information that is essential for their health and development and that they have opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their health (notably through informed consent and the right of confidentiality), to acquire life skills, to obtain adequate and age-appropriate information, and to make appropriate health behaviour choices;

(c) To ensure that health facilities, goods and services, including counselling and health services for mental and sexual and reproductive health, of appropriate quality and sensitive to adolescents' concerns are available to all adolescents;

(d) To ensure that adolescent girls and boys have the opportunity to participate actively in planning and programming for their own health and development;

(e) To protect adolescents from all forms of labour which may jeopardize the enjoyment of their rights, notably by abolishing all forms of child labour and by regulating the working environment and conditions in accordance with international standards;

(f) To protect adolescents from all forms of intentional and unintentional injuries, including those resulting from violence and road traffic accidents;

(g) To protect adolescents from all harmful traditional practices, such as early marriages, honour killings and female genital mutilation;

(h) To ensure that adolescents belonging to especially vulnerable groups are fully taken into account in the fulfilment of all aforementioned obligations;

(i) To implement measures for the prevention of mental disorders and the promotion of mental health of adolescents.

36. The Committee draws the attention of States parties to the general comment No. 14 on the right to the highest attainable standard of health of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which states that, “States parties should provide a safe and supportive environment for adolescents that ensures the opportunity to participate in decisions affecting their health, to build life skills, to acquire appropriate information, to receive counselling and to negotiate the health-behaviour choices they make. The realization of the right to health of adolescents is dependent on the development of youth-sensitive health care, which respects confidentiality and privacy and includes appropriate sexual and reproductive health services.”

37. In accordance with articles 24, 39 and other related provisions of the Convention, States parties should provide health services that are sensitive to the particular needs and human rights of all adolescents, paying attention to the following characteristics:

(a) *Availability*. Primary health care should include services sensitive to the needs of adolescents, with special attention given to sexual and reproductive health and mental health;

(b) *Accessibility*. Health facilities, goods and services should be known and easily accessible (economically, physically and socially) to all adolescents, without discrimination. Confidentiality should be guaranteed, when necessary;

(c) *Acceptability*. While fully respecting the provisions and principles of the Convention, all health facilities, goods and services should respect cultural values, be gender sensitive, be respectful of medical ethics and be acceptable to both adolescents and the communities in which they live;

(d) *Quality*. Health services and goods should be scientifically and medically appropriate, which requires personnel trained to care for adolescents, adequate facilities and scientifically accepted methods.

38. States parties should, where feasible, adopt a multisectoral approach to the promotion and protection of adolescent health and development by facilitating effective and sustainable linkages and partnerships among all relevant actors. At the national level, such an approach calls for close and systematic collaboration and coordination within Government, so as to ensure the necessary involvement of all relevant government entities. Public health and other services utilized by adolescents should also be encouraged and assisted in seeking collaboration with, inter alia, private and/or traditional practitioners, professional associations, pharmacies and organizations that provide services to vulnerable groups of adolescents.

39. A multisectoral approach to the promotion and protection of adolescent health and development will not be effective without international cooperation. Therefore, States parties should, when appropriate, seek such cooperation with United Nations specialized agencies, programmes and bodies, international NGOs and bilateral aid agencies, international professional associations and other non-State actors.

Notes

¹ These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

² See also the reports of the Committee's days of general discussion on "Violence against children" held in 2000 and 2001 and the Recommendations adopted in this regard (see CRC/C/100, chap. V and CRC/C/111, chap. V).

³ Ibid.

⁴ As proposed in the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (2003) of the World Health Organization.

⁵ For further guidance on this subject, refer to the Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and for the Improvement of Mental Health Care, (General Assembly resolution 46/119 of 17 December 1991, annex).

⁶ Ibid., in particular principles 2, 3 and 7.

⁷ For further guidance on this issue, see general comment No. 3 (2003) on HIV/AIDS and the rights of children.

⁸ United Nations Standard Rules on Equal Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

Thirty-fourth session (2003)

General comment No. 5: General measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (arts. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6)

Foreword

1. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has drafted this general comment to outline States parties' obligations to develop what it has termed "general measures of implementation". The various elements of the concept are complex and the Committee emphasizes that it is likely to issue more detailed general comments on individual elements in due course, to expand on this outline. Its general comment No. 2 (2002) entitled "The role of independent national human rights institutions in the protection and promotion of the rights of the child" has already expanded on this concept.

Article 4

“States parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the present Convention. With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation.”

I. INTRODUCTION

2. When a State ratifies the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it takes on obligations under international law to implement it. Implementation is the process whereby States parties take action to ensure the realization of all rights in the Convention for all children in their jurisdiction.¹ Article 4 requires States parties to take “all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures” for implementation of the rights contained therein. While it is the State which takes on obligations under the Convention, its task of implementation - of making reality of the human rights of children - needs to engage all sectors of society and, of course, children themselves. Ensuring that all domestic legislation is fully compatible with the Convention and that the Convention’s principles and provisions can be directly applied and appropriately enforced is fundamental. In addition, the Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified a wide range of measures that are needed for effective implementation, including the development of special structures and monitoring, training and other activities in Government, parliament and the judiciary at all levels.²
3. In its periodic examination of States parties’ reports under the Convention, the Committee pays particular attention to what it has termed “general measures of implementation”. In its concluding observations issued following examination, the Committee provides specific recommendations relating to general measures. It expects the State party to describe action taken in response to these recommendations in its subsequent periodic report. The Committee’s reporting guidelines arrange the Convention’s articles in clusters,³ the first being on “general measures of implementation” and groups article 4 with article 42 (the obligation to make the content of the Convention widely known to children and adults; see paragraph 66 below) and article 44, paragraph 6 (the obligation to make reports widely available within the State; see paragraph 71 below).
4. In addition to these provisions, other general implementation obligations are set out in article 2: “States parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind ...”.
5. Also under article 3, paragraph 2, “States parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.”
6. In international human rights law, there are articles similar to article 4 of the Convention, setting out overall implementation obligations, such as article 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and article 2 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights have issued general comments in relation to these provisions which should be seen as complementary to the present general comment and which are referred to below.⁴

7. Article 4, while reflecting States parties' overall implementation obligations, suggests a distinction between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights in its second sentence: "With regard to economic, social and cultural rights, States parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation." There is no simple or authoritative division of human rights in general or of Convention rights into the two categories. The Committee's reporting guidelines group articles 7, 8, 13-17 and 37 (a) under the heading "Civil rights and freedoms", but indicate by the context that these are not the only civil and political rights in the Convention. Indeed, it is clear that many other articles, including articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 of the Convention, contain elements which constitute civil/political rights, thus reflecting the interdependence and indivisibility of all human rights. Enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights is inextricably intertwined with enjoyment of civil and political rights. As noted in paragraph 25 below, the Committee believes that economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights, should be regarded as justiciable.

8. The second sentence of article 4 reflects a realistic acceptance that lack of resources - financial and other resources - can hamper the full implementation of economic, social and cultural rights in some States; this introduces the concept of "progressive realization" of such rights: States need to be able to demonstrate that they have implemented "to the maximum extent of their available resources" and, where necessary, have sought international cooperation. When States ratify the Convention, they take upon themselves obligations not only to implement it within their jurisdiction, but also to contribute, through international cooperation, to global implementation (see paragraph 60 below).

9. The sentence is similar to the wording used in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee entirely concurs with the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in asserting that "even where the available resources are demonstrably inadequate, the obligation remains for a State party to strive to ensure the widest possible enjoyment of the relevant rights under the prevailing circumstances ...".⁵ Whatever their economic circumstances, States are required to undertake all possible measures towards the realization of the rights of the child, paying special attention to the most disadvantaged groups.

10. The general measures of implementation identified by the Committee and described in the present general comment are intended to promote the full enjoyment of all rights in the Convention by all children, through legislation, the establishment of coordinating and monitoring bodies - governmental and independent - comprehensive data collection, awareness-raising and training and the development and implementation of appropriate policies, services and programmes. One of the satisfying results of the adoption and almost universal ratification of the Convention has been the development at the national level of a wide variety of new child-focused and child-sensitive bodies, structures and activities - children's rights units at the heart of Government, ministers for children, inter-ministerial committees on children, parliamentary committees, child impact analysis, children's budgets and "state of children's rights" reports, NGO coalitions on children's rights, children's ombudspersons and children's rights commissioners and so on.

11. While some of these developments may seem largely cosmetic, their emergence at the least indicates a change in the perception of the child's place in society, a willingness to give higher political priority to children and an increasing sensitivity to the impact of governance on children and their human rights.

12. The Committee emphasizes that, in the context of the Convention, States must see their role as fulfilling clear legal obligations to each and every child. Implementation of the human rights of children must not be seen as a charitable process, bestowing favours on children.

The development of a children's rights perspective throughout Government, parliament and the judiciary is required for effective implementation of the whole Convention and, in particular, in the light of the following articles in the Convention identified by the Committee as general principles:

Article 2: the obligation of States to respect and ensure the rights set forth in the Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind. This non-discrimination obligation requires States actively to identify individual children and groups of children the recognition and realization of whose rights may demand special measures. For example, the Committee highlights, in particular, the need for data collection to be disaggregated to enable discrimination or potential discrimination to be identified. Addressing discrimination may require changes in legislation, administration and resource allocation, as well as educational measures to change attitudes. It should be emphasized that the application of the non-discrimination principle of equal access to rights does not mean identical treatment. A general comment by the Human Rights Committee has underlined the importance of taking special measures in order to diminish or eliminate conditions that cause discrimination.⁶

Article 3 (1): the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. The article refers to actions undertaken by "public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies". The principle requires active measures throughout Government, parliament and the judiciary. Every legislative, administrative and judicial body or institution is required to apply the best interests principle by systematically considering how children's rights and interests are or will be affected by their decisions and actions - by, for example, a proposed or existing law or policy or administrative action or court decision, including those which are not directly concerned with children, but indirectly affect children.

Article 6: the child's inherent right to life and States parties' obligation to ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child. The Committee expects States to interpret "development" in its broadest sense as a holistic concept, embracing the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, psychological and social development. Implementation measures should be aimed at achieving the optimal development for all children.

Article 12: the child’s right to express his or her views freely in “all matters affecting the child”, those views being given due weight. This principle, which highlights the role of the child as an active participant in the promotion, protection and monitoring of his or her rights, applies equally to all measures adopted by States to implement the Convention.

Opening government decision-making processes to children is a positive challenge which the Committee finds States are increasingly responding to. Given that few States as yet have reduced the voting age below 18, there is all the more reason to ensure respect for the views of unenfranchised children in Government and parliament. If consultation is to be meaningful, documents as well as processes need to be made accessible. But appearing to “listen” to children is relatively unchallenging; giving due weight to their views requires real change. Listening to children should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as a means by which States make their interactions with children and their actions on behalf of children ever more sensitive to the implementation of children’s rights.

One-off or regular events like Children’s Parliaments can be stimulating and raise general awareness. But article 12 requires consistent and ongoing arrangements. Involvement of and consultation with children must also avoid being tokenistic and aim to ascertain representative views. The emphasis on “matters that affect them” in article 12 (1) implies the ascertainment of the views of particular groups of children on particular issues - for example children who have experience of the juvenile justice system on proposals for law reform in that area, or adopted children and children in adoptive families on adoption law and policy. It is important that Governments develop a direct relationship with children, not simply one mediated through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or human rights institutions. In the early years of the Convention, NGOs had played a notable role in pioneering participatory approaches with children, but it is in the interests of both Governments and children to have appropriate direct contact.

II. REVIEW OF RESERVATIONS

13. In its reporting guidelines on general measures of implementation, the Committee starts by inviting the State party to indicate whether it considers it necessary to maintain the reservations it has made, if any, or has the intention of withdrawing them.⁷ States parties to the Convention are entitled to make reservations at the time of their ratification of or accession to it (art. 51). The Committee’s aim of ensuring full and unqualified respect for the human rights of children can be achieved only if States withdraw their reservations. It consistently recommends during its examination of reports that reservations be reviewed and withdrawn. Where a State, after review, decides to maintain a reservation, the Committee requests that a full explanation be included in the next periodic report. The Committee draws the attention of States parties to the encouragement given by the World Conference on Human Rights to the review and withdrawal of reservations.⁸

14. Article 2 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties defines “reservation” as a “unilateral statement, however phrased or named, made by a State, when signing, ratifying, accepting, approving or acceding to a Treaty, whereby it purports to exclude or to modify the legal effect of certain provisions of the Treaty in their application to that State”. The Vienna

Convention notes that States are entitled, at the time of ratification or accession to a treaty, to make a reservation unless it is “incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty” (art. 19).

15. Article 51, paragraph 2, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child reflects this: “A reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the present Convention shall not be permitted.” The Committee is deeply concerned that some States have made reservations which plainly breach article 51 (2) by suggesting, for example, that respect for the Convention is limited by the State’s existing Constitution or legislation, including in some cases religious law. Article 27 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties provides: “A party may not invoke the provisions of its internal law as justification for its failure to perform a treaty.”

16. The Committee notes that, in some cases, States parties have lodged formal objections to such wide-ranging reservations made by other States parties. It commends any action which contributes to ensuring the fullest possible respect for the Convention in all States parties.

III. RATIFICATION OF OTHER KEY INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

17. As part of its consideration of general measures of implementation, and in the light of the principles of indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, the Committee consistently urges States parties, if they have not already done so, to ratify the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) and the six other major international human rights instruments. During its dialogue with States parties the Committee often encourages them to consider ratifying other relevant international instruments. A non-exhaustive list of these instruments is annexed to the present general comment, which the Committee will update from time to time.

IV. LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

18. The Committee believes a comprehensive review of all domestic legislation and related administrative guidance to ensure full compliance with the Convention is an obligation. Its experience in examining not only initial but now second and third periodic reports under the Convention suggests that the review process at the national level has, in most cases, been started, but needs to be more rigorous. The review needs to consider the Convention not only article by article, but also holistically, recognizing the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights. The review needs to be continuous rather than one-off, reviewing proposed as well as existing legislation. And while it is important that this review process should be built into the machinery of all relevant government departments, it is also advantageous to have independent review by, for example, parliamentary committees and hearings, national human rights institutions, NGOs, academics, affected children and young people and others.

19. States parties need to ensure, by all appropriate means, that the provisions of the Convention are given legal effect within their domestic legal systems. This remains a challenge in many States parties. Of particular importance is the need to clarify the extent of applicability of the Convention in States where the principle of “self-execution” applies and others where it is claimed that the Convention “has constitutional status” or has been incorporated into domestic law.

20. The Committee welcomes the incorporation of the Convention into domestic law, which is the traditional approach to the implementation of international human rights instruments in some but not all States. Incorporation should mean that the provisions of the Convention can be directly invoked before the courts and applied by national authorities and that the Convention will prevail where there is a conflict with domestic legislation or common practice. Incorporation by itself does not avoid the need to ensure that all relevant domestic law, including any local or customary law, is brought into compliance with the Convention. In case of any conflict in legislation, predominance should always be given to the Convention, in the light of article 27 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. Where a State delegates powers to legislate to federated regional or territorial governments, it must also require these subsidiary governments to legislate within the framework of the Convention and to ensure effective implementation (see also paragraphs 40 et seq. below).

21. Some States have suggested to the Committee that the inclusion in their Constitution of guarantees of rights for “everyone” is adequate to ensure respect for these rights for children. The test must be whether the applicable rights are truly realized for children and can be directly invoked before the courts. The Committee welcomes the inclusion of sections on the rights of the child in national constitutions, reflecting key principles in the Convention, which helps to underline the key message of the Convention - that children alongside adults are holders of human rights. But this inclusion does not automatically ensure respect for the rights of children. In order to promote the full implementation of these rights, including, where appropriate, the exercise of rights by children themselves, additional legislative and other measures may be necessary.

22. The Committee emphasizes, in particular, the importance of ensuring that domestic law reflects the identified general principles in the Convention (arts. 2, 3, 6 and 12 (see paragraph 12 above)). The Committee welcomes the development of consolidated children’s rights statutes, which can highlight and emphasize the Convention’s principles. But the Committee emphasizes that it is crucial in addition that all relevant “sectoral” laws (on education, health, justice and so on) reflect consistently the principles and standards of the Convention.

23. The Committee encourages all States parties to enact and implement within their jurisdiction legal provisions that are more conducive to the realization of the rights of the child than those contained in the Convention, in the light of article 41. The Committee emphasizes that the other international human rights instruments apply to all persons below the age of 18 years.

V. JUSTICIABILITY OF RIGHTS

24. For rights to have meaning, effective remedies must be available to redress violations. This requirement is implicit in the Convention and consistently referred to in the other six major international human rights treaties. Children’s special and dependent status creates real difficulties for them in pursuing remedies for breaches of their rights. So States need to give particular attention to ensuring that there are effective, child-sensitive procedures available to children and their representatives. These should include the provision of child-friendly information, advice, advocacy, including support for self-advocacy, and access to independent

complaints procedures and to the courts with necessary legal and other assistance. Where rights are found to have been breached, there should be appropriate reparation, including compensation, and, where needed, measures to promote physical and psychological recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration, as required by article 39.

25. As noted in paragraph 6 above, the Committee emphasizes that economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights, must be regarded as justiciable. It is essential that domestic law sets out entitlements in sufficient detail to enable remedies for non-compliance to be effective.

VI. ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER MEASURES

26. The Committee cannot prescribe in detail the measures which each or every State party will find appropriate to ensure effective implementation of the Convention. But from its first decade's experience of examining States parties' reports and from its ongoing dialogue with Governments and with the United Nations and United Nations-related agencies, NGOs and other competent bodies, it has distilled here some key advice for States.

27. The Committee believes that effective implementation of the Convention requires visible cross-sectoral coordination to recognize and realize children's rights across Government, between different levels of government and between Government and civil society - including in particular children and young people themselves. Invariably, many different government departments and other governmental or quasi-governmental bodies affect children's lives and children's enjoyment of their rights. Few, if any, government departments have no effect on children's lives, direct or indirect. Rigorous monitoring of implementation is required, which should be built into the process of government at all levels but also independent monitoring by national human rights institutions, NGOs and others.

A. Developing a comprehensive national strategy rooted in the Convention

28. If Government as a whole and at all levels is to promote and respect the rights of the child, it needs to work on the basis of a unifying, comprehensive and rights-based national strategy, rooted in the Convention.

29. The Committee commends the development of a comprehensive national strategy or national plan of action for children, built on the framework of the Convention. The Committee expects States parties to take account of the recommendations in its concluding observations on their periodic reports when developing and/or reviewing their national strategies. If such a strategy is to be effective, it needs to relate to the situation of all children, and to all the rights in the Convention. It will need to be developed through a process of consultation, including with children and young people and those living and working with them. As noted above (para. 12), meaningful consultation with children requires special child-sensitive materials and processes; it is not simply about extending to children access to adult processes.

30. Particular attention will need to be given to identifying and giving priority to marginalized and disadvantaged groups of children. The non-discrimination principle in the Convention requires that all the rights guaranteed by the Convention should be recognized for all children within the jurisdiction of States. As noted above (para. 12), the non-discrimination principle does not prevent the taking of special measures to diminish discrimination.

31. To give the strategy authority, it will need to be endorsed at the highest level of government. Also, it needs to be linked to national development planning and included in national budgeting; otherwise, the strategy may remain marginalized outside key decision-making processes.

32. The strategy must not be simply a list of good intentions; it must include a description of a sustainable process for realizing the rights of children throughout the State; it must go beyond statements of policy and principle, to set real and achievable targets in relation to the full range of economic, social and cultural and civil and political rights for all children. The comprehensive national strategy may be elaborated in sectoral national plans of action - for example for education and health - setting out specific goals, targeted implementation measures and allocation of financial and human resources. The strategy will inevitably set priorities, but it must not neglect or dilute in any way the detailed obligations which States parties have accepted under the Convention. The strategy needs to be adequately resourced, in human and financial terms.

33. Developing a national strategy is not a one-off task. Once drafted the strategy will need to be widely disseminated throughout Government and to the public, including children (translated into child-friendly versions as well as into appropriate languages and forms). The strategy will need to include arrangements for monitoring and continuous review, for regular updating and for periodic reports to parliament and to the public.

34. The “national plans of action” which States were encouraged to develop following the first World Summit for Children, held in 1990, were related to the particular commitments set by nations attending the Summit.⁹ In 1993, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, called on States to integrate the Convention on the Rights of the Child into their national human rights action plans.¹⁰

35. The outcome document of the United Nations General Assembly special session on children, in 2002, also commits States “to develop or strengthen as a matter of urgency if possible by the end of 2003 national and, where appropriate, regional action plans with a set of specific time-bound and measurable goals and targets based on this plan of action ...”.¹¹ The Committee welcomes the commitments made by States to achieve the goals and targets set at the special session on children and identified in the outcome document, *A World Fit for Children*. But the Committee emphasizes that making particular commitments at global meetings does not in any way reduce States parties’ legal obligations under the Convention. Similarly, preparing specific plans of action in response to the special session does not reduce the need for a comprehensive implementation strategy for the Convention. States should integrate their response to the 2002 special session and to other relevant global conferences into their overall implementation strategy for the Convention as a whole.

36. The outcome document also encourages States parties to “consider including in their reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child information on measures taken and results achieved in the implementation of the present Plan of Action”.¹² The Committee endorses this proposal; it is committed to monitoring progress towards meeting the commitments made at the special session and will provide further guidance in its revised guidelines for periodic reporting under the Convention.

B. Coordination of implementation of children’s rights

37. In examining States parties’ reports the Committee has almost invariably found it necessary to encourage further coordination of government to ensure effective implementation: coordination among central government departments, among different provinces and regions, between central and other levels of government and between Government and civil society. The purpose of coordination is to ensure respect for all of the Convention’s principles and standards for all children within the State jurisdiction; to ensure that the obligations inherent in ratification or accession to the Convention are not only recognized by those large departments which have a substantial impact on children - education, health or welfare and so on - but right across Government, including for example departments concerned with finance, planning, employment and defence, and at all levels.

38. The Committee believes that, as a treaty body, it is not advisable for it to attempt to prescribe detailed arrangements appropriate for very different systems of government across States parties. There are many formal and informal ways of achieving effective coordination, including for example inter-ministerial and interdepartmental committees for children. The Committee proposes that States parties, if they have not already done so, should review the machinery of government from the perspective of implementation of the Convention and in particular of the four articles identified as providing general principles (see paragraph 12 above).

39. Many States parties have with advantage developed a specific department or unit close to the heart of Government, in some cases in the President’s or Prime Minister’s or Cabinet office, with the objective of coordinating implementation and children’s policy. As noted above, the actions of virtually all government departments impact on children’s lives. It is not practicable to bring responsibility for all children’s services together into a single department, and in any case doing so could have the danger of further marginalizing children in Government. But a special unit, if given high-level authority - reporting directly, for example, to the Prime Minister, the President or a Cabinet Committee on children - can contribute both to the overall purpose of making children more visible in Government and to coordination to ensure respect for children’s rights across Government and at all levels of Government. Such a unit can be given responsibility for developing the comprehensive children’s strategy and monitoring its implementation, as well as for coordinating reporting under the Convention.

C. Decentralization, federalization and delegation

40. The Committee has found it necessary to emphasize to many States that decentralization of power, through devolution and delegation of government, does not in any way reduce the direct responsibility of the State party’s Government to fulfil its obligations to all children within its jurisdiction, regardless of the State structure.

41. The Committee reiterates that in all circumstances the State which ratified or acceded to the Convention remains responsible for ensuring the full implementation of the Convention throughout the territories under its jurisdiction. In any process of devolution, States parties have to make sure that the devolved authorities do have the necessary financial, human and other resources effectively to discharge responsibilities for the implementation of the Convention. The Governments of States parties must retain powers to require full compliance with the Convention by devolved administrations or local authorities and must establish permanent monitoring mechanisms to ensure that the Convention is respected and applied for all children within its jurisdiction without discrimination. Further, there must be safeguards to ensure that decentralization or devolution does not lead to discrimination in the enjoyment of rights by children in different regions.

D. Privatization

42. The process of privatization of services can have a serious impact on the recognition and realization of children's rights. The Committee devoted its 2002 day of general discussion to the theme "The private sector as service provider and its role in implementing child rights", defining the private sector as including businesses, NGOs and other private associations, both for profit and not-for-profit. Following that day of general discussion, the Committee adopted detailed recommendations to which it draws the attention of States parties.¹³

43. The Committee emphasizes that States parties to the Convention have a legal obligation to respect and ensure the rights of children as stipulated in the Convention, which includes the obligation to ensure that non-State service providers operate in accordance with its provisions, thus creating indirect obligations on such actors.

44. The Committee emphasizes that enabling the private sector to provide services, run institutions and so on does not in any way lessen the State's obligation to ensure for all children within its jurisdiction the full recognition and realization of all rights in the Convention (arts. 2 (1) and 3 (2)). Article 3 (1) establishes that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private bodies. Article 3 (3) requires the establishment of appropriate standards by competent bodies (bodies with the appropriate legal competence), in particular, in the areas of health, and with regard to the number and suitability of staff. This requires rigorous inspection to ensure compliance with the Convention. The Committee proposes that there should be a permanent monitoring mechanism or process aimed at ensuring that all State and non-State service providers respect the Convention.

E. Monitoring implementation - the need for child impact assessment and evaluation

45. Ensuring that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (art. 3 (1)), and that all the provisions of the Convention are respected in legislation and policy development and delivery at all levels of government demands a continuous process of child impact assessment (predicting the impact of any proposed law, policy or budgetary allocation which affects children and the enjoyment of their rights) and child impact evaluation (evaluating the actual impact of implementation). This process needs to be built into government at all levels and as early as possible in the development of policy.

46. Self-monitoring and evaluation is an obligation for Governments. But the Committee also regards as essential the independent monitoring of progress towards implementation by, for example, parliamentary committees, NGOs, academic institutions, professional associations, youth groups and independent human rights institutions (see paragraph 65 below).

47. The Committee commends certain States which have adopted legislation requiring the preparation and presentation to parliament and/or the public of formal impact analysis statements. Every State should consider how it can ensure compliance with article 3 (1) and do so in a way which further promotes the visible integration of children in policy-making and sensitivity to their rights.

F. Data collection and analysis and development of indicators

48. Collection of sufficient and reliable data on children, disaggregated to enable identification of discrimination and/or disparities in the realization of rights, is an essential part of implementation. The Committee reminds States parties that data collection needs to extend over the whole period of childhood, up to the age of 18 years. It also needs to be coordinated throughout the jurisdiction, ensuring nationally applicable indicators. States should collaborate with appropriate research institutes and aim to build up a complete picture of progress towards implementation, with qualitative as well as quantitative studies. The reporting guidelines for periodic reports call for detailed disaggregated statistical and other information covering all areas of the Convention. It is essential not merely to establish effective systems for data collection, but to ensure that the data collected are evaluated and used to assess progress in implementation, to identify problems and to inform all policy development for children. Evaluation requires the development of indicators related to all rights guaranteed by the Convention.

49. The Committee commends States parties which have introduced annual publication of comprehensive reports on the state of children's rights throughout their jurisdiction. Publication and wide dissemination of and debate on such reports, including in parliament, can provide a focus for broad public engagement in implementation. Translations, including child-friendly versions, are essential for engaging children and minority groups in the process.

50. The Committee emphasizes that, in many cases, only children themselves are in a position to indicate whether their rights are being fully recognized and realized. Interviewing children and using children as researchers (with appropriate safeguards) is likely to be an important way of finding out, for example, to what extent their civil rights, including the crucial right set out in article 12, to have their views heard and given due consideration, are respected within the family, in schools and so on.

G. Making children visible in budgets

51. In its reporting guidelines and in the consideration of States parties' reports, the Committee has paid much attention to the identification and analysis of resources for children in national and other budgets.¹⁴ No State can tell whether it is fulfilling children's economic, social and cultural rights "to the maximum extent of ... available resources", as it is required to do under article 4, unless it can identify the proportion of national and other budgets allocated to the social sector and, within that, to children, both directly and indirectly. Some States have claimed it is not possible to analyse national budgets in this way. But others have done it and publish annual

“children’s budgets”. The Committee needs to know what steps are taken at all levels of Government to ensure that economic and social planning and decision-making and budgetary decisions are made with the best interests of children as a primary consideration and that children, including in particular marginalized and disadvantaged groups of children, are protected from the adverse effects of economic policies or financial downturns.

52. Emphasizing that economic policies are never neutral in their effect on children’s rights, the Committee has been deeply concerned by the often negative effects on children of structural adjustment programmes and transition to a market economy. The implementation duties of article 4 and other provisions of the Convention demand rigorous monitoring of the effects of such changes and adjustment of policies to protect children’s economic, social and cultural rights.

H. Training and capacity-building

53. The Committee emphasizes States’ obligation to develop training and capacity-building for all those involved in the implementation process - government officials, parliamentarians and members of the judiciary - and for all those working with and for children. These include, for example, community and religious leaders, teachers, social workers and other professionals, including those working with children in institutions and places of detention, the police and armed forces, including peacekeeping forces, those working in the media and many others. Training needs to be systematic and ongoing - initial training and retraining. The purpose of training is to emphasize the status of the child as a holder of human rights, to increase knowledge and understanding of the Convention and to encourage active respect for all its provisions. The Committee expects to see the Convention reflected in professional training curricula, codes of conduct and educational curricula at all levels. Understanding and knowledge of human rights must, of course, be promoted among children themselves, through the school curriculum and in other ways (see also paragraph 69 below and the Committee’s general comment No. 1 (2001) on the aims of education).

54. The Committee’s guidelines for periodic reports mention many aspects of training, including specialist training, which are essential if all children are to enjoy their rights. The Convention highlights the importance of the family in its preamble and in many articles. It is particularly important that the promotion of children’s rights should be integrated into preparation for parenthood and parenting education.

55. There should be periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of training, reviewing not only knowledge of the Convention and its provisions but also the extent to which it has contributed to developing attitudes and practice which actively promote enjoyment by children of their rights.

I. Cooperation with civil society

56. Implementation is an obligation for States parties, but needs to engage all sectors of society, including children themselves. The Committee recognizes that responsibilities to respect and ensure the rights of children extend in practice beyond the State and State-controlled services and institutions to include children, parents and wider families, other adults, and non-State services and organizations. The Committee concurs, for example, with general comment No. 14 (2000) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on

the right to the highest attainable standard of health, paragraph 42, of which states: “While only States are parties to the Covenant and thus ultimately accountable for compliance with it, all members of society - individuals, including health professionals, families, local communities, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, as well as the private business sector - have responsibilities regarding the realization of the right to health. States parties should therefore provide an environment which facilitates the discharge of these responsibilities.”

57. Article 12 of the Convention, as already emphasized (see paragraph 12 above), requires due weight to be given to children’s views in all matters affecting them, which plainly includes implementation of “their” Convention.

58. The State needs to work closely with NGOs in the widest sense, while respecting their autonomy; these include, for example, human rights NGOs, child- and youth-led organizations and youth groups, parent and family groups, faith groups, academic institutions and professional associations. NGOs played a crucial part in the drafting of the Convention and their involvement in the process of implementation is vital.

59. The Committee welcomes the development of NGO coalitions and alliances committed to promoting, protecting and monitoring children’s human rights and urges Governments to give them non-directive support and to develop positive formal as well as informal relationships with them. The engagement of NGOs in the reporting process under the Convention, coming within the definition of “competent bodies” under article 45 (a), has in many cases given a real impetus to the process of implementation as well as reporting. The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child has a very welcome, strong and supportive impact on the reporting process and other aspects of the Committee’s work. The Committee underlines in its reporting guidelines that the process of preparing a report “should encourage and facilitate popular participation and public scrutiny of government policies”.¹⁵ The media can be valuable partners in the process of implementation (see also paragraph 70).

J. International cooperation

60. Article 4 emphasizes that implementation of the Convention is a cooperative exercise for the States of the world. This article and others in the Convention highlight the need for international cooperation.¹⁶ The Charter of the United Nations (Arts. 55 and 56) identifies the overall purposes of international economic and social cooperation, and members pledge themselves under the Charter “to take joint and separate action in cooperation with the Organization” to achieve these purposes. In the United Nations Millennium Declaration and at other global meetings, including the United Nations General Assembly special session on children, States have pledged themselves, in particular, to international cooperation to eliminate poverty.

61. The Committee advises States parties that the Convention should form the framework for international development assistance related directly or indirectly to children and that programmes of donor States should be rights-based. The Committee urges States to meet internationally agreed targets, including the United Nations target for international development assistance of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product. This goal was reiterated along with other targets in the Monterrey Consensus, arising from the 2002 International Conference on

Financing for Development.¹⁷ The Committee encourages States parties that receive international aid and assistance to allocate a substantive part of that aid specifically to children. The Committee expects States parties to be able to identify on a yearly basis the amount and proportion of international support earmarked for the implementation of children's rights.

62. The Committee endorses the aims of the 20/20 initiative, to achieve universal access to basic social services of good quality on a sustainable basis, as a shared responsibility of developing and donor States. The Committee notes that international meetings held to review progress have concluded that many States are going to have difficulty meeting fundamental economic and social rights unless additional resources are allocated and efficiency in resource allocation is increased. The Committee takes note of and encourages efforts being made to reduce poverty in the most heavily indebted countries through the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). As the central, country-led strategy for achieving the millennium development goals, PRSPs must include a strong focus on children's rights. The Committee urges Governments, donors and civil society to ensure that children are a prominent priority in the development of PRSPs and sectorwide approaches to development (SWAps). Both PRSPs and SWAps should reflect children's rights principles, with a holistic, child-centred approach recognizing children as holders of rights and the incorporation of development goals and objectives which are relevant to children.

63. The Committee encourages States to provide and to use, as appropriate, technical assistance in the process of implementing the Convention. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and other United Nations and United Nations-related agencies can provide technical assistance with many aspects of implementation. States parties are encouraged to identify their interest in technical assistance in their reports under the Convention.

64. In their promotion of international cooperation and technical assistance, all United Nations and United Nations-related agencies should be guided by the Convention and should mainstream children's rights throughout their activities. They should seek to ensure within their influence that international cooperation is targeted at supporting States to fulfil their obligations under the Convention. Similarly the World Bank Group, the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization should ensure that their activities related to international cooperation and economic development give primary consideration to the best interests of children and promote full implementation of the Convention.

K. Independent human rights institutions

65. In its general comment No. 2 (2002) entitled "The role of independent national human rights institutions in the protection and promotion of the rights of the child", the Committee notes that it "considers the establishment of such bodies to fall within the commitment made by States parties upon ratification to ensure the implementation of the Convention and advance the universal realization of children's rights". Independent human rights institutions are complementary to effective government structures for children; the essential element is independence: "The role of national human rights institutions is to monitor independently the State's compliance and progress towards implementation and to do all it can to ensure full respect for children's rights. While this may require the institution to develop projects to enhance the promotion and protection of children's rights, it should not lead to the Government

delegating its monitoring obligations to the national institution. It is essential that institutions remain entirely free to set their own agenda and determine their own activities.”¹⁸ General comment No. 2 provides detailed guidance on the establishment and operation of independent human rights institutions for children.

Article 42: Making the Convention known to adults and children

“States parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.”

66. Individuals need to know what their rights are. Traditionally in most, if not all, societies children have not been regarded as rights holders. So article 42 acquires a particular importance. If the adults around children, their parents and other family members, teachers and carers do not understand the implications of the Convention, and above all its confirmation of the equal status of children as subjects of rights, it is most unlikely that the rights set out in the Convention will be realized for many children.

67. The Committee proposes that States should develop a comprehensive strategy for disseminating knowledge of the Convention throughout society. This should include information on those bodies - governmental and independent - involved in implementation and monitoring and on how to contact them. At the most basic level, the text of the Convention needs to be made widely available in all languages and the Committee commends the collection of official and unofficial translations of the Convention made by OHCHR. There needs to be a strategy for dissemination of the Convention among illiterate people. UNICEF and NGOs in many States have developed child-friendly versions of the Convention for children of various ages - a process the Committee welcomes and encourages; these should also inform children of sources of help and advice.

68. Children need to acquire knowledge of their rights and the Committee places special emphasis on incorporating learning about the Convention and human rights in general into the school curriculum at all stages. The Committee’s general comment No. 1 (2001) entitled “The aims of education” (art. 29, para. 1), should be read in conjunction with this. Article 29, paragraph 1, requires that the education of the child shall be directed to “... the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms ...”. The general comment underlines: “Human rights education should provide information on the content of human rights treaties. But children should also learn about human rights by seeing human rights standards implemented in practice whether at home, in school or within the community. Human rights education should be a comprehensive, lifelong process and start with the reflection of human rights values in the daily life and experiences of children.”¹⁹

69. Similarly, learning about the Convention needs to be integrated into the initial and in-service training of all those working with and for children (see paragraph 53 above). The Committee reminds States parties of the recommendations it made following its meeting on general measures of implementation held to commemorate the tenth anniversary of adoption of the Convention, in which it recalled that “dissemination and awareness-raising about the rights

of the child are most effective when conceived as a process of social change, of interaction and dialogue rather than lecturing. Raising awareness should involve all sectors of society, including children and young people. Children, including adolescents, have the right to participate in raising awareness about their rights to the maximum extent of their evolving capacities”.²⁰

“The Committee recommends that all efforts to provide training on the rights of the child be practical, systematic and integrated into regular professional training in order to maximize its impact and sustainability. Human rights training should use participatory methods, and equip professionals with skills and attitudes that enable them to interact with children and young people in a manner that respects their rights, dignity and self-respect.”²¹

The media can play a crucial role in the dissemination of the Convention and knowledge and understanding of it and the Committee encourages their voluntary engagement in the process, which may be stimulated by Governments and by NGOs.²²

Article 44 (6): Making reports under the Convention widely available

“... States parties shall make their reports widely available to the public in their own countries.”

70. If reporting under the Convention is to play the important part it should in the process of implementation at the national level, it needs to be known about by adults and children throughout the State party. The reporting process provides a unique form of international accountability for how States treat children and their rights. But unless reports are disseminated and constructively debated at the national level, the process is unlikely to have substantial impact on children’s lives.

71. The Convention explicitly requires States to make their reports widely available to the public; this should be done when they are submitted to the Committee. Reports should be made genuinely accessible, for example through translation into all languages, into appropriate forms for children and for people with disabilities and so on. The Internet may greatly aid dissemination, and Governments and parliaments are strongly urged to place such reports on their web sites.

72. The Committee urges States to make all the other documentation of the examination of their reports under the Convention widely available to promote constructive debate and inform the process of implementation at all levels. In particular, the Committee’s concluding observations should be disseminated to the public including children and should be the subject of detailed debate in parliament. Independent human rights institutions and NGOs can play a crucial role in helping to ensure widespread debate. The summary records of the examination of government representatives by the Committee aid understanding of the process and of the Committee’s requirements and should also be made available and discussed.

Notes

¹ The Committee reminds States parties that, for the purposes of the Convention, a child is defined as “every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (art. 1).

² In 1999, the Committee on the Rights of the Child held a two-day workshop to commemorate the tenth anniversary of adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by the United Nations General Assembly. The workshop focused on general measures of implementation following which the Committee adopted detailed conclusions and recommendations (see CRC/C/90, paragraph 291).

³ General guidelines regarding the form and content of initial reports to be submitted by States parties under article 44, paragraph 1 (a) of the Convention, CRC/C/5, 15 October 1991; general guidelines regarding the form and contents of periodic reports to be submitted under article 44, paragraph 1 (b) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/58, 20 November 1996.

⁴ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 3 (thirteenth session, 1981), *article 2: Implementation at the national level*; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 3 (fifth session, 1990), *The nature of States parties’ obligations (article 2, paragraph 1, of the Covenant)*; also general comment No. 9 (nineteenth session, 1998), *The domestic application of the Covenant*, elaborating further on certain elements in general comment No. 3. A compendium of the treaty bodies’ general comments and recommendations is published regularly by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6).

⁵ General comment No. 3, HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6, para. 11, p. 16.

⁶ Human Rights Committee, general comment No. 18 (1989), HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6, pp. 147 et seq.

⁷ General guidelines regarding the form and contents of periodic reports to be submitted under article 44, paragraph 1 (b) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/58, 20 November 1996, para. 11.

⁸ World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 14-25 June 1993, “Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action”, A/CONF.157/23.

⁹ World Summit for Children, “World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s”, CF/WSC/1990/WS-001, United Nations, New York, 30 September 1990.

¹⁰ World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 14-25 June 1993, “Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action”, A/CONF.157/23.

¹¹ *A World Fit for Children*, outcome document of the United Nations General Assembly special session on children, 2002, para. 59.

¹² Ibid., para. 61 (a).

¹³ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Report on its thirty-first session, September-October 2002, Day of General Discussion on “The private sector as service provider and its role in implementing child rights”, paras. 630-653.

¹⁴ General guidelines regarding the form and contents of periodic reports to be submitted under article 44, paragraph 1 (b), of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC/C/58, 20 November 1996, para. 20.

¹⁵ Ibid., para. 3.

¹⁶ The following articles of the Convention relate to international cooperation explicitly: articles 7 (2); 11 (2); 17 (b); 21 (e); 22 (2); 23 (4); 24 (4); 27 (4); 28 (3); 34 and 35.

¹⁷ Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002 (A/CONF.198/11).

¹⁸ HRI/GEN/1/Rev.6, para. 25, p. 295.

¹⁹ Ibid., para. 15, p. 286.

²⁰ See CRC/C/90, para. 291 (k).

²¹ Ibid., para. 291 (l).

²² The Committee held a day of general discussion on the theme “The child and the media” in 1996, adopting detailed recommendations (see CRC/C/57, paragraphs 242 et seq.).

Annex I

RATIFICATION OF OTHER KEY INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

As noted in paragraph 17 of the present general comment, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, as part of its consideration of general measures of implementation, and in the light of the principles of indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, consistently urges States parties, if they have not already done so, to ratify the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) and the six other major international human rights instruments. During its dialogue with States parties the Committee often encourages them to consider ratifying other relevant international instruments. A non-exhaustive list of these instruments is annexed here. The Committee will update this from time to time.

- Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
- Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, aiming at the abolition of the death penalty;
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women;
- Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment;
- Convention against Discrimination in Education;
- ILO Forced Labour Convention No. 29, 1930;
- ILO Convention No. 105 on Abolition of Forced Labour, 1957;
- ILO Convention No. 138 Concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 1973;
- ILO Convention No. 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999;
- ILO Convention No. 183 on Maternity Protection, 2000;
- Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951, as amended by the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees of 1967;
- Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1949);
- Slavery Convention (1926);
- Protocol amending the Slavery Convention (1953);

- The Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery (1956);
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime of 2000;
- Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War;
- Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I);
- Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II);
- Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and of Their Destruction;
- Statute of the International Criminal Court;
- Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Inter-country Adoption;
- Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction;
- Hague Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Cooperation in respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children of 1996.

Thirty-ninth session (2005)

General comment No. 6: Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin

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I. OBJECTIVES OF THE GENERAL COMMENT

1. The objective of this general comment is to draw attention to the particularly vulnerable situation of unaccompanied and separated children; to outline the multifaceted challenges faced by States and other actors in ensuring that such children are able to access and enjoy their rights; and, to provide guidance on the protection, care and proper treatment of unaccompanied and separated children based on the entire legal framework provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the “Convention”), with particular reference to the principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child and the right of the child to express his or her views freely.
2. The issuing of this general comment is motivated by the Committee’s observation of an increasing number of children in such situations. There are varied and numerous reasons for a child being unaccompanied or separated, including: persecution of the child or the parents; international conflict and civil war; trafficking in various contexts and forms, including sale by parents; and the search for better economic opportunities.
3. The issuing of the general comment is further motivated by the Committee’s identification of a number of protection gaps in the treatment of such children, including the following: unaccompanied and separated children face greater risks of, inter alia, sexual exploitation and abuse, military recruitment, child labour (including for their foster families) and detention. They are often discriminated against and denied access to food, shelter, housing, health services and education. Unaccompanied and separated girls are at particular risk of gender-based violence, including domestic violence. In some situations, such children have no access to proper and appropriate identification, registration, age assessment, documentation, family tracing, guardianship systems or legal advice. In many countries, unaccompanied and separated children are routinely denied entry to or detained by border or immigration officials. In other cases they are admitted but are denied access to asylum procedures or their asylum claims are not handled in an age and gender-sensitive manner. Some countries prohibit separated children who are recognized as refugees from applying for family reunification; others permit reunification but impose conditions so restrictive as to make it virtually impossible to achieve. Many such children are granted only temporary status, which ends when they turn 18, and there are few effective return programmes.
4. Concerns such as these have led the Committee to frequently raise issues related to unaccompanied and separated children in its concluding observations. This general comment will compile and consolidate standards developed, inter alia, through the Committee’s monitoring efforts and shall thereby provide clear guidance to States on the obligations deriving from the Convention with regard to this particular vulnerable group of children. In applying these standards, States parties must be cognizant of their evolutionary character and therefore recognize that their obligations may develop beyond the standards articulated herein. These standards shall in no way impair further-reaching rights and benefits offered to unaccompanied and separated children under regional human rights instruments or national systems, international and regional refugee law or international humanitarian law.

II. STRUCTURE AND SCOPE OF THE GENERAL COMMENT

5. This general comment applies to unaccompanied and separated children who find themselves outside their country of nationality (consistent with article 7) or, if stateless, outside their country of habitual residence. The general comment applies to all such children irrespective of their residence status and reasons for being abroad, and whether they are unaccompanied or separated. However, it does not apply to children who have not crossed an international border, even though the Committee acknowledges the many similar challenges related to internally displaced unaccompanied and separated children, recognizes that much of the guidance offered below is also valuable in relation to such children, and strongly encourages States to adopt relevant aspects of this general comment in relation to the protection, care and treatment of unaccompanied and separated children who are displaced within their own country.

6. While the mandate of the Committee is confined to its supervisory function in relation to the Convention, its interpretation efforts must be conducted in the context of the entirety of applicable international human rights norms and, therefore, the general comment adopts a holistic approach to the question of the proper treatment of unaccompanied and separated children. This acknowledges that all human rights, including those contained in the Convention, are indivisible and interdependent. The importance of other international human rights instruments to the protection of the child is also recognized in the preamble to the Convention.

III. DEFINITIONS

7. “Unaccompanied children” (also called unaccompanied minors) are children, as defined in article 1 of the Convention, who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.

8. “Separated children” are children, as defined in article 1 of the Convention, who have been separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members.

9. A “child as defined in article 1 of the Convention”, means “every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”. This means that any instruments governing children in the territory of the State cannot define a child in any way that deviates from the norms determining the age of majority in that State.

10. If not otherwise specified, the guidelines below apply equally to both unaccompanied and separated children.

11. “Country of origin” is the country of nationality or, in the case of a stateless child, the country of habitual residence.

IV. APPLICABLE PRINCIPLES

(a) Legal obligations of States parties for all unaccompanied or separated children in their territory and measures for their implementation

12. State obligations under the Convention apply to each child within the State's territory and to all children subject to its jurisdiction (art. 2). These State obligations cannot be arbitrarily and unilaterally curtailed either by excluding zones or areas from a State's territory or by defining particular zones or areas as not, or only partly, under the jurisdiction of the State. Moreover, State obligations under the Convention apply within the borders of a State, including with respect to those children who come under the State's jurisdiction while attempting to enter the country's territory. Therefore, the enjoyment of rights stipulated in the Convention is not limited to children who are citizens of a State party and must therefore, if not explicitly stated otherwise in the Convention, also be available to all children - including asylum-seeking, refugee and migrant children - irrespective of their nationality, immigration status or statelessness.

13. Obligations deriving from the Convention vis-à-vis unaccompanied and separated children apply to all branches of government (executive, legislative and judicial). They include the obligation to establish national legislation; administrative structures; and the necessary research, information, data compilation and comprehensive training activities to support such measures. Such legal obligations are both negative and positive in nature, requiring States not only to refrain from measures infringing on such children's rights, but also to take measures to ensure the enjoyment of these rights without discrimination. Such responsibilities are not only limited to the provision of protection and assistance to children who are already unaccompanied or separated, but include measures to prevent separation (including the implementation of safeguards in case of evacuation). The positive aspect of these protection obligations also extends to requiring States to take all necessary measures to identify children as being unaccompanied or separated at the earliest possible stage, including at the border, to carry out tracing activities and, where possible and if in the child's best interest, to reunify separated and unaccompanied children with their families as soon as possible.

14. As reaffirmed in its general comment No. 5 (2003) (paras. 18-23), States parties to the Convention have to ensure that the provisions and principles of the treaty are fully reflected and given legal effect in relevant domestic legislation. In case of any conflict in legislation, predominance should always be given to the Convention, in light of article 27 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

15. In order to ensure a conducive legal environment and in light of article 41 (b) of the Convention, States parties are also encouraged to ratify other international instruments that address issues relating to unaccompanied and separated children, including the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (the "CAT"), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees ("the 1951 Refugee Convention") and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption, the Hague Convention on

Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Cooperation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children, the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I) of 8 June 1977, the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II) of 8 June 1977. The Committee also encourages States parties to the Convention and others concerned to take into account the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)'s Guidelines on Protection and Care (1994) and the Inter-Agency Guiding Principles on Unaccompanied and Separated Children.¹

16. In view of the absolute nature of obligations deriving from the Convention and their *lex specialis* character, article 2, paragraph 3, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights would not apply with regard to unaccompanied and separated children. In application of article 4 of the Convention, the particular vulnerability of unaccompanied and separated children, explicitly recognized in article 20 of the Convention, must be taken into account and will result in making the assignment of available resources to such children a priority. States are expected to accept and facilitate assistance offered within their respective mandates by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNHCR and other agencies (article 22 (2) of the Convention) in order to meet the needs of unaccompanied and separated children.

17. The Committee believes that reservations made by States parties to the Convention should not in any way limit the rights of unaccompanied and separated children. As is systematically done with States parties during the reporting process, the Committee recommends that, in the light of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna,² reservations limiting the rights of unaccompanied and separated children be reviewed with the objective of withdrawal.

(b) Non-discrimination (art. 2)

18. The principle of non-discrimination, in all its facets, applies in respect to all dealings with separated and unaccompanied children. In particular, it prohibits any discrimination on the basis of the status of a child as being unaccompanied or separated, or as being a refugee, asylum-seeker or migrant. This principle, when properly understood, does not prevent, but may indeed call for, differentiation on the basis of different protection needs such as those deriving from age and/or gender. Measures should also be taken to address possible misperceptions and stigmatization of unaccompanied or separated children within the society. Policing or other measures concerning unaccompanied or separated children relating to public order are only permissible where such measures are based on the law; entail individual rather than collective assessment; comply with the principle of proportionality; and represent the least intrusive option. In order not to violate the prohibition on non-discrimination, such measures can, therefore, never be applied on a group or collective basis.

(c) Best interests of the child as a primary consideration in the search for short and long-term solutions (art. 3)

19. Article 3 (1) states that “[i]n all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration”. In the case of a displaced child, the principle must be respected during all stages of the displacement cycle. At any of these stages, a best interests determination must be documented in preparation of any decision fundamentally impacting on the unaccompanied or separated child’s life.

20. A determination of what is in the best interests of the child requires a clear and comprehensive assessment of the child’s identity, including her or his nationality, upbringing, ethnic, cultural and linguistic background, particular vulnerabilities and protection needs. Consequently, allowing the child access to the territory is a prerequisite to this initial assessment process. The assessment process should be carried out in a friendly and safe atmosphere by qualified professionals who are trained in age and gender-sensitive interviewing techniques.

21. Subsequent steps, such as the appointment of a competent guardian as expeditiously as possible, serves as a key procedural safeguard to ensure respect for the best interests of an unaccompanied or separated child. Therefore, such a child should only be referred to asylum or other procedures after the appointment of a guardian. In cases where separated or unaccompanied children are referred to asylum procedures or other administrative or judicial proceedings, they should also be provided with a legal representative in addition to a guardian.

22. Respect for best interests also requires that, where competent authorities have placed an unaccompanied or separated child “for the purposes of care, protection or treatment of his or her physical or mental health”, the State recognizes the right of that child to a “periodic review” of their treatment and “all other circumstances relevant to his or her placement” (article 25 of the Convention).

(d) Right to life, survival and development (art. 6)

23. The obligation of the State party under article 6 includes protection from violence and exploitation, to the maximum extent possible, which would jeopardize a child’s right to life, survival and development. Separated and unaccompanied children are vulnerable to various risks that affect their life, survival and development such as trafficking for purposes of sexual or other exploitation or involvement in criminal activities which could result in harm to the child, or in extreme cases, in death. Accordingly, article 6 necessitates vigilance by States parties in this regard, particularly when organized crime may be involved. While the issue of trafficking of children is beyond the scope of this general comment, the Committee notes that there is often a link between trafficking and the situation of separated and unaccompanied children.

24. The Committee is of the view that practical measures should be taken at all levels to protect children from the risks mentioned above. Such measures could include: priority procedures for child victims of trafficking, the prompt appointment of guardians, the provision of information to children about the risks they may encounter, and establishment of measures to provide follow-up to children particularly at risk. These measures should be regularly evaluated to ensure their effectiveness.

(e) Right of the child to express his or her views freely (art. 12)

25. Pursuant to article 12 of the Convention, in determining the measures to be adopted with regard to unaccompanied or separated children, the child's views and wishes should be elicited and taken into account (art. 12 (1)). To allow for a well-informed expression of such views and wishes, it is imperative that such children are provided with all relevant information concerning, for example, their entitlements, services available including means of communication, the asylum process, family tracing and the situation in their country of origin (arts. 13, 17 and 22 (2)). In guardianship, care and accommodation arrangements, and legal representation, children's views should also be taken into account. Such information must be provided in a manner that is appropriate to the maturity and level of understanding of each child. As participation is dependent on reliable communication, where necessary, interpreters should be made available at all stages of the procedure.

(f) Respect for the principle of non-refoulement

26. In affording proper treatment of unaccompanied or separated children, States must fully respect non-refoulement obligations deriving from international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law and, in particular, must respect obligations codified in article 33 of the 1951 Refugee Convention and in article 3 of CAT.

27. Furthermore, in fulfilling obligations under the Convention, States shall not return a child to a country where there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of irreparable harm to the child, such as, but by no means limited to, those contemplated under articles 6 and 37 of the Convention, either in the country to which removal is to be effected or in any country to which the child may subsequently be removed. Such non-refoulement obligations apply irrespective of whether serious violations of those rights guaranteed under the Convention originate from non-State actors or whether such violations are directly intended or are the indirect consequence of action or inaction. The assessment of the risk of such serious violations should be conducted in an age and gender-sensitive manner and should, for example, take into account the particularly serious consequences for children of the insufficient provision of food or health services.

28. As underage recruitment and participation in hostilities entails a high risk of irreparable harm involving fundamental human rights, including the right to life, State obligations deriving from article 38 of the Convention, in conjunction with articles 3 and 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, entail extraterritorial effects and States shall refrain from returning a child in any manner whatsoever to the borders of a State where there is a real risk of underage recruitment, including recruitment not only as a combatant but also to provide sexual services for the military or where there is a real risk of direct or indirect participation in hostilities, either as a combatant or through carrying out other military duties.

(g) Confidentiality

29. States parties must protect the confidentiality of information received in relation to an unaccompanied or separated child, consistent with the obligation to protect the child's rights, including the right to privacy (art. 16). This obligation applies in all settings, including health and social welfare. Care must be taken that information sought and legitimately shared for one purpose is not inappropriately used for that of another.

30. Confidentiality concerns also involve respect for the rights of others. For example, in obtaining, sharing and preserving the information collected in respect of unaccompanied and separated children, particular care must be taken in order not to endanger the well-being of persons still within the child's country of origin, especially the child's family members. Furthermore, information relating to the whereabouts of the child shall only be withheld vis-à-vis the parents where required for the safety of the child or to otherwise secure the "best interests" of the child.

V. RESPONSE TO GENERAL AND SPECIFIC PROTECTION NEEDS

(a) Initial assessment and measures

31. The best interests of the child must also be a guiding principle for determining the priority of protection needs and the chronology of measures to be applied in respect of unaccompanied and separated children. This necessary initial assessment process, in particular, entails the following:

- (i) Prioritized identification of a child as separated or unaccompanied immediately upon arrival at ports of entry or as soon as their presence in the country becomes known to the authorities (art. 8). Such identification measures include age assessment and should not only take into account the physical appearance of the individual, but also his or her psychological maturity. Moreover, the assessment must be conducted in a scientific, safe, child and gender-sensitive and fair manner, avoiding any risk of violation of the physical integrity of the child; giving due respect to human dignity; and, in the event of remaining uncertainty, should accord the individual the benefit of the doubt such that if there is a possibility that the individual is a child, she or he should be treated as such;
- (ii) Prompt registration by means of an initial interview conducted in an age-appropriate and gender-sensitive manner, in a language the child understands, by professionally qualified persons to collect biodata and social history to ascertain the identity of the child, including, wherever possible, identity of both parents, other siblings, as well as the citizenship of the child, the siblings and the parents;
- (iii) In continuation of the registration process, the recording of further information in order to meet the specific needs of the child. This information should include:
 - Reasons for being separated or unaccompanied;

- Assessment of particular vulnerabilities, including health, physical, psychosocial, material and other protection needs, including those deriving from domestic violence, trafficking or trauma
 - All available information to determine the potential existence of international protection needs, including those: due to a “well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” in the child’s country of origin (article 1 A (2), 1951 Refugee Convention); deriving from external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order (article 1 (2), Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa); or relating to the indiscriminate effects of generalized violence
- (iv) Unaccompanied and separated children should be provided with their own personal identity documentation as soon as possible;
- (v) Tracing of family members to be commenced as early as possible (arts. 22 (2), 9 (3) and 10 (2)).

32. Any further actions relating to the residence and other status of the child in the territory of the State should be based on the findings of an initial protection assessment carried out in accordance with the above procedures. States should refrain from referring unaccompanied and separated children into asylum procedures if their presence in the territory does not raise the question of international refugee protection needs. This is without prejudice to the obligation of States to refer unaccompanied or separated children to relevant procedures serving child protection, such as those foreseen under child welfare legislation.

(b) Appointment of a guardian or adviser and legal representative (arts. 18 (2) and 20 (1))

33. States are required to create the underlying legal framework and to take necessary measures to secure proper representation of an unaccompanied or separated child’s best interests. Therefore, States should appoint a guardian or adviser as soon as the unaccompanied or separated child is identified and maintain such guardianship arrangements until the child has either reached the age of majority or has permanently left the territory and/or jurisdiction of the State, in compliance with the Convention and other international obligations. The guardian should be consulted and informed regarding all actions taken in relation to the child. The guardian should have the authority to be present in all planning and decision-making processes, including immigration and appeal hearings, care arrangements and all efforts to search for a durable solution. The guardian or adviser should have the necessary expertise in the field of childcare, so as to ensure that the interests of the child are safeguarded and that the child’s legal, social, health, psychological, material and educational needs are appropriately covered by, inter alia, the guardian acting as a link between the child and existing specialist agencies/individuals who provide the continuum of care required by the child. Agencies or individuals whose interests could potentially be in conflict with those of the child’s should not be eligible for guardianship. For example, non-related adults whose primary relationship to the child is that of an employer should be excluded from a guardianship role.

34. In the case of a separated child, guardianship should regularly be assigned to the accompanying adult family member or non-primary family caretaker unless there is an indication that it would not be in the best interests of the child to do so, for example, where the accompanying adult has abused the child. In cases where a child is accompanied by a non-family adult or caretaker, suitability for guardianship must be scrutinized more closely. If such a guardian is able and willing to provide day-to-day care, but unable to adequately represent the child's best interests in all spheres and at all levels of the child's life, supplementary measures (such as the appointment of an adviser or legal representative) must be secured.

35. Review mechanisms shall be introduced and implemented to monitor the quality of the exercise of guardianship in order to ensure the best interests of the child are being represented throughout the decision-making process and, in particular, to prevent abuse.

36. In cases where children are involved in asylum procedures or administrative or judicial proceedings, they should, in addition to the appointment of a guardian, be provided with legal representation.

37. At all times children should be informed of arrangements with respect to guardianship and legal representation and their opinions should be taken into consideration.

38. In large-scale emergencies, where it will be difficult to establish guardianship arrangements on an individual basis, the rights and best interests of separated children should be safeguarded and promoted by States and organizations working on behalf of these children.

(c) Care and accommodation arrangements (arts. 20 and 22)

39. Unaccompanied or separated children are children temporarily or permanently deprived of their family environment and, as such, are beneficiaries of States' obligations under article 20 of the Convention and shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the relevant State.

40. Mechanisms established under national law in order to ensure alternative care for such children in accordance with article 22 of the Convention, shall also cover unaccompanied or separated children outside their country of origin. A wide range of options for care and accommodation arrangements exist and are explicitly acknowledged in article 20 (3) as follows: "... inter alia, foster placement, *kafalah* of Islamic law, adoption or, if necessary, placement in suitable institutions for the care of children". When selecting from these options, the particular vulnerabilities of such a child, not only having lost connection with his or her family environment, but further finding him or herself outside of his or her country of origin, as well as the child's age and gender, should be taken into account. In particular, due regard ought to be taken of the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background as assessed in the identification, registration and documentation process. Such care and accommodation arrangements should comply with the following parameters:

- Children should not, as a general rule, be deprived of liberty;

- In order to ensure continuity of care and considering the best interests of the child, changes in residence for unaccompanied and separated children should be limited to instances where such change is in the best interests of the child;
- In accordance with the principle of family unity, siblings should be kept together;
- A child who has adult relatives arriving with him or her or already living in the country of asylum should be allowed to stay with them unless such action would be contrary to the best interests of the child. Given the particular vulnerabilities of the child, regular assessments should be conducted by social welfare personnel;
- Irrespective of the care arrangements made for unaccompanied or separated children, regular supervision and assessment ought to be maintained by qualified persons in order to ensure the child's physical and psychosocial health, protection against domestic violence or exploitation, and access to educational and vocational skills and opportunities;
- States and other organizations must take measures to ensure the effective protection of the rights of separated or unaccompanied children living in child-headed households;
- In large-scale emergencies, interim care must be provided for the shortest time appropriate for unaccompanied children. This interim care provides for their security and physical and emotional care in a setting that encourages their general development;
- Children must be kept informed of the care arrangements being made for them, and their opinions must be taken into consideration.

(d) Full access to education (arts. 28, 29 (1) (c), 30 and 32)

41. States should ensure that access to education is maintained during all phases of the displacement cycle. Every unaccompanied and separated child, irrespective of status, shall have full access to education in the country that they have entered in line with articles 28, 29 (1) (c), 30 and 32 of the Convention and the general principles developed by the Committee. Such access should be granted without discrimination and in particular, separated and unaccompanied girls shall have equal access to formal and informal education, including vocational training at all levels. Access to quality education should also be ensured for children with special needs, in particular children with disabilities.

42. The unaccompanied or separated child should be registered with appropriate school authorities as soon as possible and get assistance in maximizing learning opportunities. All unaccompanied and separated children have the right to maintain their cultural identity and values, including the maintenance and development of their native language. All adolescents should be allowed to enrol in vocational/professional training or education, and early learning programmes should be made available to young children. States should ensure that unaccompanied or separated children are provided with school certificates or other documentation indicating their level of education, in particular in preparation of relocation, resettlement or return.

43. States shall, in particular where government capacity is limited, accept and facilitate the assistance offered by UNICEF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UNHCR and other United Nations agencies within their respective mandates, as well as, where appropriate, other competent intergovernmental organizations or non-governmental organizations (art. 22 (2)) in order to meet the educational needs of unaccompanied and separated children.

(e) Right to an adequate standard of living (art. 27)

44. States should ensure that separated and unaccompanied children have a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual and moral development. As provided in article 27 (2) of the Convention, States shall provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

45. States shall, in particular where government capacity is limited, accept and facilitate the assistance offered by UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR and other United Nations agencies within their respective mandates, as well as, where appropriate, other competent intergovernmental organizations or non-governmental organizations (art. 22 (2)) in order to secure an adequate standard of living for unaccompanied and separated children.

(f) Right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health and facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health (arts. 23, 24 and 39)

46. When implementing the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health and facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health under article 24 of the Convention, States are obligated to ensure that unaccompanied and separated children have the same access to health care as children who are ... nationals

47. In ensuring their access, States must assess and address the particular plight and vulnerabilities of such children. They should, in particular, take into account the fact that unaccompanied children have undergone separation from family members and have also, to varying degrees, experienced loss, trauma, disruption and violence. Many such children, in particular those who are refugees, have further experienced pervasive violence and the stress associated with a country afflicted by war. This may have created deep-rooted feelings of helplessness and undermined a child's trust in others. Moreover, girls are particularly susceptible to marginalization, poverty and suffering during armed conflict, and many may have experienced gender-based violence in the context of armed conflict. The profound trauma experienced by many affected children calls for special sensitivity and attention in their care and rehabilitation.

48. The obligation under article 39 of the Convention sets out the duty of States to provide rehabilitation services to children who have been victims of any form of abuse, neglect, exploitation, torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or armed conflicts. In order to facilitate such recovery and reintegration, culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive mental health care should be developed and qualified psychosocial counselling provided.

49. States shall, in particular where government capacity is limited, accept and facilitate assistance offered by UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Joint

Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), UNHCR and other agencies (art. 22 (2)) within their respective mandates, as well as, where appropriate, other competent intergovernmental organizations or non-governmental organizations in order to meet the health and health-care needs of unaccompanied and separated children.

(g) Prevention of trafficking and of sexual and other forms of exploitation, abuse and violence (arts. 34, 35 and 36)

50. Unaccompanied or separated children in a country outside their country of origin are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Girls are at particular risk of being trafficked, including for purposes of sexual exploitation.

51. Articles 34 to 36 of the Convention must be read in conjunction with special protection and assistance obligations to be provided according to article 20 of the Convention, in order to ensure that unaccompanied and separated children are shielded from trafficking, and from sexual and other forms of exploitation, abuse and violence.

52. Trafficking of such a child, or “re-trafficking” in cases where a child was already a victim of trafficking, is one of many dangers faced by unaccompanied or separated children. Trafficking in children is a threat to the fulfilment of their right to life, survival and development (art. 6). In accordance with article 35 of the Convention, States parties should take appropriate measures to prevent such trafficking. Necessary measures include identifying unaccompanied and separated children; regularly inquiring as to their whereabouts; and conducting information campaigns that are age-appropriate, gender-sensitive and in a language and medium that is understandable to the child. Adequate legislation should also be passed and effective mechanisms of enforcement be established with respect to labour regulations and border crossing.

53. Risks are also great for a child who has already been a victim of trafficking, resulting in the status of being unaccompanied or separated. Such children should not be penalized and should receive assistance as victims of a serious human rights violation. Some trafficked children may be eligible for refugee status under the 1951 Convention, and States should ensure that separated and unaccompanied trafficked children who wish to seek asylum or in relation to whom there is otherwise indication that international protection needs exist, have access to asylum procedures. Children who are at risk of being re-trafficked should not be returned to their country of origin unless it is in their best interests and appropriate measures for their protection have been taken. States should consider complementary forms of protection for trafficked children when return is not in their best interests.

(h) Prevention of military recruitment and protection against effects of war (arts. 38 and 39)

Prevention of recruitment

54. State obligations deriving from article 38 of the Convention and from articles 3 and 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict also apply to unaccompanied and separated children. A State must

take all necessary measures to prevent recruitment or use of such children by any party to a conflict. This also applies to former child soldiers who have defected from their units and who require protection against re-recruitment.

Care arrangements

55. Care arrangements for unaccompanied and separated children shall be made in a manner which prevents their recruitment, re-recruitment or use by any party to a conflict. Guardianships should not be given to individuals or organizations who are directly or indirectly involved in a conflict.

Former child soldiers

56. Child soldiers should be considered primarily as victims of armed conflict. Former child soldiers, who often find themselves unaccompanied or separated at the cessation of the conflict or following defection, shall be given all the necessary support services to enable reintegration into normal life, including necessary psychosocial counselling. Such children shall be identified and demobilized on a priority basis during any identification and separation operation. Child soldiers, in particular, those who are unaccompanied or separated, should not normally be interned, but rather, benefit from special protection and assistance measures, in particular as regards their demobilization and rehabilitation. Particular efforts must be made to provide support and facilitate the reintegration of girls who have been associated with the military, either as combatants or in any other capacity.

57. If, under certain circumstances, exceptional internment of a child soldier over the age of 15 years is unavoidable and in compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law, for example, where she or he poses a serious security threat, the conditions of such internment should be in conformity with international standards, including article 37 of the Convention and those pertaining to juvenile justice, and should not preclude any tracing efforts and priority participation in rehabilitation programmes.

Non-refoulement

58. As under-age recruitment and participation in hostilities entails a high risk of irreparable harm involving fundamental human rights, including the right to life, State obligations deriving from article 38 of the Convention, in conjunction with articles 3 and 4 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, entail extraterritorial effects and States shall refrain from returning a child in any manner whatsoever to the borders of a State where there is a real risk of under-age recruitment or participation, directly or indirectly, in hostilities.

Child-specific forms and manifestations of persecution³

59. Reminding States of the need for age and gender-sensitive asylum procedures and an age and gender-sensitive interpretation of the refugee definition, the Committee highlights that under-age recruitment (including of girls for sexual services or forced marriage with the military) and direct or indirect participation in hostilities constitutes a serious human rights violation and thereby persecution, and should lead to the granting of refugee status

where the well-founded fear of such recruitment or participation in hostilities is based on “reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (article 1A (2), 1951 Refugee Convention).

Rehabilitation and recovery

60. States shall develop, where needed, in cooperation with international agencies and NGOs, a comprehensive age-appropriate and gender-sensitive system of psychological support and assistance for unaccompanied and separated children affected by armed conflict.

(i) Prevention of deprivation of liberty and treatment in cases thereof

61. In application of article 37 of the Convention and the principle of the best interests of the child, unaccompanied or separated children should not, as a general rule, be detained. Detention cannot be justified solely on the basis of the child being unaccompanied or separated, or on their migratory or residence status, or lack thereof. Where detention is exceptionally justified for other reasons, it shall be conducted in accordance with article 37 (b) of the Convention that requires detention to conform to the law of the relevant country and only to be used as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time. In consequence, all efforts, including acceleration of relevant processes, should be made to allow for the immediate release of unaccompanied or separated children from detention and their placement in other forms of appropriate accommodation.

62. In addition to national requirements, international obligations constitute part of the law governing detention. With regard to asylum-seeking, unaccompanied and separated children, States must, in particular, respect their obligations deriving from article 31 (1) of the 1951 Refugee Convention. States should further take into account that illegal entry into or stay in a country by an unaccompanied or separated child may also be justified according to general principles of law, where such entry or stay is the only way of preventing a violation of the fundamental human rights of the child. More generally, in developing policies on unaccompanied or separated children, including those who are victims of trafficking and exploitation, States should ensure that such children are not criminalized solely for reasons of illegal entry or presence in the country.

63. In the exceptional case of detention, conditions of detention must be governed by the best interests of the child and pay full respect to article 37 (a) and (c) of the Convention and other international obligations. Special arrangements must be made for living quarters that are suitable for children and that separate them from adults, unless it is considered in the child’s best interests not to do so. Indeed, the underlying approach to such a programme should be “care” and not “detention”. Facilities should not be located in isolated areas where culturally appropriate community resources and access to legal aid are unavailable. Children should have the opportunity to make regular contact and receive visits from friends, relatives, religious, social and legal counsel and their guardian. They should also be provided with the opportunity to receive all basic necessities as well as appropriate medical treatment and psychological counselling where necessary. During their period in detention, children have the right to education which ought, ideally, to take place outside the detention premises in order to facilitate the continuance of their education upon release. They also have the right to recreation and play as provided for in article 31 of the Convention. In order to effectively secure the rights provided

by article 37 (d) of the Convention, unaccompanied or separated children deprived of their liberty shall be provided with prompt and free access to legal and other appropriate assistance, including the assignment of a legal representative.

VI. ACCESS TO THE ASYLUM PROCEDURE, LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AND RIGHTS IN ASYLUM

(a) General

64. The obligation stemming from article 22 of the Convention to take “appropriate measures” to ensure that a child, whether unaccompanied or accompanied, who is seeking refugee status receives appropriate protection entails, inter alia, the responsibility to set up a functioning asylum system and, in particular, to enact legislation addressing the particular treatment of unaccompanied and separated children and to build capacities necessary to realize this treatment in accordance with applicable rights codified in the Convention and in other international human rights, refugee protection or humanitarian instruments to which the State is a party. States facing resource constraints in staging such capacity-building efforts are strongly encouraged to seek international assistance, including that provided by UNHCR.

65. Taking into account the complementary nature of the obligations under article 22 and those deriving from international refugee law, as well as the desirability of consolidated standards, States should apply international standards relating to refugees as they progressively evolve when implementing article 22 of the Convention.

(b) Access to asylum procedures, regardless of age

66. Asylum-seeking children, including those who are unaccompanied or separated, shall enjoy access to asylum procedures and other complementary mechanisms providing international protection, irrespective of their age. In the case that facts become known during the identification and registration process which indicate that the child may have a well-founded fear or, even if unable to explicitly articulate a concrete fear, the child may objectively be at risk of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, or otherwise be in need of international protection, such a child should be referred to the asylum procedure and/or, where relevant, to mechanisms providing complementary protection under international and domestic law.

67. Unaccompanied or separated children for whom there is no indication of being in need of international protection should not automatically, or otherwise, be referred to asylum procedures, but shall be protected pursuant to other relevant child protection mechanisms such as those provided under youth welfare legislation.

(c) Procedural safeguards and support measures (art. 3 (3))

68. Appropriate measures required under article 22 (1) of the Convention must take into account the particular vulnerabilities of unaccompanied and separated children and the national legal framework and conditions. Such measures should be guided by the considerations set out below.

69. An asylum-seeking child should be represented by an adult who is familiar with the child's background and who is competent and able to represent his or her best interests (see section V (b), "Appointment of a guardian or adviser or legal representative"). The unaccompanied or separated child should also, in all cases, be given access, free of charge, to a qualified legal representative, including where the application for refugee status is processed under the normal procedures for adults.

70. Refugee status applications filed by unaccompanied and separated children shall be given priority and every effort should be made to render a decision promptly and fairly.

71. Minimum procedural guarantees should include that the application will be determined by a competent authority fully qualified in asylum and refugee matters. Where the age and maturity of the child permits, the opportunity for a personal interview with a qualified official should be granted before any final decision is made. Wherever the child is unable to communicate directly with the qualified official in a common language, the assistance of a qualified interpreter should be sought. Moreover, the child should be given the "benefit of the doubt", should there be credibility concerns relating to his or her story as well as a possibility to appeal for a formal review of the decision.

72. The interviews should be conducted by representatives of the refugee determination authority who will take into account the special situation of unaccompanied children in order to carry out the refugee status assessment and apply an understanding of the history, culture and background of the child. The assessment process should comprise a case-by-case examination of the unique combination of factors presented by each child, including the child's personal, family and cultural background. The guardian and the legal representative should be present during all interviews.

73. In cases of large-scale refugee movements where individual refugee status determination is not possible, States may grant refugee status to all members of a group. In such circumstances, all unaccompanied or separated children are entitled to be granted the same status as other members of the particular group.

(d) Child-sensitive assessment of protection needs, taking into account persecution of a child-specific nature

74. When assessing refugee claims of unaccompanied or separated children, States shall take into account the development of, and formative relationship between, international human rights and refugee law, including positions developed by UNHCR in exercising its supervisory functions under the 1951 Refugee Convention. In particular, the refugee definition in that Convention must be interpreted in an age and gender-sensitive manner, taking into account the particular motives for, and forms and manifestations of, persecution experienced by children. Persecution of kin; under-age recruitment; trafficking of children for prostitution; and sexual exploitation or subjection to female genital mutilation, are some of the child-specific forms and manifestations of persecution which may justify the granting of refugee status if such acts are related to one of the 1951 Refugee Convention grounds. States should, therefore, give utmost attention to such child-specific forms and manifestations of persecution as well as gender-based violence in national refugee status-determination procedures.

75. Staff involved in status-determination procedures of children, in particular those who are unaccompanied or separated, should receive training on adopting an application of international and national refugee law that is child, cultural, and gender-sensitive. To properly assess asylum claims of children, information on the situation of children, including those belonging to minorities or marginalized groups, should be included in government efforts to collect country-of-origin information.

(e) Full enjoyment of all international refugee and human rights by children granted refugee status (art. 22)

76. Unaccompanied or separated children recognized as refugees and granted asylum do not only enjoy rights under the 1951 Refugee Convention, but are also entitled to the fullest extent to the enjoyment of all human rights granted to children in the territory or subject to the jurisdiction of the State, including those rights which require a lawful stay in the territory.

(f) Children to benefit from complementary forms of protection

77. In the case that the requirements for granting refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention are not met, unaccompanied and separated children shall benefit from available forms of complementary protection to the extent determined by their protection needs. The application of such complementary forms of protection does not obviate States' obligations to address the particular protection needs of the unaccompanied and separated child. Therefore, children granted complementary forms of protection are entitled, to the fullest extent, to the enjoyment of all human rights granted to children in the territory or subject to the jurisdiction of the State, including those rights which require a lawful stay in the territory.

78. In line with the generally applicable principles and, in particular, those relating to the responsibilities of States with regard to unaccompanied or separated children finding themselves in their territory, children who are neither granted refugee status nor benefiting from complementary forms of protection, will still enjoy protection under all norms of the Convention as long as they remain de facto within the States' territories and/or subject to its jurisdiction.

VII. FAMILY REUNIFICATION, RETURN AND OTHER FORMS OF DURABLE SOLUTIONS

(a) General

79. The ultimate aim in addressing the fate of unaccompanied or separated children is to identify a durable solution that addresses all their protection needs, takes into account the child's view and, wherever possible, leads to overcoming the situation of a child being unaccompanied or separated. Efforts to find durable solutions for unaccompanied or separated children should be initiated and implemented without undue delay and, wherever possible, immediately upon the assessment of a child being unaccompanied or separated. Following a rights-based approach, the search for a durable solution commences with analysing the possibility of family reunification.

80. Tracing is an essential component of any search for a durable solution and should be prioritized except where the act of tracing, or the way in which tracing is conducted, would be contrary to the best interests of the child or jeopardize fundamental rights of those being traced.

In any case, in conducting tracing activities, no reference should be made to the status of the child as an asylum-seeker or refugee. Subject to all of these conditions, such tracing efforts should also be continued during the asylum procedure. For all children who remain in the territory of the host State, whether on the basis of asylum, complementary forms of protection or due to other legal or factual obstacles to removal, a durable solution must be sought.

(b) Family reunification

81. In order to pay full respect to the obligation of States under article 9 of the Convention to ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, all efforts should be made to return an unaccompanied or separated child to his or her parents except where further separation is necessary for the best interests of the child, taking full account of the right of the child to express his or her views (art. 12) (see also section IV (e), “Right of the child to express his or her views freely”). While the considerations explicitly listed in article 9, paragraph 1, sentence 2, namely, cases involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, may prohibit reunification at any location, other best-interests considerations can provide an obstacle to reunification at specific locations only.

82. Family reunification in the country of origin is not in the best interests of the child and should therefore not be pursued where there is a “reasonable risk” that such a return would lead to the violation of fundamental human rights of the child. Such risk is indisputably documented in the granting of refugee status or in a decision of the competent authorities on the applicability of non-refoulement obligations (including those deriving from article 3 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and articles 6 and 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights). Accordingly, the granting of refugee status constitutes a legally binding obstacle to return to the country of origin and, consequently, to family reunification therein. Where the circumstances in the country of origin contain lower level risks and there is concern, for example, of the child being affected by the indiscriminate effects of generalized violence, such risks must be given full attention and balanced against other rights-based considerations, including the consequences of further separation. In this context, it must be recalled that the survival of the child is of paramount importance and a precondition for the enjoyment of any other rights.

83. Whenever family reunification in the country of origin is not possible, irrespective of whether this is due to legal obstacles to return or whether the best-interests-based balancing test has decided against return, the obligations under article 9 and 10 of the Convention come into effect and should govern the host country’s decisions on family reunification therein. In this context, States parties are particularly reminded that “applications by a child or his or her parents to enter or leave a State party for the purpose of family reunification shall be dealt with by States parties in a positive, humane and expeditious manner” and “shall entail no adverse consequences for the applicants and for the members of their family” (art. 10 (1)). Countries of origin must respect “the right of the child and his or her parents to leave any country, including their own, and to enter their own country” (art. 10 (2)).

(c) Return to the country of origin

84. Return to the country of origin is not an option if it would lead to a “reasonable risk” that such return would result in the violation of fundamental human rights of the child, and in

particular, if the principle of non-refoulement applies. Return to the country of origin shall in principle only be arranged if such return is in the best interests of the child. Such a determination shall, inter alia, take into account:

- The safety, security and other conditions, including socio-economic conditions, awaiting the child upon return, including through home study, where appropriate, conducted by social network organizations;
- The availability of care arrangements for that particular child;
- The views of the child expressed in exercise of his or her right to do so under article 12 and those of the caretakers;
- The child’s level of integration in the host country and the duration of absence from the home country;
- The child’s right “to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations” (art. 8);
- The “desirability of continuity in a child’s upbringing and to the child’s ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background” (art. 20).

85. In the absence of the availability of care provided by parents or members of the extended family, return to the country of origin should, in principle, not take place without advance secure and concrete arrangements of care and custodial responsibilities upon return to the country of origin.

86. Exceptionally, a return to the home country may be arranged, after careful balancing of the child’s best interests and other considerations, if the latter are rights-based and override best interests of the child. Such may be the case in situations in which the child constitutes a serious risk to the security of the State or to the society. Non-rights-based arguments such as those relating to general migration control, cannot override best interests considerations.

87. In all cases return measures must be conducted in a safe, child-appropriate and gender-sensitive manner.

88. Countries of origin are also reminded in this context of their obligations pursuant to article 10 of the Convention and, in particular, to respect “the right of the child and his or her parents to leave any country, including their own, and to enter their own country”.

(d) Local integration

89. Local integration is the primary option if return to the country of origin is impossible on either legal or factual grounds. Local integration must be based on a secure legal status (including residence status) and be governed by the Convention rights that are fully applicable to all children who remain in the country, irrespective of whether this is due to their recognition as a refugee, other legal obstacles to return, or whether the best-interests-based balancing test has decided against return.

90. Once it has been determined that a separated or unaccompanied child will remain in the community, the relevant authorities should conduct an assessment of the child's situation and then, in consultation with the child and his or her guardian, determine the appropriate long-term arrangements within the local community and other necessary measures to facilitate such integration. The long-term placement should be decided in the best interests of the child and, at this stage, institutional care should, wherever possible, serve only as a last resort. The separated or unaccompanied child should have the same access to rights (including to education, training, employment and health care) as enjoyed by national children. In ensuring that these rights are fully enjoyed by the unaccompanied or separated child, the host country may need to pay special attention to the extra measures required to address the child's vulnerable status, including, for example, through extra language training.

(e) Intercountry adoption (art. 21)

91. States must have full respect for the preconditions provided under article 21 of the Convention as well as other relevant international instruments, including in particular the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption and its 1994 Recommendation Concerning the Application to Refugee and other Internationally Displaced Children when considering the adoption of unaccompanied and separated children. States should, in particular, observe the following:

- Adoption of unaccompanied or separated children should only be considered once it has been established that the child is in a position to be adopted. In practice, this means, inter alia, that efforts with regard to tracing and family reunification have failed, or that the parents have consented to the adoption. The consent of parents and the consent of other persons, institutions and authorities that are necessary for adoption must be free and informed. This supposes notably that such consent has not been induced by payment or compensation of any kind and has not been withdrawn;
- Unaccompanied or separated children must not be adopted in haste at the height of an emergency;
- Any adoption must be determined as being in the child's best interests and carried out in keeping with applicable national, international and customary law;
- The views of the child, depending upon his/her age and degree of maturity, should be sought and taken into account in all adoption procedures. This requirement implies that he/she has been counselled and duly informed of the consequences of adoption and of his/her consent to adoption, where such consent is required. Such consent must have been given freely and not induced by payment or compensation of any kind;
- Priority must be given to adoption by relatives in their country of residence. Where this is not an option, preference will be given to adoption within the community from which the child came or at least within his or her own culture;

- Adoption should not be considered:
 - Where there is reasonable hope of successful tracing and family reunification is in the child’s best interests;
 - If it is contrary to the expressed wishes of the child or the parents;
 - Unless a reasonable time has passed during which all feasible steps to trace the parents or other surviving family members has been carried out. This period of time may vary with circumstances, in particular, those relating to the ability to conduct proper tracing; however, the process of tracing must be completed within a reasonable period of time;
- Adoption in a country of asylum should not be taken up when there is the possibility of voluntary repatriation under conditions of safety and dignity in the near future.

(f) Resettlement in a third country

92. Resettlement to a third country may offer a durable solution for an accompanied or separated child who cannot return to the country of origin and for whom no durable solution can be envisaged in the host country. The decision to resettle an unaccompanied or separated child must be based on an updated, comprehensive and thorough best-interests assessment, taking into account, in particular, ongoing international and other protection needs. Resettlement is particularly called for if such is the only means to effectively and sustainably protect a child against refoulement or against persecution or other serious human rights violations in the country of stay. Resettlement is also in the best interests of the unaccompanied or separated child if it serves family reunification in the resettlement country.

93. The best-interests assessment determination, prior to a decision to resettle, needs also to take into account other factors such as: the envisaged duration of legal or other obstacles to a child’s return to his or her home country; the child’s right to preserve his or her identity, including nationality and name (art. 8); the child’s age, sex, emotional state, educational and family background; continuity/discontinuity of care in the host country; the desirability of continuity in a child’s upbringing and to the child’s ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background (art. 20); the right of the child to preserve his or her family relations (art. 8) and related short, medium and long-term possibilities of family reunion either in the home, host, or resettlement country. Unaccompanied or separated children should never be resettled to a third country if this would undermine or seriously hamper future reunion with their family.

94. States are encouraged to provide resettlement opportunities in order to meet all the resettlement needs related to unaccompanied and separated children.

VIII. TRAINING, DATA AND STATISTICS

(a) Training of personnel dealing with unaccompanied and separated children

95. Particular attention should be paid to the training of officials working with separated and unaccompanied children and dealing with their cases. Specialized training is equally important for legal representatives, guardians, interpreters and others dealing with separated and unaccompanied children.

96. Such training should be specifically tailored to the needs and rights of the groups concerned. Nevertheless, certain key elements should be included in all training programmes, including:

- Principles and provisions of the Convention;
- Knowledge of the country of origin of separated and unaccompanied children;
- Appropriate interview techniques;
- Child development and psychology;
- Cultural sensitivity and intercultural communication.

97. Initial training programmes should also be followed up regularly, including through on-the-job learning and professional networks.

(b) Data and statistics on separated and unaccompanied children

98. It is the experience of the Committee that data and statistics collected with regard to unaccompanied and separated children tends to be limited to the number of arrivals and/or number of requests for asylum. This data is insufficient for a detailed analysis of the implementation of the rights of such children. Furthermore, data and statistics are often collected by a variety of different ministries or agencies, which can impede further analysis and presents potential concerns with regard to confidentiality and a child's right to privacy.

99. Accordingly, the development of a detailed and integrated system of data collection on unaccompanied and separated children is a prerequisite for the development of effective policies for the implementation of the rights of such children.

100. Data collected within such a system should ideally include but not be limited to: basic biographical data on each child (including age, sex, country of origin and nationality, ethnic group); total number of unaccompanied and separated children attempting to enter the country and the number that have been refused entry; number of requests for asylum; number of legal representatives and guardians assigned to such children; legal and immigration status (i.e. asylum-seeker, refugee, temporary resident permit); living arrangements (i.e. in institutions, with families or living independently); enrolment in school or vocational training; family

reunifications; and, numbers returned to their country of origin. In addition, States parties should consider collecting qualitative data that would allow them to analyse issues that remain insufficiently addressed, such as for instance, disappearances of unaccompanied and separated children and the impact of trafficking.

Notes

¹ These Guiding Principles are jointly endorsed by the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children/UK, UNICEF, UNHCR, and World Vision International. They are intended to guide the work of all members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee with respect to unaccompanied and separated children.

² Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (A/CONF.157/23) adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, 14-25 June 1993.

³ On child-specific forms and manifestations of persecution more generally, see section VI (d) below “Child sensitive assessment of protection needs, taking into account persecution of a child-specific nature”.

Fortieth session (2006)

General comment No. 7: Implementing child rights in early childhood

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This general comment arises out of the Committee’s experiences of reviewing States parties’ reports. In many cases, very little information has been offered about early childhood, with comments limited mainly to child mortality, birth registration and health care. The Committee felt the need for a discussion on the broader implications of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for young children. Accordingly, in 2004, the Committee devoted its day of general discussion to the theme “Implementing child rights in early childhood”. This resulted in a set of recommendations (see CRC/C/143, sect. VII) as well as the decision to prepare a general comment on this important topic. Through this general comment, the Committee wishes to encourage recognition that young children are holders of all rights enshrined in the Convention and that early childhood is a critical period for the realization of these rights. The Committee’s working definition of “early childhood” is all young children: at birth and throughout infancy; during the preschool years; as well as during the transition to school (see paragraph 4 below).

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE GENERAL COMMENT

2. The objectives of the general comment are:

(a) To strengthen understanding of the human rights of all young children and to draw States parties’ attention to their obligations towards young children;

(b) To comment on the specific features of early childhood that impact on the realization of rights;

(c) To encourage recognition of young children as social actors from the beginning of life, with particular interests, capacities and vulnerabilities, and of requirements for protection, guidance and support in the exercise of their rights;

(d) To draw attention to diversities within early childhood that need to be taken into account when implementing the Convention, including diversities in young children's circumstances, in the quality of their experiences and in the influences shaping their development;

(e) To point to variations in cultural expectations and treatment of children, including local customs and practices that should be respected, except where they contravene the rights of the child;

(f) To emphasize the vulnerability of young children to poverty, discrimination, family breakdown and multiple other adversities that violate their rights and undermine their well-being;

(g) To contribute to the realization of rights for all young children through formulation and promotion of comprehensive policies, laws, programmes, practices, professional training and research specifically focused on rights in early childhood.

III. HUMAN RIGHTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

3. Young children are rights holders. The Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier" (art. 1). Consequently, young children are holders of all the rights enshrined in the Convention. They are entitled to special protection measures and, in accordance with their evolving capacities, the progressive exercise of their rights. The Committee is concerned that in implementing their obligations under the Convention, States parties have not given sufficient attention to young children as rights holders and to the laws, policies and programmes required to realize their rights during this distinct phase of their childhood. The Committee reaffirms that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is to be applied holistically in early childhood, taking account of the principle of the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights.

4. Definition of early childhood. Definitions of early childhood vary in different countries and regions, according to local traditions and the organization of primary school systems. In some countries, the transition from preschool to school occurs soon after 4 years old. In other countries, this transition takes place at around 7 years old. In its consideration of rights in early childhood, the Committee wishes to include all young children: at birth and throughout infancy; during the preschool years; as well as during the transition to school. Accordingly, the Committee proposes as an appropriate working definition of early childhood the period below the age of 8 years; States parties should review their obligations towards young children in the context of this definition.

5. A positive agenda for early childhood. The Committee encourages States parties to construct a positive agenda for rights in early childhood. A shift away from traditional beliefs that regard early childhood mainly as a period for the socialization of the immature human being

towards mature adult status is required. The Convention requires that children, including the very youngest children, be respected as persons in their own right. Young children should be recognized as active members of families, communities and societies, with their own concerns, interests and points of view. For the exercise of their rights, young children have particular requirements for physical nurturance, emotional care and sensitive guidance, as well as for time and space for social play, exploration and learning. These requirements can best be planned for within a framework of laws, policies and programmes for early childhood, including a plan for implementation and independent monitoring, for example through the appointment of a children's rights commissioner, and through assessments of the impact of laws and policies on children (see general comment No. 2 (2002) on the role of independent human rights institutions, para. 19).

6. Features of early childhood. Early childhood is a critical period for realizing children's rights. During this period:

(a) Young children experience the most rapid period of growth and change during the human lifespan, in terms of their maturing bodies and nervous systems, increasing mobility, communication skills and intellectual capacities, and rapid shifts in their interests and abilities;

(b) Young children form strong emotional attachments to their parents or other caregivers, from whom they seek and require nurturance, care, guidance and protection, in ways that are respectful of their individuality and growing capacities;

(c) Young children establish their own important relationships with children of the same age, as well as with younger and older children. Through these relationships they learn to negotiate and coordinate shared activities, resolve conflicts, keep agreements and accept responsibility for others;

(d) Young children actively make sense of the physical, social and cultural dimensions of the world they inhabit, learning progressively from their activities and their interactions with others, children as well as adults;

(e) Young children's earliest years are the foundation for their physical and mental health, emotional security, cultural and personal identity, and developing competencies;

(f) Young children's experiences of growth and development vary according to their individual nature, as well as their gender, living conditions, family organization, care arrangements and education systems;

(g) Young children's experiences of growth and development are powerfully shaped by cultural beliefs about their needs and proper treatment, and about their active role in family and community.

7. Respecting the distinctive interests, experiences and challenges facing every young child is the starting point for realizing their rights during this crucial phase of their lives.

8. Research into early childhood. The Committee notes the growing body of theory and research which confirms that young children are best understood as social actors whose survival, well-being and development are dependent on and built around close relationships. These

relationships are normally with a small number of key people, most often parents, members of the extended family and peers, as well as caregivers and other early childhood professionals. At the same time, research into the social and cultural dimensions of early childhood draws attention to the diverse ways in which early development is understood and enacted, including varying expectations of the young child and arrangements for his or her care and education. A feature of modern societies is that increasing numbers of young children are growing up in multicultural communities and in contexts marked by rapid social change, where beliefs and expectations about young children are also changing, including through greater recognition of their rights. States parties are encouraged to draw on beliefs and knowledge about early childhood in ways that are appropriate to local circumstances and changing practices, and respect traditional values, provided these are not discriminatory, (article 2 of the Convention) nor prejudicial to children's health and well-being (art. 24.3), nor against their best interests (art. 3). Finally, research has highlighted the particular risks to young children from malnutrition, disease, poverty, neglect, social exclusion and a range of other adversities. It shows that proper prevention and intervention strategies during early childhood have the potential to impact positively on young children's current well-being and future prospects. Implementing child rights in early childhood is thus an effective way to help prevent personal, social and educational difficulties during middle childhood and adolescence (see general comment No. 4 (2003) on adolescent health and development).

III. GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND RIGHTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

9. The Committee has identified articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 of the Convention as general principles (see general comment No. 5 (2003) on the general measures of implementation of the Convention). Each principle has implications for rights in early childhood.

10. Right to life, survival and development. Article 6 refers to the child's inherent right to life and States parties' obligation to ensure, to the maximum extent possible, the survival and development of the child. States parties are urged to take all possible measures to improve perinatal care for mothers and babies, reduce infant and child mortality, and create conditions that promote the well-being of all young children during this critical phase of their lives. Malnutrition and preventable diseases continue to be major obstacles to realizing rights in early childhood. Ensuring survival and physical health are priorities, but States parties are reminded that article 6 encompasses all aspects of development, and that a young child's health and psychosocial well-being are in many respects interdependent. Both may be put at risk by adverse living conditions, neglect, insensitive or abusive treatment and restricted opportunities for realizing human potential. Young children growing up in especially difficult circumstances require particular attention (see section VI below). The Committee reminds States parties (and others concerned) that the right to survival and development can only be implemented in a holistic manner, through the enforcement of all the other provisions of the Convention, including rights to health, adequate nutrition, social security, an adequate standard of living, a healthy and safe environment, education and play (arts. 24, 27, 28, 29 and 31), as well as through respect for the responsibilities of parents and the provision of assistance and quality services (arts. 5 and 18). From an early age, children should themselves be included in activities promoting good nutrition and a healthy and disease-preventing lifestyle.

11. Right to non-discrimination. Article 2 ensures rights to every child, without discrimination of any kind. The Committee urges States parties to identify the implications of this principle for realizing rights in early childhood:

(a) Article 2 means that young children in general must not be discriminated against on any grounds, for example where laws fail to offer equal protection against violence for all children, including young children. Young children are especially at risk of discrimination because they are relatively powerless and depend on others for the realization of their rights;

(b) Article 2 also means that particular groups of young children must not be discriminated against. Discrimination may take the form of reduced levels of nutrition; inadequate care and attention; restricted opportunities for play, learning and education; or inhibition of free expression of feelings and views. Discrimination may also be expressed through harsh treatment and unreasonable expectations, which may be exploitative or abusive. For example:

- (i) Discrimination against girl children is a serious violation of rights, affecting their survival and all areas of their young lives as well as restricting their capacity to contribute positively to society. They may be victims of selective abortion, genital mutilation, neglect and infanticide, including through inadequate feeding in infancy. They may be expected to undertake excessive family responsibilities and deprived of opportunities to participate in early childhood and primary education;
- (ii) Discrimination against children with disabilities reduces survival prospects and quality of life. These children are entitled to the care, nutrition, nurturance and encouragement offered other children. They may also require additional, special assistance in order to ensure their integration and the realization of their rights;
- (iii) Discrimination against children infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS deprives them of the help and support they most require. Discrimination may be found within public policies, in the provision of and access to services, as well as in everyday practices that violate these children's rights (see also paragraph 27);
- (iv) Discrimination related to ethnic origin, class/caste, personal circumstances and lifestyle, or political and religious beliefs (of children or their parents) excludes children from full participation in society. It affects parents' capacities to fulfil their responsibilities towards their children. It affects children's opportunities and self-esteem, as well as encouraging resentment and conflict among children and adults;
- (v) Young children who suffer multiple discrimination (e.g. related to ethnic origin, social and cultural status, gender and/or disabilities) are especially at risk.

12. Young children may also suffer the consequences of discrimination against their parents, for example if children have been born out of wedlock or in other circumstances that deviate from traditional values, or if their parents are refugees or asylum-seekers. States parties have a responsibility to monitor and combat discrimination in whatever forms it takes and wherever it occurs - within families, communities, schools or other institutions. Potential discrimination in

access to quality services for young children is a particular concern, especially where health, education, welfare and other services are not universally available and are provided through a combination of State, private and charitable organizations. As a first step, the Committee encourages States parties to monitor the availability of and access to quality services that contribute to young children's survival and development, including through systematic data collection, disaggregated in terms of major variables related to children's and families' background and circumstances. As a second step, actions may be required that guarantee that all children have an equal opportunity to benefit from available services. More generally, States parties should raise awareness about discrimination against young children in general, and against vulnerable groups in particular.

13. Best interests of the child. Article 3 sets out the principle that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. By virtue of their relative immaturity, young children are reliant on responsible authorities to assess and represent their rights and best interests in relation to decisions and actions that affect their well-being, while taking account of their views and evolving capacities. The principle of best interests appears repeatedly within the Convention (including in articles 9, 18, 20 and 21, which are most relevant to early childhood). The principle of best interests applies to all actions concerning children and requires active measures to protect their rights and promote their survival, growth, and well-being, as well as measures to support and assist parents and others who have day-to-day responsibility for realizing children's rights:

(a) *Best interests of individual children.* All decision-making concerning a child's care, health, education, etc. must take account of the best interests principle, including decisions by parents, professionals and others responsible for children. States parties are urged to make provisions for young children to be represented independently in all legal proceedings by someone who acts for the child's interests, and for children to be heard in all cases where they are capable of expressing their opinions or preferences;

(b) *Best interests of young children as a group or constituency.* All law and policy development, administrative and judicial decision-making and service provision that affect children must take account of the best interests principle. This includes actions directly affecting children (e.g. related to health services, care systems, or schools), as well as actions that indirectly impact on young children (e.g. related to the environment, housing or transport).

14. Respect for the views and feelings of the young child. Article 12 states that the child has a right to express his or her views freely in all matters affecting the child, and to have them taken into account. This right reinforces the status of the young child as an active participant in the promotion, protection and monitoring of their rights. Respect for the young child's agency - as a participant in family, community and society - is frequently overlooked, or rejected as inappropriate on the grounds of age and immaturity. In many countries and regions, traditional beliefs have emphasized young children's need for training and socialization. They have been regarded as undeveloped, lacking even basic capacities for understanding, communicating and making choices. They have been powerless within their families, and often voiceless and invisible within society. The Committee wishes to emphasize that article 12 applies both to younger and to older children. As holders of rights, even the youngest children are entitled to express their views, which should be "given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (art. 12.1). Young children are acutely sensitive to their surroundings and very

rapidly acquire understanding of the people, places and routines in their lives, along with awareness of their own unique identity. They make choices and communicate their feelings, ideas and wishes in numerous ways, long before they are able to communicate through the conventions of spoken or written language. In this regard:

(a) The Committee encourages States parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure that the concept of the child as rights holder with freedom to express views and the right to be consulted in matters that affect him or her is implemented from the earliest stage in ways appropriate to the child's capacities, best interests, and rights to protection from harmful experiences;

(b) The right to express views and feelings should be anchored in the child's daily life at home (including, when applicable, the extended family) and in his or her community; within the full range of early childhood health, care and education facilities, as well as in legal proceedings; and in the development of policies and services, including through research and consultations;

(c) States parties should take all appropriate measures to promote the active involvement of parents, professionals and responsible authorities in the creation of opportunities for young children to progressively exercise their rights within their everyday activities in all relevant settings, including by providing training in the necessary skills. To achieve the right of participation requires adults to adopt a child-centred attitude, listening to young children and respecting their dignity and their individual points of view. It also requires adults to show patience and creativity by adapting their expectations to a young child's interests, levels of understanding and preferred ways of communicating.

IV. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND ASSISTANCE FROM STATES PARTIES

15. A crucial role for parents and other primary caregivers. Under normal circumstances, a young child's parents play a crucial role in the achievement of their rights, along with other members of family, extended family or community, including legal guardians, as appropriate. This is fully recognized within the Convention (especially article 5), along with the obligation on States parties to provide assistance, including quality childcare services (especially article 18). The preamble to the Convention refers to the family as "the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children". The Committee recognizes that "family" here refers to a variety of arrangements that can provide for young children's care, nurturance and development, including the nuclear family, the extended family, and other traditional and modern community-based arrangements, provided these are consistent with children's rights and best interests.

16. Parents/primary caregivers and children's best interests. The responsibility vested in parents and other primary caregivers is linked to the requirement that they act in children's best interests. Article 5 states that parents' role is to offer appropriate direction and guidance in "the exercise by the child of the rights in the ... Convention". This applies equally to younger as to older children. Babies and infants are entirely dependent on others, but they are not passive recipients of care, direction and guidance. They are active social agents, who seek protection, nurturance and understanding from parents or other caregivers, which they require for their survival, growth and well-being. Newborn babies are able to recognize their parents (or other

caregivers) very soon after birth, and they engage actively in non-verbal communication. Under normal circumstances, young children form strong mutual attachments with their parents or primary caregivers. These relationships offer children physical and emotional security, as well as consistent care and attention. Through these relationships children construct a personal identity and acquire culturally valued skills, knowledge and behaviours. In these ways, parents (and other caregivers) are normally the major conduit through which young children are able to realize their rights.

17. Evolving capacities as an enabling principle. Article 5 draws on the concept of “evolving capacities” to refer to processes of maturation and learning whereby children progressively acquire knowledge, competencies and understanding, including acquiring understanding about their rights and about how they can best be realized. Respecting young children’s evolving capacities is crucial for the realization of their rights, and especially significant during early childhood, because of the rapid transformations in children’s physical, cognitive, social and emotional functioning, from earliest infancy to the beginnings of schooling. Article 5 contains the principle that parents (and others) have the responsibility to continually adjust the levels of support and guidance they offer to a child. These adjustments take account of a child’s interests and wishes as well as the child’s capacities for autonomous decision-making and comprehension of his or her best interests. While a young child generally requires more guidance than an older child, it is important to take account of individual variations in the capacities of children of the same age and of their ways of reacting to situations. Evolving capacities should be seen as a positive and enabling process, not an excuse for authoritarian practices that restrict children’s autonomy and self-expression and which have traditionally been justified by pointing to children’s relative immaturity and their need for socialization. Parents (and others) should be encouraged to offer “direction and guidance” in a child-centred way, through dialogue and example, in ways that enhance young children’s capacities to exercise their rights, including their right to participation (art. 12) and their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (art. 14).¹

18. Respecting parental roles. Article 18 of the Convention reaffirms that parents or legal guardians have the primary responsibility for promoting children’s development and well-being, with the child’s best interests as their basic concern (arts. 18.1 and 27.2). States parties should respect the primacy of parents, mothers and fathers. This includes the obligation not to separate children from their parents, unless it is in the child’s best interests (art. 9). Young children are especially vulnerable to adverse consequences of separations because of their physical dependence on and emotional attachment to their parents/primary caregivers. They are also less able to comprehend the circumstances of any separation. Situations which are most likely to impact negatively on young children include neglect and deprivation of adequate parenting; parenting under acute material or psychological stress or impaired mental health; parenting in isolation; parenting which is inconsistent, involves conflict between parents or is abusive towards children; and situations where children experience disrupted relationships (including enforced separations), or where they are provided with low-quality institutional care. The Committee urges States parties to take all necessary steps to ensure that parents are able to take primary responsibility for their children; to support parents in fulfilling their responsibilities, including by reducing harmful deprivations, disruptions and distortions in children’s care; and to

take action where young children's well-being may be at risk. States parties' overall goals should include reducing the number of young children abandoned or orphaned, as well as minimizing the numbers requiring institutional or other forms of long-term care, except where this is judged to be in a young child's best interests (see also section VI below).

19. Social trends and the role of the family. The Convention emphasizes that "both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child", with fathers and mothers recognized as equal caregivers (art. 18.1). The Committee notes that in practice family patterns are variable and changing in many regions, as is the availability of informal networks of support for parents, with an overall trend towards greater diversity in family size, parental roles and arrangements for bringing up children. These trends are especially significant for young children, whose physical, personal and psychological development is best provided for within a small number of consistent, caring relationships. Typically, these relationships are with some combination of mother, father, siblings, grandparents and other members of the extended family, along with professional caregivers specialized in childcare and education. The Committee acknowledges that each of these relationships can make a distinctive contribution to the fulfilment of children's rights under the Convention and that a range of family patterns may be consistent with promoting children's well-being. In some countries and regions, shifting social attitudes towards family, marriage and parenting are impacting on young children's experiences of early childhood, for example following family separations and reformations. Economic pressures also impact on young children, for example, where parents are forced to work far away from their families and their communities. In other countries and regions, the illness and death of one or both parents or other kin due to HIV/AIDS is now a common feature of early childhood. These and many other factors impact on parents' capacities to fulfil their responsibilities towards children. More generally, during periods of rapid social change, traditional practices may no longer be viable or relevant to present parental circumstances and lifestyles, but without sufficient time having elapsed for new practices to be assimilated and new parental competencies understood and valued.

20. Assistance to parents. States parties are required to render appropriate assistance to parents, legal guardians and extended families in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities (arts. 18.2 and 18.3), including assisting parents in providing living conditions necessary for the child's development (art. 27.2) and ensuring that children receive necessary protection and care (art. 3.2). The Committee is concerned that insufficient account is taken of the resources, skills and personal commitment required of parents and others responsible for young children, especially in societies where early marriage and parenthood is still sanctioned as well as in societies with a high incidence of young, single parents. Early childhood is the period of most extensive (and intensive) parental responsibilities related to all aspects of children's well-being covered by the Convention: their survival, health, physical safety and emotional security, standards of living and care, opportunities for play and learning, and freedom of expression. Accordingly, realizing children's rights is in large measure dependent on the well-being and resources available to those with responsibility for their care. Recognizing these interdependencies is a sound starting point for planning assistance and services to parents, legal guardians and other caregivers. For example:

(a) An integrated approach would include interventions that impact indirectly on parents' ability to promote the best interests of children (e.g. taxation and benefits, adequate housing, working hours) as well as those that have more immediate consequences (e.g. perinatal health services for mother and baby, parent education, home visitors);

(b) Providing adequate assistance should take account of the new roles and skills required of parents, as well as the ways that demands and pressures shift during early childhood - for example, as children become more mobile, more verbally communicative, more socially competent, and as they begin to participate in programmes of care and education;

(c) Assistance to parents will include provision of parenting education, parent counselling and other quality services for mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents and others who from time to time may be responsible for promoting the child's best interests;

(d) Assistance also includes offering support to parents and other family members in ways that encourage positive and sensitive relationships with young children and enhance understanding of children's rights and best interests.

21. Appropriate assistance to parents can best be achieved as part of comprehensive policies for early childhood (see section V below), including provision for health, care and education during the early years. States parties should ensure that parents are given appropriate support to enable them to involve young children fully in such programmes, especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. In particular, article 18.3 acknowledges that many parents are economically active, often in poorly paid occupations which they combine with their parental responsibilities. Article 18.3 requires States parties to take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from childcare services, maternity protection and facilities for which they are eligible. In this regard, the Committee recommends that States parties ratify the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) of the International Labour Organization.

V. COMPREHENSIVE POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD, ESPECIALLY FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

22. Rights-based, multisectoral strategies. In many countries and regions, early childhood has received low priority in the development of quality services. These services have often been fragmented. They have frequently been the responsibility of several government departments at central and local levels, and their planning has often been piecemeal and uncoordinated. In some cases, they have also been largely provided by the private and voluntary sector, without adequate resources, regulation or quality assurance. States parties are urged to develop rights-based, coordinated, multisectoral strategies in order to ensure that children's best interests are always the starting point for service planning and provision. These should be based around a systematic and integrated approach to law and policy development in relation to all children up to 8 years old. A comprehensive framework for early childhood services, provisions and facilities is required, backed up by information and monitoring systems. Comprehensive services

will be coordinated with the assistance provided to parents and will fully respect their responsibilities, as well as their circumstances and requirements (as in articles 5 and 18 of the Convention; see section IV above). Parents should also be consulted and involved in the planning of comprehensive services.

23. Programme standards and professional training appropriate to the age range. The Committee emphasizes that a comprehensive strategy for early childhood must also take account of individual children's maturity and individuality, in particular recognizing the changing developmental priorities for specific age groups (for example, babies, toddlers, preschool and early primary school groups), and the implications for programme standards and quality criteria. States parties must ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for early childhood conform to quality standards, particularly in the areas of health and safety, and that staff possess the appropriate psychosocial qualities and are suitable, sufficiently numerous and well-trained. Provision of services appropriate to the circumstances, age and individuality of young children requires that all staff be trained to work with this age group. Work with young children should be socially valued and properly paid, in order to attract a highly qualified workforce, men as well as women. It is essential that they have sound, up-to-date theoretical and practical understanding about children's rights and development (see also paragraph 41); that they adopt appropriate child-centred care practices, curricula and pedagogies; and that they have access to specialist professional resources and support, including a supervisory and monitoring system for public and private programmes, institutions and services.

24. Access to services, especially for the most vulnerable. The Committee calls on States parties to ensure that all young children (and those with primary responsibility for their well-being) are guaranteed access to appropriate and effective services, including programmes of health, care and education specifically designed to promote their well-being. Particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups of young children and to those who are at risk of discrimination (art. 2). This includes girls, children living in poverty, children with disabilities, children belonging to indigenous or minority groups, children from migrant families, children who are orphaned or lack parental care for other reasons, children living in institutions, children living with mothers in prison, refugee and asylum-seeking children, children infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS, and children of alcohol- or drug-addicted parents (see also section VI).

25. Birth registration. Comprehensive services for early childhood begin at birth. The Committee notes that provision for registration of all children at birth is still a major challenge for many countries and regions. This can impact negatively on a child's sense of personal identity and children may be denied entitlements to basic health, education and social welfare. As a first step in ensuring the rights to survival, development and access to quality services for all children (art. 6), the Committee recommends that States parties take all necessary measures to ensure that all children are registered at birth. This can be achieved through a universal, well-managed registration system that is accessible to all and free of charge. An effective system must be flexible and responsive to the circumstances of families, for example by providing mobile registration units where appropriate. The Committee notes that children who are sick or disabled are less likely to be registered in some regions and emphasizes that all children should be registered at birth, without discrimination of any kind (art. 2). The Committee also reminds States parties of the importance of facilitating late registration of birth, and ensuring that children who have not been registered have equal access to health care, protection, education and other social services.

26. Standard of living and social security. Young children are entitled to a standard of living adequate for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (art. 27). The Committee notes with concern that even the most basic standard of living is not assured for millions of young children, despite widespread recognition of the adverse consequences of deprivation. Growing up in relative poverty undermines children's well-being, social inclusion and self-esteem and reduces opportunities for learning and development. Growing up in conditions of absolute poverty has even more serious consequences, threatening children's survival and their health, as well as undermining the basic quality of life. States parties are urged to implement systematic strategies to reduce poverty in early childhood as well as combat its negative effects on children's well-being. All possible means should be employed, including "material assistance and support programmes" for children and families (art. 27.3), in order to assure to young children a basic standard of living consistent with rights. Implementing children's right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, is an important element of any strategy (art. 26).

27. Health-care provision. States parties should ensure that all children have access to the highest attainable standard of health care and nutrition during their early years, in order to reduce infant mortality and enable children to enjoy a healthy start in life (art. 24). In particular:

(a) States parties have a responsibility to ensure access to clean drinking water, adequate sanitation, appropriate immunization, good nutrition and medical services, which are essential for young children's health, as is a stress-free environment. Malnutrition and disease have long-term impacts on children's physical health and development. They affect children's mental state, inhibiting learning and social participation and reducing prospects for realizing their potential. The same applies to obesity and unhealthy lifestyles;

(b) States parties have a responsibility to implement children's right to health by encouraging education in child health and development, including about the advantages of breastfeeding, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation.² Priority should also be given to the provision of appropriate prenatal and post-natal health care for mothers and infants in order to foster healthy family-child relationships, especially between a child and his or her mother (or other primary caregiver) (art. 24.2). Young children are themselves able to contribute to ensuring their personal health and encouraging healthy lifestyles among their peers, for example through participation in appropriate, child-centred health education programmes;

(c) The Committee wishes to draw States parties' attention to the particular challenges of HIV/AIDS for early childhood. All necessary steps should be taken to: (i) prevent infection of parents and young children, especially by intervening in chains of transmission, especially between father and mother and from mother to baby; (ii) provide accurate diagnoses, effective treatment and other forms of support for both parents and young children who are infected by the virus (including antiretroviral therapies); and (iii) ensure adequate alternative care for children who have lost parents or other primary caregivers due to HIV/AIDS, including healthy and infected orphans. (See also general comment No. 3 (2003) on HIV/AIDS and the rights of the child.)

28. Early childhood education. The Convention recognizes the right of the child to education, and primary education should be made compulsory and available free to all (art. 28). The Committee recognizes with appreciation that some States parties are planning to make one year

of preschool education available and free of cost for all children. The Committee interprets the right to education during early childhood as beginning at birth and closely linked to young children's right to maximum development (art. 6.2). Linking education to development is elaborated in article 29.1: "States parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: (a) the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential". General comment No. 1 on the aims of education explains that the goal is to "empower the child by developing his or her skills, learning and other capacities, human dignity, self-esteem and self-confidence" and that this must be achieved in ways that are child-centred, child-friendly and reflect the rights and inherent dignity of the child (para. 2). States parties are reminded that children's right to education include all children, and that girls should be enabled to participate in education, without discrimination of any kind (art. 2).

29. Parental and public responsibilities for early childhood education. The principle that parents (and other primary caregivers) are children's first educators is well established and endorsed within the Convention's emphasis on respect for the responsibilities of parents (sect. IV above). They are expected to provide appropriate direction and guidance to young children in the exercise of their rights, and provide an environment of reliable and affectionate relationships based on respect and understanding (art. 5). The Committee invites States parties to make this principle a starting point for planning early education, in two respects:

(a) In providing appropriate assistance to parents in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities (art. 18.2), States parties should take all appropriate measures to enhance parents' understanding of their role in their children's early education, encourage child-rearing practices which are child-centred, encourage respect for the child's dignity and provide opportunities for developing understanding, self-esteem and self-confidence;

(b) In planning for early childhood, States parties should at all times aim to provide programmes that complement the parents' role and are developed as far as possible in partnership with parents, including through active cooperation between parents, professionals and others in developing "the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (art. 29.1 (a)).

30. The Committee calls on States parties to ensure that all young children receive education in the broadest sense (as outlined in paragraph 28 above), which acknowledges a key role for parents, wider family and community, as well as the contribution of organized programmes of early childhood education provided by the State, the community or civil society institutions. Research evidence demonstrates the potential for quality education programmes to have a positive impact on young children's successful transition to primary school, their educational progress and their long-term social adjustment. Many countries and regions now provide comprehensive early education starting at 4 years old, which in some countries is integrated with childcare for working parents. Acknowledging that traditional divisions between "care" and "education" services have not always been in children's best interests, the concept of "Educare" is sometimes used to signal a shift towards integrated services, and reinforces the recognition of the need for a coordinated, holistic, multisectoral approach to early childhood.

31. Community-based programmes. The Committee recommends that States parties support early childhood development programmes, including home- and community-based preschool programmes, in which the empowerment and education of parents (and other caregivers) are

main features. States parties have a key role to play in providing a legislative framework for the provision of quality, adequately resourced services, and for ensuring that standards are tailored to the circumstances of particular groups and individuals and to the developmental priorities of particular age groups, from infancy through to transition into school. They are encouraged to construct high-quality, developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant programmes and to achieve this by working with local communities rather by imposing a standardized approach to early childhood care and education. The Committee also recommends that States parties pay greater attention to, and actively support, a rights-based approach to early childhood programmes, including initiatives surrounding transition to primary school that ensure continuity and progression, in order to build children's confidence, communication skills and enthusiasm for learning through their active involvement in, among others, planning activities.

32. The private sector as service provider. With reference to its recommendations adopted during its 2002 day of general discussion on "The private sector as service provider and its role in implementing child rights" (see CRC/C/121, paras. 630-653), the Committee recommends that States parties support the activities of the non-governmental sector as a channel for programme implementation. It further calls on all non-State service providers ("for profit" as well as "non-profit" providers) to respect the principles and provisions of the Convention and, in this regard, reminds States parties of their primary obligation to ensure its implementation. Early childhood professionals - in both the State and non-State sectors - should be provided with thorough preparation, ongoing training and adequate remuneration. In this context, States parties are responsible for service provision for early childhood development. The role of civil society should be complementary to - not a substitute for - the role of the State. Where non-State services play a major role, the Committee reminds States parties that they have an obligation to monitor and regulate the quality of provision to ensure that children's rights are protected and their best interests served.

33. Human rights education in early childhood. In light of article 29 and the Committee's general comment No. 1 (2001), the Committee also recommends that States parties include human rights education within early childhood education. Such education should be participatory and empowering to children, providing them with practical opportunities to exercise their rights and responsibilities in ways adapted to their interests, concerns and evolving capacities. Human rights education of young children should be anchored in everyday issues at home, in childcare centres, in early education programmes and other community settings with which young children can identify.

34. Right to rest, leisure and play. The Committee notes that insufficient attention has been given by States parties and others to the implementation of the provisions of article 31 of the Convention, which guarantees "the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts". Play is one of the most distinctive features of early childhood. Through play, children both enjoy and challenge their current capacities, whether they are playing alone or with others. The value of creative play and exploratory learning is widely recognized in early childhood education. Yet realizing the right to rest, leisure and play is often hindered by a shortage of opportunities for young children to meet, play and interact in child-centred, secure, supportive, stimulating and stress-free environments. Children's right-to-play space is especially at risk in many urban environments, where the design and density of housing, commercial centres and transport systems combine with noise, pollution and all manner of dangers to create a

hazardous environment for young children. Children's right to play can also be frustrated by excessive domestic chores (especially affecting girls) or by competitive schooling. Accordingly, the Committee appeals to States parties, non-governmental organizations and private actors to identify and remove potential obstacles to the enjoyment of these rights by the youngest children, including as part of poverty reduction strategies. Planning for towns, and leisure and play facilities should take account of children's right to express their views (art. 12), through appropriate consultations. In all these respects, States parties are encouraged to pay greater attention and allocate adequate resources (human and financial) to the implementation of the right to rest, leisure and play.

35. Modern communications technologies and early childhood. Article 17 recognizes the potential for both traditional print-based media and modern information technology-based mass media to contribute positively to the realization of children's rights. Early childhood is a specialist market for publishers and media producers, who should be encouraged to disseminate material that is appropriate to the capacities and interests of young children, socially and educationally beneficial to their well-being, and which reflects the national and regional diversities of children's circumstances, culture and language. Particular attention should be given to the need of minority groups for access to media that promote their recognition and social inclusion. Article 17 (e) also refers to the role of States parties in ensuring that children are protected from inappropriate and potentially harmful material. Rapid increases in the variety and accessibility of modern technologies, including Internet-based media, are a particular cause for concern. Young children are especially at risk if they are exposed to inappropriate or offensive material. States parties are urged to regulate media production and delivery in ways that protect young children, as well as support parents/caregivers to fulfil their child-rearing responsibilities in this regard (art. 18).

VI. YOUNG CHILDREN IN NEED OF SPECIAL PROTECTION

36. Young children's vulnerability to risks. Throughout this general comment the Committee notes that large numbers of young children grow up in difficult circumstances that are frequently in violation of their rights. Young children are especially vulnerable to the harm caused by unreliable, inconsistent relationships with parents and caregivers, or growing up in extreme poverty and deprivation, or being surrounded by conflict and violence or displaced from their homes as refugees, or any number of other adversities prejudicial to their well-being. Young children are less able to comprehend these adversities or resist harmful effects on their health, or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. They are especially at risk where parents or other caregivers are unable to offer adequate protection, whether due to illness, or death, or due to disruption to families or communities. Whatever the difficult circumstances, young children require particular consideration because of the rapid developmental changes they are experiencing; they are more vulnerable to disease, trauma, and distorted or disturbed development, and they are relatively powerless to avoid or resist difficulties and are dependent on others to offer protection and promote their best interests. In the following paragraphs, the Committee draws States parties' attention to major difficult circumstances referred to in the Convention that have clear implications for rights in early childhood. This list is not exhaustive, and children may in any case be subject to multiple risks. In general, the goal of States parties should be to ensure that every child, in every circumstance, receives adequate protection in fulfilment of their rights:

(a) *Abuse and neglect (art. 19)*. Young children are frequent victims of neglect, maltreatment and abuse, including physical and mental violence. Abuse very often happens within families, which can be especially destructive. Young children are least able to avoid or resist, least able to comprehend what is happening and least able to seek the protection of others. There is compelling evidence that trauma as a result of neglect and abuse has negative impacts on development, including, for the very youngest children, measurable effects on processes of brain maturation. Bearing in mind the prevalence of abuse and neglect in early childhood and the evidence that it has long-term repercussions, States parties should take all necessary measures to safeguard young children at risk and offer protection to victims of abuse, taking positive steps to support their recovery from trauma while avoiding stigmatization for the violations they have suffered;

(b) *Children without families (art. 20 and 21)*. Children's rights to development are at serious risk when they are orphaned, abandoned or deprived of family care or when they suffer long-term disruptions to relationships or separations (e.g. due to natural disasters or other emergencies, epidemics such as HIV/AIDS, parental imprisonment, armed conflicts, wars and forced migration). These adversities will impact on children differently depending on their personal resilience, their age and their circumstances, as well as the availability of wider sources of support and alternative care. Research suggests that low-quality institutional care is unlikely to promote healthy physical and psychological development and can have serious negative consequences for long-term social adjustment, especially for children under 3 but also for children under 5 years old. To the extent that alternative care is required, early placement in family-based or family-like care is more likely to produce positive outcomes for young children. States parties are encouraged to invest in and support forms of alternative care that can ensure security, continuity of care and affection, and the opportunity for young children to form long-term attachments based on mutual trust and respect, for example through fostering, adoption and support for members of extended families. Where adoption is envisaged "the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration" (art. 21), not just "a primary consideration" (art. 3), systematically bearing in mind and respecting all relevant rights of the child and obligations of States parties set out elsewhere in the Convention and recalled in the present general comment;

(c) *Refugees (art. 22)*. Young children who are refugees are most likely to be disoriented, having lost much that is familiar in their everyday surroundings and relationships. They and their parents are entitled to equal access to health care, education and other services. Children who are unaccompanied or separated from their families are especially at risk. The Committee offers detailed guidance on the care and protection of these children in general comment No. 6 (2005) on the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin;

(d) *Children with disabilities (art. 23)*. Early childhood is the period during which disabilities are usually identified and the impact on children's well-being and development recognized. Young children should never be institutionalized solely on the grounds of disability. It is a priority to ensure that they have equal opportunities to participate fully in education and community life, including by the removal of barriers that impede the realization of their rights. Young disabled children are entitled to appropriate specialist assistance, including support for

their parents (or other caregivers). Disabled children should at all times be treated with dignity and in ways that encourage their self-reliance. (See also the recommendations from the Committee's 1997 day of general discussion on "The rights of children with disabilities" contained in document CRC/C/66);

(e) *Harmful work (art. 32)*. In some countries and regions, children are socialized to work from an early age, including in activities that are potentially hazardous, exploitative and damaging to their health, education and long-term prospects. For example, young children may be initiated into domestic work or agricultural labour, or assist parents or siblings engaged in hazardous activities. Even very young babies may be vulnerable to economic exploitation, as when they are used or hired out for begging. Exploitation of young children in the entertainment industry, including television, film, advertising and other modern media, is also a cause for concern. States parties have particular responsibilities in relation to extreme forms of hazardous child labour identified in the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) of the ILO;

(f) *Substance abuse (art. 33)*. While very young children are only rarely likely to be substance abusers, they may require specialist health care if born to alcohol- or drug-addicted mothers, and protection where family members are abusers and they are at risk of exposure to drugs. They may also suffer adverse consequences of alcohol or drug abuse on family living standards and quality of care, as well as being at risk of early initiation into substance abuse;

(g) *Sexual abuse and exploitation (art. 34)*. Young children, especially girls, are vulnerable to early sexual abuse and exploitation within and outside families. Young children in difficult circumstances are at particular risk, for example girl children employed as domestic workers. Young children may also be victims of producers of pornography; this is covered by the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography of 2002;

(h) *Sale, trafficking and abduction of children (art. 35)*. The Committee has frequently expressed concern about evidence of the sale and trafficking of abandoned and separated children for various purposes. As far as the youngest age groups are concerned, these purposes can include adoption, particularly (though not solely) by foreigners. In addition to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption provides a framework and mechanism for preventing abuses in this sphere, and the Committee has therefore always consistently and strongly urged all States parties that recognize and/or permit adoption to ratify or accede to this treaty. Universal birth registration, in addition to international cooperation, can help to combat this violation of rights;

(i) *Deviant behaviour and lawbreaking (art. 40)*. Under no circumstances should young children (defined as under 8 years old; see paragraph 4) be included in legal definitions of minimum age of criminal responsibility. Young children who misbehave or violate laws require sympathetic help and understanding, with the goal of increasing their capacities for personal control, social empathy and conflict resolution. States parties should ensure that parents/caregivers are provided adequate support and training to fulfil their responsibilities (art. 18) and that young children have access to quality early childhood education and care, and (where appropriate) specialist guidance/therapies.

37. In each of these circumstances, and in the case of all other forms of exploitation (art. 36), the Committee urges States parties to incorporate the particular situation of young children into all legislation, policies and interventions to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration within an environment that promotes dignity and self-respect (art. 39).

VII. CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

38. Resource allocation for early childhood. In order to ensure that young children's rights are fully realized during this crucial phase of their lives (and bearing in mind the impact of early childhood experiences on their long-term prospects), States parties are urged to adopt comprehensive, strategic and time-bound plans for early childhood within a rights-based framework. This requires an increase in human and financial resource allocations for early childhood services and programmes (art. 4). The Committee acknowledges that States parties implementing child rights in early childhood do so from very different starting points, in terms of existing infrastructures for early childhood policies, services and professional training, as well as levels of resources potentially available to allocate to early childhood. The Committee also acknowledges that States parties may be faced with competing priorities to implement rights throughout childhood, for example where universal health services and primary education have still not been achieved. It is nonetheless important that there be sufficient public investment in services, infrastructure and overall resources specifically allocated to early childhood, for the many reasons set out in this general comment. In this connection, States parties are encouraged to develop strong and equitable partnerships between the Government, public services, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and families to finance comprehensive services in support of young children's rights. Finally, the Committee emphasizes that where services are decentralized, this should not be to the disadvantage of young children.

39. Data collection and management. The Committee reiterates the importance of comprehensive and up-to-date quantitative and qualitative data on all aspects of early childhood for the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of progress achieved, and for assessment of the impact of policies. The Committee is aware that many States parties lack adequate national data collection systems on early childhood for many areas covered by the Convention, and in particular that specific and disaggregated information on children in the early years is not readily available. The Committee urges all States parties to develop a system of data collection and indicators consistent with the Convention and disaggregated by gender, age, family structure, urban and rural residence, and other relevant categories. This system should cover all children up to the age of 18 years, with specific emphasis on early childhood, particularly children belonging to vulnerable groups.

40. Capacity-building for research in early childhood. The Committee noted earlier in this general comment that extensive research has been carried out on aspects of children's health, growth, and cognitive, social and cultural development, on the influence of both positive and negative factors on their well-being, and on the potential impact of early childhood care and education programmes. Increasingly, research is also being carried out on early childhood from a human rights perspective, notably on ways that children's participatory rights can be respected, including through their participation in the research process. Theory and evidence from early childhood research has a great deal to offer in the development of policies and practices, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of initiatives and the education and training of all responsible for the well-being of young children. But the Committee also draws attention to the limitations

of current research, through its focus mainly on early childhood in a limited range of contexts and regions of the world. As part of planning for early childhood, the Committee encourages States parties to develop national and local capacities for early childhood research, especially from a rights-based perspective.

41. Training for rights in early childhood. Knowledge and expertise about early childhood are not static but change over time. This is due variously to social trends impacting on the lives of young children, their parents and other caregivers, changing policies and priorities for their care and education, innovations in childcare, curricula and pedagogy, as well as the emergence of new research. Implementing child rights in early childhood sets challenges for all those responsible for children, as well as for children themselves as they gain an understanding of their role in their families, schools and communities. States parties are encouraged to undertake systematic child rights training for children and their parents, as well as for all professionals working for and with children, in particular parliamentarians, judges, magistrates, lawyers, law enforcement officials, civil servants, personnel in institutions and places of detention for children, teachers, health personnel, social workers and local leaders. Furthermore, the Committee urges States parties to conduct awareness-raising campaigns for the public at large.

42. International assistance. Acknowledging the resource constraints affecting many States parties seeking to implement the comprehensive provisions outlined in this general comment, the Committee recommends that donor institutions, including the World Bank, other United Nations bodies and bilateral donors support early childhood development programmes financially and technically, and that it be one of their main targets in assisting sustainable development in countries receiving international assistance. Effective international cooperation can also strengthen capacity-building for early childhood, in terms of policy development, programme development, research and professional training.

43. Looking forward. The Committee urges all States parties, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, academics, professional groups and grass-roots communities to continue advocating for the establishment of independent institutions on children's rights and foster continuous, high-level policy dialogues and research on the crucial importance of quality in early childhood, including dialogues at international, national, regional and local levels.

Notes

¹ See G. Lansdown, *The Evolving Capacities of the Child* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2005).

² See *Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding*, World Health Organization, 2003.

Forty-second session (2006)

General comment No. 8: The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment (arts. 19; 28, para. 2; and 37, inter alia)

I. OBJECTIVES

1. Following its two days of general discussion on violence against children, held in 2000 and 2001, the Committee on the Rights of the Child resolved to issue a series of general comments concerning eliminating violence against children, of which this is the first. The Committee aims to guide States parties in understanding the provisions of the Convention concerning the protection of children against all forms of violence. This general comment focuses on corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, which are currently very widely accepted and practised forms of violence against children.
2. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments recognize the right of the child to respect for the child's human dignity and physical integrity and equal protection under the law. The Committee is issuing this general comment to highlight the obligation of all States parties to move quickly to prohibit and eliminate all corporal punishment and all other cruel or degrading forms of punishment of children and to outline the legislative and other awareness-raising and educational measures that States must take.
3. Addressing the widespread acceptance or tolerance of corporal punishment of children and eliminating it, in the family, schools and other settings, is not only an obligation of States parties under the Convention. It is also a key strategy for reducing and preventing all forms of violence in societies.

II. BACKGROUND

4. The Committee has, from its earliest sessions, paid special attention to asserting children's right to protection from all forms of violence. In its examination of States parties' reports, and most recently in the context of the United Nations Secretary-General's study on violence against children, it has noted with great concern the widespread legality and persisting social approval of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishment of children.¹ Already in 1993, the Committee noted in the report of its fourth session that it "recognized the importance of the question of corporal punishment in improving the system of promotion and protection of the rights of the child and decided to continue to devote attention to it in the process of examining States parties' reports".²
5. Since it began examining States parties' reports the Committee has recommended prohibition of all corporal punishment, in the family and other settings, to more than 130 States in all continents.³ The Committee is encouraged that a growing number of States are taking appropriate legislative and other measures to assert children's right to respect for their human dignity and physical integrity and to equal protection under the law. The Committee understands

that by 2006, more than 100 States had prohibited corporal punishment in their schools and penal systems for children. A growing number have completed prohibition in the home and family and all forms of alternative care.⁴

6. In September 2000, the Committee held the first of two days of general discussion on violence against children. It focused on “State violence against children” and afterwards adopted detailed recommendations, including for the prohibition of all corporal punishment and the launching of public information campaigns “to raise awareness and sensitize the public about the severity of human rights violations in this domain and their harmful impact on children, and to address cultural acceptance of violence against children, promoting instead ‘zero-tolerance’ of violence”.⁵

7. In April 2001, the Committee adopted its first general comment on “The aims of education” and reiterated that corporal punishment is incompatible with the Convention: “... Children do not lose their human rights by virtue of passing through the school gates. Thus, for example, education must be provided in a way that respects the inherent dignity of the child, enables the child to express his or her views freely in accordance with article 12, paragraph 1, and to participate in school life. Education must also be provided in a way that respects the strict limits on discipline reflected in article 28, paragraph 2, and promotes non-violence in school. The Committee has repeatedly made clear in its concluding observations that the use of corporal punishment does not respect the inherent dignity of the child nor the strict limits on school discipline ...”.⁶

8. In recommendations adopted following the second day of general discussion, on “Violence against children within the family and in schools”, held in September 2001, the Committee called upon States to “enact or repeal, as a matter of urgency, their legislation in order to prohibit all forms of violence, however light, within the family and in schools, including as a form of discipline, as required by the provisions of the Convention ...”.⁷

9. Another outcome of the Committee’s 2000 and 2001 days of general discussion was a recommendation that the United Nations Secretary-General should be requested, through the General Assembly, to carry out an in-depth international study on violence against children. The United Nations General Assembly took this forward in 2001.⁸ Within the context of the United Nations study, carried out between 2003 and 2006, the need to prohibit all currently legalized violence against children has been highlighted, as has children’s own deep concern at the almost universal high prevalence of corporal punishment in the family and also its persisting legality in many States in schools and other institutions, and in penal systems for children in conflict with the law.

III. DEFINITIONS

10. “Child” is defined as in the Convention as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”.⁹

11. The Committee defines “corporal” or “physical” punishment as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting (“smacking”, “slapping”, “spanking”) children, with the hand or with an implement - a whip, stick, belt, shoe, wooden spoon, etc. But it can also involve, for example,

kicking, shaking or throwing children, scratching, pinching, biting, pulling hair or boxing ears, forcing children to stay in uncomfortable positions, burning, scalding or forced ingestion (for example, washing children's mouths out with soap or forcing them to swallow hot spices). In the view of the Committee, corporal punishment is invariably degrading. In addition, there are other non-physical forms of punishment that are also cruel and degrading and thus incompatible with the Convention. These include, for example, punishment which belittles, humiliates, denigrates, scapegoats, threatens, scares or ridicules the child.

12. Corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment of children take place in many settings, including within the home and family, in all forms of alternative care, schools and other educational institutions and justice systems - both as a sentence of the courts and as a punishment within penal and other institutions - in situations of child labour, and in the community.

13. In rejecting any justification of violence and humiliation as forms of punishment for children, the Committee is not in any sense rejecting the positive concept of discipline. The healthy development of children depends on parents and other adults for necessary guidance and direction, in line with children's evolving capacities, to assist their growth towards responsible life in society.

14. The Committee recognizes that parenting and caring for children, especially babies and young children, demand frequent physical actions and interventions to protect them. This is quite distinct from the deliberate and punitive use of force to cause some degree of pain, discomfort or humiliation. As adults, we know for ourselves the difference between a protective physical action and a punitive assault; it is no more difficult to make a distinction in relation to actions involving children. The law in all States, explicitly or implicitly, allows for the use of non-punitive and necessary force to protect people.

15. The Committee recognizes that there are exceptional circumstances in which teachers and others, e.g. those working with children in institutions and with children in conflict with the law, may be confronted by dangerous behaviour which justifies the use of reasonable restraint to control it. Here too there is a clear distinction between the use of force motivated by the need to protect a child or others and the use of force to punish. The principle of the minimum necessary use of force for the shortest necessary period of time must always apply. Detailed guidance and training is also required, both to minimize the necessity to use restraint and to ensure that any methods used are safe and proportionate to the situation and do not involve the deliberate infliction of pain as a form of control.

IV. HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS AND CORPORAL PUNISHMENT OF CHILDREN

16. Before the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Bill of Human Rights - the Universal Declaration and the two International Covenants, on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - upheld "everyone's" right to respect for his/her human dignity and physical integrity and to equal protection under the law. In asserting States' obligation to prohibit and eliminate all corporal punishment and all other cruel

or degrading forms of punishment, the Committee notes that the Convention on the Rights of the Child builds on this foundation. The dignity of each and every individual is the fundamental guiding principle of international human rights law.

17. The preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms, in accordance with the principles in the Charter of the United Nations, repeated in the preamble to the Universal Declaration, that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”. The preamble to the Convention also recalls that, in the Universal Declaration, the United Nations “has proclaimed that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance”.

18. Article 37 of the Convention requires States to ensure that “no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”. This is complemented and extended by article 19, which requires States to “take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child”. There is no ambiguity: “all forms of physical or mental violence” does not leave room for any level of legalized violence against children. Corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment are forms of violence and States must take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to eliminate them.

19. In addition, article 28, paragraph 2, of the Convention refers to school discipline and requires States parties to “take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child’s human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention”.

20. Article 19 and article 28, paragraph 2, do not refer explicitly to corporal punishment. The *travaux préparatoires* for the Convention do not record any discussion of corporal punishment during the drafting sessions. But the Convention, like all human rights instruments, must be regarded as a living instrument, whose interpretation develops over time. In the 17 years since the Convention was adopted, the prevalence of corporal punishment of children in their homes, schools and other institutions has become more visible, through the reporting process under the Convention and through research and advocacy by, among others, national human rights institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

21. Once visible, it is clear that the practice directly conflicts with the equal and inalienable rights of children to respect for their human dignity and physical integrity. The distinct nature of children, their initial dependent and developmental state, their unique human potential as well as their vulnerability, all demand the need for more, rather than less, legal and other protection from all forms of violence.

22. The Committee emphasizes that eliminating violent and humiliating punishment of children, through law reform and other necessary measures, is an immediate and unqualified obligation of States parties. It notes that other treaty bodies, including the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee against Torture have reflected the same view in their concluding observations on States parties’ reports under the relevant instruments, recommending prohibition and other measures against corporal

punishment in schools, penal systems and, in some cases, the family. For example, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its general comment No. 13 (1999) on “The right to education” stated: “In the Committee’s view, corporal punishment is inconsistent with the fundamental guiding principle of international human rights law enshrined in the Preambles to the Universal Declaration and both Covenants: the dignity of the individual. Other aspects of school discipline may also be inconsistent with school discipline, including public humiliation.”¹⁰

23. Corporal punishment has also been condemned by regional human rights mechanisms. The European Court of Human Rights, in a series of judgements, has progressively condemned corporal punishment of children, first in the penal system, then in schools, including private schools, and most recently in the home.¹¹ The European Committee of Social Rights, monitoring compliance of member States of the Council of Europe with the European Social Charter and Revised Social Charter, has found that compliance with the Charters requires prohibition in legislation against any form of violence against children, whether at school, in other institutions, in their home or elsewhere.¹²

24. An Advisory Opinion of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, on the *Legal Status and Human Rights of the Child* (2002) holds that the States parties to the American Convention on Human Rights “are under the obligation ... to adopt all positive measures required to ensure protection of children against mistreatment, whether in their relations with public authorities, or in relations among individuals or with non-governmental entities”. The Court quotes provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, conclusions of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and also judgements of the European Court of Human Rights relating to States’ obligations to protect children from violence, including within the family. The Court concludes that “the State has the duty to adopt positive measures to fully ensure effective exercise of the rights of the child”.¹³

25. The African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights monitors implementation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. In a 2003 decision on an individual communication concerning a sentence of “lashes” imposed on students, the Commission found that the punishment violated article 5 of the African Charter, which prohibits cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment. It requested the relevant Government to amend the law, abolishing the penalty of lashes, and to take appropriate measures to ensure compensation of the victims. In its decision, the Commission states: “There is no right for individuals, and particularly the Government of a country to apply physical violence to individuals for offences. Such a right would be tantamount to sanctioning State-sponsored torture under the Charter and contrary to the very nature of this human rights treaty.”¹⁴ The Committee on the Rights of the Child is pleased to note that constitutional and other high-level courts in many countries have issued decisions condemning corporal punishment of children in some or all settings, and in most cases quoting the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁵

26. When the Committee on the Rights of the Child has raised eliminating corporal punishment with certain States during the examination of their reports, governmental representatives have sometimes suggested that some level of “reasonable” or “moderate” corporal punishment can be justified as in the “best interests” of the child. The Committee has identified, as an important general principle, the Convention’s requirement that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children (art. 3, para. 1).

The Convention also asserts, in article 18, that the best interests of the child will be parents' basic concern. But interpretation of a child's best interests must be consistent with the whole Convention, including the obligation to protect children from all forms of violence and the requirement to give due weight to the child's views; it cannot be used to justify practices, including corporal punishment and other forms of cruel or degrading punishment, which conflict with the child's human dignity and right to physical integrity.

27. The preamble to the Convention upholds the family as "the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children". The Convention requires States to respect and support families. There is no conflict whatsoever with States' obligation to ensure that the human dignity and physical integrity of children within the family receive full protection alongside other family members.

28. Article 5 requires States to respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents "to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention". Here again, interpretation of "appropriate" direction and guidance must be consistent with the whole Convention and leaves no room for justification of violent or other cruel or degrading forms of discipline.

29. Some raise faith-based justifications for corporal punishment, suggesting that certain interpretations of religious texts not only justify its use, but provide a duty to use it. Freedom of religious belief is upheld for everyone in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (art. 18), but practice of a religion or belief must be consistent with respect for others' human dignity and physical integrity. Freedom to practise one's religion or belief may be legitimately limited in order to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. In certain States, the Committee has found that children, in some cases from a very young age, in other cases from the time that they are judged to have reached puberty, may be sentenced to punishments of extreme violence, including stoning and amputation, prescribed under certain interpretations of religious law. Such punishments plainly violate the Convention and other international human rights standards, as has been highlighted also by the Human Rights Committee and the Committee against Torture, and must be prohibited.

V. MEASURES AND MECHANISMS REQUIRED TO ELIMINATE CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND OTHER CRUEL OR DEGRADING FORMS OF PUNISHMENT

1. Legislative measures

30. The wording of article 19 of the Convention builds upon article 4 and makes clear that legislative as well as other measures are required to fulfil States' obligations to protect children from all forms of violence. The Committee has welcomed the fact that, in many States, the Convention or its principles have been incorporated into domestic law. All States have criminal laws to protect citizens from assault. Many have constitutions and/or legislation reflecting international human rights standards and article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which uphold "everyone's" right to protection from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Many also have specific child protection laws that make "ill-treatment" or "abuse" or "cruelty" an offence. But the Committee has learned from its examination of

States' reports that such legislative provisions do not generally guarantee the child protection from all corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, in the family and in other settings.

31. In its examination of reports, the Committee has noted that in many States there are explicit legal provisions in criminal and/or civil (family) codes that provide parents and other carers with a defence or justification for using some degree of violence in "disciplining" children. For example, the defence of "lawful", "reasonable" or "moderate" chastisement or correction has formed part of English common law for centuries, as has a "right of correction" in French law. At one time in many States the same defence was also available to justify the chastisement of wives by their husbands and of slaves, servants and apprentices by their masters. The Committee emphasizes that the Convention requires the removal of any provisions (in statute or common - case law) that allow some degree of violence against children (e.g. "reasonable" or "moderate" chastisement or correction), in their homes/families or in any other setting.

32. In some States, corporal punishment is specifically authorized in schools and other institutions, with regulations setting out how it is to be administered and by whom. And in a minority of States, corporal punishment using canes or whips is still authorized as a sentence of the courts for child offenders. As frequently reiterated by the Committee, the Convention requires the repeal of all such provisions.

33. In some States, the Committee has observed that while there is no explicit defence or justification of corporal punishment in the legislation, nevertheless traditional attitudes to children imply that corporal punishment is permitted. Sometimes these attitudes are reflected in court decisions (in which parents or teachers or other carers have been acquitted of assault or ill-treatment on the grounds that they were exercising a right or freedom to use moderate "correction").

34. In the light of the traditional acceptance of violent and humiliating forms of punishment of children, a growing number of States have recognized that simply repealing authorization of corporal punishment and any existing defences is not enough. In addition, explicit prohibition of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment, in their civil or criminal legislation, is required in order to make it absolutely clear that it is as unlawful to hit or "smack" or "spank" a child as to do so to an adult, and that the criminal law on assault does apply equally to such violence, regardless of whether it is termed "discipline" or "reasonable correction".

35. Once the criminal law applies fully to assaults on children, the child is protected from corporal punishment wherever he or she is and whoever the perpetrator is. But in the view of the Committee, given the traditional acceptance of corporal punishment, it is essential that the applicable sectoral legislation - e.g. family law, education law, law relating to all forms of alternative care and justice systems, employment law - clearly prohibits its use in the relevant settings. In addition, it is valuable if professional codes of ethics and guidance for teachers, carers and others, and also the rules or charters of institutions, emphasize the illegality of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment.

36. The Committee is also concerned at reports that corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishments are used in situations of child labour, including in the domestic context.

The Committee reiterates that the Convention and other applicable human rights instruments protect the child from economic exploitation and from any work that is likely to be hazardous, interferes with the child's education, or is harmful to the child's development, and that they require certain safeguards to ensure the effective enforcement of this protection. The Committee emphasizes that it is essential that the prohibition of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment must be enforced in any situations in which children are working.

37. Article 39 of the Convention requires States to take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of "any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment". Corporal punishment and other degrading forms of punishment may inflict serious damage to the physical, psychological and social development of children, requiring appropriate health and other care and treatment. This must take place in an environment that fosters the integral health, self-respect and dignity of the child, and be extended as appropriate to the child's family group. There should be an interdisciplinary approach to planning and providing care and treatment, with specialized training of the professionals involved. The child's views should be given due weight concerning all aspects of their treatment and in reviewing it.

2. Implementation of prohibition of corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment

38. The Committee believes that implementation of the prohibition of all corporal punishment requires awareness-raising, guidance and training (see paragraph 45 et seq. below) for all those involved. This must ensure that the law operates in the best interests of the affected children - in particular when parents or other close family members are the perpetrators. The first purpose of law reform to prohibit corporal punishment of children within the family is prevention: to prevent violence against children by changing attitudes and practice, underlining children's right to equal protection and providing an unambiguous foundation for child protection and for the promotion of positive, non-violent and participatory forms of child-rearing.

39. Achieving a clear and unconditional prohibition of all corporal punishment will require varying legal reforms in different States parties. It may require specific provisions in sectoral laws covering education, juvenile justice and all forms of alternative care. But it should be made explicitly clear that the criminal law provisions on assault also cover all corporal punishment, including in the family. This may require an additional provision in the criminal code of the State party. But it is also possible to include a provision in the civil code or family law, prohibiting the use of all forms of violence, including all corporal punishment. Such a provision emphasizes that parents or other caretakers can no longer use any traditional defence that it is their right ("reasonably" or "moderately") to use corporal punishment if they face prosecution under the criminal code. Family law should also positively emphasize that parental responsibility includes providing appropriate direction and guidance to children without any form of violence.

40. The principle of equal protection of children and adults from assault, including within the family, does not mean that all cases of corporal punishment of children by their parents that come to light should lead to prosecution of parents. The *de minimis* principle - that the law does not concern itself with trivial matters - ensures that minor assaults between adults only come to

court in very exceptional circumstances; the same will be true of minor assaults on children. States need to develop effective reporting and referral mechanisms. While all reports of violence against children should be appropriately investigated and their protection from significant harm assured, the aim should be to stop parents from using violent or other cruel or degrading punishments through supportive and educational, not punitive, interventions.

41. Children's dependent status and the unique intimacy of family relations demand that decisions to prosecute parents, or to formally intervene in the family in other ways, should be taken with very great care. Prosecuting parents is in most cases unlikely to be in their children's best interests. It is the Committee's view that prosecution and other formal interventions (for example, to remove the child or remove the perpetrator) should only proceed when they are regarded both as necessary to protect the child from significant harm and as being in the best interests of the affected child. The affected child's views should be given due weight, according to his or her age and maturity.

42. Advice and training for all those involved in child protection systems, including the police, prosecuting authorities and the courts, should underline this approach to enforcement of the law. Guidance should also emphasize that article 9 of the Convention requires that any separation of the child from his or her parents must be deemed necessary in the best interests of the child and be subject to judicial review, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, with all interested parties, including the child, represented. Where separation is deemed to be justified, alternatives to placement of the child outside the family should be considered, including removal of the perpetrator, suspended sentencing, and so on.

43. Where, despite prohibition and positive education and training programmes, cases of corporal punishment come to light outside the family home - in schools, other institutions and forms of alternative care, for example - prosecution may be a reasonable response. The threat to the perpetrator of other disciplinary action or dismissal should also act as a clear deterrent. It is essential that the prohibition of all corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading punishment, and the sanctions that may be imposed if it is inflicted, should be well disseminated to children and to all those working with or for children in all settings. Monitoring disciplinary systems and the treatment of children must be part of the sustained supervision of all institutions and placements which is required by the Convention. Children and their representatives in all such placements must have immediate and confidential access to child-sensitive advice, advocacy and complaints procedures and ultimately to the courts, with necessary legal and other assistance. In institutions, there should be a requirement to report and to review any violent incidents.

3. Educational and other measures

44. Article 12 of the Convention underlines the importance of giving due consideration to children's views on the development and implementation of educational and other measures to eradicate corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment.

45. Given the widespread traditional acceptance of corporal punishment, prohibition on its own will not achieve the necessary change in attitudes and practice. Comprehensive awareness-raising of children's right to protection and of the laws that reflect this right is

required. Under article 42 of the Convention, States undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.

46. In addition, States must ensure that positive, non-violent relationships and education are consistently promoted to parents, carers, teachers and all others who work with children and families. The Committee emphasizes that the Convention requires the elimination not only of corporal punishment but of all other cruel or degrading punishment of children. It is not for the Convention to prescribe in detail how parents should relate to or guide their children. But the Convention does provide a framework of principles to guide relationships both within the family, and between teachers, carers and others and children. Children's developmental needs must be respected. Children learn from what adults do, not only from what adults say. When the adults to whom a child most closely relates use violence and humiliation in their relationship with the child, they are demonstrating disrespect for human rights and teaching a potent and dangerous lesson that these are legitimate ways to seek to resolve conflict or change behaviour.

47. The Convention asserts the status of the child as an individual person and holder of human rights. The child is not a possession of parents, nor of the State, nor simply an object of concern. In this spirit, article 5 requires parents (or, where applicable, members of the extended family or community) to provide the child with appropriate direction and guidance, in a manner consistent with his/her evolving capacities, in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the Convention. Article 18, which underlines the primary responsibility of parents, or legal guardians, for the upbringing and development of the child, states that "the best interests of the child will be their basic concern". Under article 12, States are required to assure children the right to express their views freely "in all matters affecting the child", with the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity. This emphasizes the need for styles of parenting, caring and teaching that respect children's participation rights. In its general comment No. 1 on "The aims of education", the Committee has emphasized the importance of developing education that is "child-centred, child-friendly and empowering".¹⁶

48. The Committee notes that there are now many examples of materials and programmes promoting positive, non-violent forms of parenting and education, addressed to parents, other carers and teachers and developed by Governments, United Nations agencies, NGOs and others.¹⁷ These can be appropriately adapted for use in different States and situations. The media can play a very valuable role in awareness-raising and public education. Challenging traditional dependence on corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of discipline requires sustained action. The promotion of non-violent forms of parenting and education should be built into all the points of contact between the State and parents and children, in health, welfare and educational services, including early childhood institutions, day-care centres and schools. It should also be integrated into the initial and in-service training of teachers and all those working with children in care and justice systems.

49. The Committee proposes that States may wish to seek technical assistance from, among others, UNICEF and UNESCO concerning awareness-raising, public education and training to promote non-violent approaches.

4. Monitoring and evaluation

50. The Committee, in its general comment No. 5 on “General measures of implementation for the Convention on the Rights of the Child (arts. 4, 42 and 44, para. 6)”, emphasizes the need for systematic monitoring by States parties of the realization of children’s rights, through the development of appropriate indicators and the collection of sufficient and reliable data.¹⁸

51. Therefore States parties should monitor their progress towards eliminating corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment and thus realizing children’s right to protection. Research using interviews with children, their parents and other carers, in conditions of confidentiality and with appropriate ethical safeguards, is essential in order to accurately assess the prevalence of these forms of violence within the family and attitudes to them. The Committee encourages every State to carry out/commission such research, as far as possible with groups representative of the whole population, to provide baseline information and then at regular intervals to measure progress. The results of this research can also provide valuable guidance for the development of universal and targeted awareness-raising campaigns and training for professionals working with or for children.

52. The Committee also underlines in general comment No. 5 the importance of independent monitoring of implementation by, for example, parliamentary committees, NGOs, academic institutions, professional associations, youth groups and independent human rights institutions (see also the Committee’s general comment No. 2 on “The role of independent national human rights institutions in the protection and promotion of the rights of the child”).¹⁹ These could all play an important role in monitoring the realization of children’s right to protection from all corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment.

VI. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS UNDER THE CONVENTION

53. The Committee expects States to include in their periodic reports under the Convention information on the measures taken to prohibit and prevent all corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment in the family and all other settings, including on related awareness-raising activities and promotion of positive, non-violent relationships and on the State’s evaluation of progress towards achieving full respect for children’s rights to protection from all forms of violence. The Committee also encourages United Nations agencies, national human rights institutions, NGOs and other competent bodies to provide it with relevant information on the legal status and prevalence of corporal punishment and progress towards its elimination.

Notes

¹ United Nations Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children, due to report to United Nations General Assembly, autumn 2006. For details see <http://www.violencestudy.org>.

² Committee on the Rights of the Child, Report on the fourth session, 25 October 1993, CRC/C/20, para. 176.

³ All the Committee’s concluding observations can be viewed at www.ohchr.org.

⁴ The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children provides reports on the legal status of corporal punishment at www.endcorporalpunishment.org.

⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child, day of general discussion on State violence against children, Report on the twenty-fifth session, September/October 2000, CRC/C/100, paras. 666-688.

⁶ Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 1, The aims of education, 17 April 2001, CRC/GC/2001/1, para. 8.

⁷ Committee on the Rights of the Child, day of general discussion on violence against children within the family and in schools, Report on the twenty-eighth session, September/October 2001, CRC/C/111, paras. 701-745.

⁸ General Assembly resolution 56/138.

⁹ Article 1.

¹⁰ Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, general comment No. 13, The right to education (art. 13), 1999, para. 41.

¹¹ Corporal punishment was condemned in a series of decisions of the European Commission on Human Rights and judgements of the European Court of Human Rights; see in particular *Tyrer v. UK*, 1978; *Campbell and Cosans v. UK*, 1982; *Costello-Roberts v. UK*, 1993; *A v. UK*, 1998. European Court judgements are available at <http://www.echr.coe.int/echr>.

¹² European Committee of Social Rights, general observations regarding article 7, paragraph 10, and article 17. *Conclusions XV-2*, Vol. 1, General Introduction, p. 26, 2001; the Committee has since issued conclusions, finding a number of Member States not in compliance because of their failure to prohibit all corporal punishment in the family and in other settings. In 2005 it issued decisions on collective complaints made under the charters, finding three States not in compliance because of their failure to prohibit. For details, see http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_Rights/Esc/; also *Eliminating corporal punishment: a human rights imperative for Europe's children*, Council of Europe Publishing, 2005.

¹³ Inter-American Court of Human Rights, Advisory Opinion OC-17/2002 of 28 August 2002, paras. 87 and 91.

¹⁴ African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Curtis Francis Doebbler v. Sudan*, Comm. No. 236/2000 (2003); see para. 42.

¹⁵ For example, in 2002 the Fiji Court of Appeal declared corporal punishment in schools and the penal system unconstitutional. The judgement declared: "Children have rights no wit inferior to the rights of adults. Fiji has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Our Constitution also guarantees fundamental rights to every person. Government is required to adhere to principles respecting the rights of all individuals, communities and groups. By their status as children, children need special protection. Our educational institutions should be

sanctuaries of peace and creative enrichment, not places for fear, ill-treatment and tampering with the human dignity of students” (Fiji Court of Appeal, *Naushad Ali v. State*, 2002). In 1996, Italy’s highest Court, the Supreme Court of Cassation in Rome, issued a decision that effectively prohibited all parental use of corporal punishment. The judgement states: “... The use of violence for educational purposes can no longer be considered lawful. There are two reasons for this: the first is the overriding importance which the [Italian] legal system attributes to protecting the dignity of the individual. This includes ‘minors’ who now hold rights and are no longer simply objects to be protected by their parents or, worse still, objects at the disposal of their parents. The second reason is that, as an educational aim, the harmonious development of a child’s personality, which ensures that he/she embraces the values of peace, tolerance and co-existence, cannot be achieved by using violent means which contradict these goals” (Cambria, Cass, sez. VI, 18 Marzo 1996 [Supreme Court of Cassation, 6th Penal Section, 18 March 1996], *Foro It II* 1996, 407 (Italy)). Also see South African Constitutional Court (2000) *Christian Education South Africa v. Minister of Education*, CCT4/00; 2000 (4) SA757 (CC); 2000 (10) BCLR 1051 (CC), 18 August 2000.

¹⁶ See note 11.

¹⁷ The Committee commends, as one example, UNESCO’s handbook, *Eliminating corporal punishment: the way forward to constructive child discipline*, UNESCO Publishing, Paris, 2005. This provides a set of principles for constructive discipline, rooted in the Convention. It also includes Internet references to materials and programmes available worldwide.

¹⁸ Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 5 (2003), “General measures of implementation for the Convention on the Rights of the Child”, para. 2.

¹⁹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 2 on “The role of independent national human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child”, 2002.

Forty-third session (2006)

General comment No. 9: The rights of children with disabilities

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Why a General Comment on children with disabilities?

1. It is estimated that there are 500-650 million persons with disabilities in the world, approximately 10 per cent of the world population, 150 million of whom are children. More than 80 per cent live in developing countries with little or no access to services. The majority of children with disabilities in developing countries remain out of school and are completely illiterate. It is recognized that most of the causes of disabilities, such as war, illness and poverty, are preventable which also prevent and/or reduce the secondary impacts of disabilities, often caused by the lack of early/timely intervention. Therefore, more should be done to create the necessary political will and real commitment to investigate and put into practice the most effective actions to prevent disabilities with the participation of all levels of society.

2. The past few decades have witnessed positive focus on persons with disabilities in general and children in particular. The reason for this new focus is explained partly by the fact that the voice of persons with disabilities and of their advocates from national and international non governmental organizations (NGO) is being increasingly heard and partly by the growing attention paid to persons with disabilities within the framework of the human rights treaties and the United Nations human rights treaty bodies. These treaty bodies have considerable potential in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities but they have generally been underused. When adopted in November 1989 the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter “the Convention”) was the first human rights treaty that contained a specific reference to disability (article 2 on non-discrimination) and a separate article 23 exclusively dedicated to the rights and needs of children with disabilities. Since the Convention has entered into force (2 September 1990), the Committee on the Rights of the Child (thereafter “the Committee”) has paid sustained and particular attention to disability-based discrimination¹ while other human rights treaty bodies have paid attention to disability-based discrimination under “other status” in the context of articles on non-discrimination of their relevant Convention. In 1994 the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights issued its general comment No. 5 on persons with disabilities and stated in paragraph 15 that “The effects of disability-based discrimination have been particularly severe in the fields of education, employment, housing, transport, cultural life, and access to public places and services.” The Special Rapporteur on disability of the United Nations Commission for Social Development was first appointed in 1994 and mandated to monitor of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session in 1993 (A/RES/48/96, Annex), and to advance the status of persons with disabilities throughout the world. On 6 October 1997 the Committee devoted its day of general discussion to children with disabilities and adopted a set of recommendations (CRC/C/69, paragraphs 310-339), in which it considered the possibility of drafting a general comment on children with disabilities. The Committee notes with appreciation the work of the Ad-Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, and that it adopted at its eighth session, held in New York on 25 August 2006, a draft convention on the rights of persons with disabilities to be submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session (A/AC.265/2006/4, Annex II).

3. The Committee, in reviewing State party reports, has accumulated a wealth of information on the status of children with disabilities worldwide and found that in the overwhelming majority of countries some recommendations had to be made specifically to address the situation of children with disabilities. The problems identified and addressed have varied from exclusion from decision-making processes to severe discrimination and actual killing of children with disabilities. Poverty being both a cause and a consequence of disability, the Committee has repeatedly stressed that children with disabilities and their families have the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of their living conditions. The question of children with disabilities living in poverty should be addressed by allocating adequate budgetary resources as well as by ensuring that children with disabilities have access to social protection and poverty reduction programmes.

4. The Committee has noted that no reservations or declarations have been entered specifically to article 23 of the Convention by any State party.

5. The Committee also notes that children with disabilities are still experiencing serious difficulties and facing barriers to the full enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Convention. The Committee emphasizes that the barrier is not the disability itself but rather a combination of social, cultural, attitudinal and physical obstacles which children with disabilities encounter in their daily lives. The strategy for promoting their rights is therefore to take the necessary action to remove those barriers. Acknowledging the importance of articles 2 and 23 of the Convention, the Committee states from the outset that the implementation of the Convention with regards to children with disabilities should not be limited to these articles.

6. The present general comment is meant to provide guidance and assistance to States parties in their efforts to implement the rights of children with disabilities, in a comprehensive manner which covers all the provisions of the Convention. Thus, the Committee will first make some observations related directly to articles 2 and 23, then it will elaborate on the necessity of paying particular attention to and including explicitly children with disabilities within the framework of general measures for the implementation of the Convention. Those observations will be followed by comments on the meaning and the implementation of the various articles of the Convention (clustered in accordance with the Committee's practice) for children with disabilities.

B. Definition

7. According to article 1, paragraph 2, of the draft convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." (A/AC.265/2006/4, Annex II)

II. THE KEY PROVISIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES (arts. 2 and 23)

A. Article 2

8. Article 2 requires States parties to ensure that all children within their jurisdiction enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Convention without discrimination of any kind. This obligation requires States parties to take appropriate measures to prevent all forms of discrimination, including on the ground of disability. This explicit mention of disability as a prohibited ground for discrimination in article 2 is unique and can be explained by the fact that children with disabilities belong to one of the most vulnerable groups of children. In many cases forms of multiple discrimination - based on a combination of factors, i.e. indigenous girls with disabilities, children with disabilities living in rural areas and so on - increase the vulnerability of certain groups. It has been therefore felt necessary to mention disability explicitly in the non-discrimination article. Discrimination takes place - often de facto - in various aspects of the life and development of children with disabilities. As an example, social discrimination and stigmatization leads to their marginalization and exclusion, and may even threaten their survival and development if it goes as far as physical or mental violence against children with disabilities. Discrimination in service provision excludes them from education and denies them access to quality health and social services. The lack of appropriate education and vocational training discriminates against them by denying them job opportunities in the future. Social stigma, fears, overprotection, negative attitudes, misbeliefs and prevailing prejudices against children with

disabilities remain strong in many communities and lead to the marginalization and alienation of children with disabilities. The Committee shall elaborate on these aspects in the paragraphs below.

9. In general, States parties in their efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of discrimination against children with disabilities should take the following measures:

(a) Include explicitly disability as a forbidden ground for discrimination in constitutional provisions on non-discrimination and/or include specific prohibition of discrimination on the ground of disability in specific anti-discrimination laws or legal provisions.

(b) Provide for effective remedies in case of violations of the rights of children with disabilities, and ensure that those remedies are easily accessible to children with disabilities and their parents and/or others caring for the child.

(c) Conduct awareness-raising and educational campaigns targeting the public at large and specific groups of professionals with a view to preventing and eliminating de facto discrimination against children with disabilities.

10. Girls with disabilities are often even more vulnerable to discrimination due to gender discrimination. In this context, States parties are requested to pay particular attention to girls with disabilities by taking the necessary measures, and when needed extra measures, in order to ensure that they are well protected, have access to all services and are fully included in society.

B. Article 23

11. Paragraph 1 of article 23 should be considered as the leading principle for the implementation of the Convention with respect to children with disabilities: the enjoyment of a full and decent life in conditions that ensure dignity, promote self reliance and facilitate active participation in the community. The measures taken by States parties regarding the realization of the rights of children with disabilities should be directed towards this goal. The core message of this paragraph is that children with disabilities should be included in the society. Measures taken for the implementation of the rights contained in the Convention regarding children with disabilities, for example in the areas of education and health, should explicitly aim at the maximum inclusion of those children in society.

12. According to paragraph 2 of article 23 States parties to the Convention recognize the right of the child with disability to special care and shall encourage and ensure the extension of assistance to the eligible child and those responsible for his or her care. The assistance has to be appropriate to the child's condition and the circumstances of the parents or others caring for the child. Paragraph 3 of article 23 gives further rules regarding the costs of specific measures and precisions as to what the assistance should try to achieve.

13. In order to meet the requirements of article 23 it is necessary that States parties develop and effectively implement a comprehensive policy by means of a plan of action which not only aims at the full enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Convention without discrimination but which also ensures that a child with disability and her or his parents and/or others caring for the child do receive the special care and assistance they are entitled to under the Convention.

14. Regarding the specifics of paragraphs 2 and 3 of article 23, the Committee makes the following observations:

(a) The provision of special care and assistance is subject to available resources and free of charge whenever possible. The Committee urges States parties to make special care and assistance to children with disabilities a matter of high priority and to invest to the maximum extent of available resources in the elimination of discrimination against children with disabilities and towards their maximum inclusion in society.

(b) Care and assistance shall be designed to ensure that children with disabilities have effective access to and benefit from education, training, health care services, recovery services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities. The Committee when dealing with specific articles of the Convention will elaborate on the measures necessary to achieve this.

15. With reference to article 23, paragraph 4, the Committee notes that the international exchange of information between States parties in the areas of prevention and treatment is quite limited. The Committee recommends that States parties take effective, and where appropriate targeted, measures for an active promotion of information as envisaged by article 23, paragraph 4, in order to enable States parties to improve their capabilities and skills in the areas of prevention and treatment of disabilities of children.

16. It is often not clear how and to which degree the needs of developing countries are taken into account as required by article 23, paragraph 4. The Committee strongly recommends States parties to ensure that, within the framework of bilateral or multilateral development assistance, particular attention be paid to children with disabilities and their survival and development in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, for example, by developing and implementing special programmes aiming at their inclusion in society and allocating earmarked budgets to that effect. States parties are invited to provide information in their reports to the Committee on the activities and results of such international cooperation.

III. GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION (arts. 4, 42 and 44 (6))²

A. Legislation

17. In addition to the legislative measures recommended with regard to non-discrimination (see paragraph 9 above), the Committee recommends that States parties undertake a comprehensive review of all domestic laws and related regulations in order to ensure that all provisions of the Convention are applicable to all children, including children with disabilities who should be mentioned explicitly, where appropriate. National laws and regulations should contain clear and explicit provisions for the protection and exercise of the specific rights of children with disabilities, in particular those enshrined in article 23 of the Convention.

B. National plans of action and policies

18. The need for a national plan of action that integrates all the provisions of the Convention is a well-recognized fact and has often been a recommendation made by the Committee to States parties. Plans of action must be comprehensive, including plans and strategies for children with

disabilities, and should have measurable outcomes. The draft convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, in its article 4, paragraph 1 *c*, emphasizes the importance of inclusion of this aspect stating that States parties undertake “to take into account the protection and promotion of the human rights of persons with disabilities in all policies and programmes” (A/AC.265/2006/4, annex II). It is also essential that all programmes be adequately supplied with financial and human resources and equipped with built-in monitoring mechanisms, for example, indicators allowing accurate outcome measurements. Another factor that should not be overlooked is the importance of including all children with disabilities in policies and programmes. Some States parties have initiated excellent programmes, but failed to include all children with disabilities.

C. Data and statistics

19. In order to fulfil their obligations, it is necessary for States parties to set up and develop mechanisms for collecting data which are accurate, standardized and allow disaggregation, and which reflect the actual situation of children with disabilities. The importance of this issue is often overlooked and not viewed as a priority despite the fact that it has an impact not only on the measures that need to be taken in terms of prevention but also on the distribution of very valuable resources needed to fund programmes. One of the main challenges in obtaining accurate statistics is the lack of a widely accepted clear definition for disabilities. States parties are encouraged to establish an appropriate definition that guarantees the inclusion of all children with disabilities so that children with disabilities may benefit from the special protection and programmes developed for them. Extra efforts are often needed to collect data on children with disabilities because they are often hidden by their parents or others caring for the child.

D. Budget

20. Allocation of budget: in the light of article 4 “... States parties shall undertake such measures to the maximum extent of their available resources ...”. Although the Convention does not make a specific recommendation regarding the most appropriate percentage of the State budget that should be dedicated to services and programmes for children, it does insist that children should be a priority. The implementation of this right has been a concern to the Committee since many States parties not only do not allocate sufficient resources but have also reduced the budget allocated to children over the years. This trend has many serious implications especially for children with disabilities who often rank quite low, or even not at all, on priority lists. For example, if a State party is failing to allocate sufficient funds to ensure compulsory and free quality education for all children, it will be unlikely to allocate funds to train teachers for children with disabilities or to provide for the necessary teaching aids and transportation for children with disabilities. Decentralization and privatization of services are now means of economic reform. However, it should not be forgotten that it is the State Party’s ultimate responsibility to oversee that adequate funds are allocated to children with disabilities along with strict guidelines for service delivery. Resources allocated to children with disabilities should be sufficient - and earmarked so that they are not used for other purposes - to cover all their needs, including programmes established for training professionals working with children with disabilities such as teachers, physiotherapists and policymakers; education campaigns; financial support for families; income maintenance; social security; assistive devices; and related services. Furthermore, funding must also be ensured for other programmes aimed at including children with disabilities into mainstream education, inter alia by renovating schools to render them physically accessible to children with disabilities.

E. Coordination body: “Focal point for disabilities”

21. Services for children with disabilities are often delivered by various governmental and non-governmental institutions, and more often than not, these services are fragmented and not coordinated which result in overlapping of functions and gaps in provisions. Therefore, the setting up of an appropriate coordinating mechanism becomes essential. This body should be multisectoral, including all organizations public or private. It must be empowered and supported from the highest possible levels of Government to allow it to function at its full potential. A coordination body for children with disabilities, as part of a broader coordination system for the rights of the child or a national coordination system for persons with disabilities, would have the advantage of working within an already established system, provided this system is functioning adequately and capable of devoting the adequate financial and human resources necessary. On the other hand, a separate coordination system may help to focus attention on children with disabilities.

F. International cooperation and technical assistance

22. In order to make information among States parties freely accessible and to cultivate an atmosphere of knowledge-sharing concerning, inter alia, the management and rehabilitation of children with disabilities, States parties should recognize the importance of international cooperation and technical assistance. Particular attention should be paid to developing countries that need assistance in setting up and/or funding programmes that protect and promote the rights of children with disabilities. These countries are experiencing increasing difficulties in mobilizing the adequate resources to meet the pressing needs of persons with disabilities and would urgently need assistance in the prevention of disability, the provision of services and rehabilitation, and in the equalization of opportunities. However, in order to respond to these growing needs, the international community should explore new ways and means of raising funds, including substantial increase of resources, and take the necessary follow-up measures for mobilizing resources. Therefore, voluntary contributions from Governments, increased regional and bilateral assistance as well as contributions from private sources should also be encouraged. UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) have been instrumental in helping developing countries set up and implement specific programmes for children with disabilities. The process of knowledge exchange is also valuable in sharing updated medical knowledge and good practices, such as early identification and community-based approaches to early intervention and support to families, and addressing common challenges.

23. Countries that have endured, or continue to endure, internal or foreign conflict, during which land mines were laid, face a particular challenge. States parties are often not privy to plans of the sites where the land mines and unexploded ordnance were planted and the cost of mine clearance is very high. The Committee emphasizes the importance of international cooperation in accordance with the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, in order to prevent injuries and deaths caused by landmines and unexploded ordnance that remain in place. In this regard the Committee recommends that States parties closely cooperate with a view to completely removing all landmines and unexploded ordnance in areas of armed conflict and/or previous armed conflict.

G. Independent monitoring

24. Both the Convention and the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities recognize the importance of the establishment of an appropriate monitoring system.³ The Committee has very often referred to “the Paris Principles” (A/RES/48/134) as the guidelines which national human rights institutions should follow (see the Committee’s general comment No. 2 (2002) on the role of independent national human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of the rights of the child). National human rights institutions can take many shapes or forms such as an Ombudsman or a Commissioner and may be broad-based or specific. Whatever mechanism is chosen, it must be:

- (a) Independent and provided with adequate human and financial resources;
- (b) Well known to children with disabilities and their caregivers;
- (c) Accessible not only in the physical sense but also in a way that allows children with disabilities to send in their complaints or issues easily and confidentially; and
- (d) It must have the appropriate legal authority to receive, investigate and address the complaints of children with disabilities in a manner sensitive to both their childhood and to their disabilities.

H. Civil society

25. Although caring for children with disabilities is an obligation of the State, NGOs often carry out these responsibilities without the appropriate support, funding or recognition from Governments. States parties are therefore encouraged to support and cooperate with NGOs enabling them to participate in the provision of services for children with disabilities and to ensure that they operate in full compliance with the provisions and principles of the Convention. In this regard the Committee draws the attention of States parties to the recommendations adopted on its day of general discussion on the private sector as a service provider, held on 20 September 2002 (CRC/C/121, paras. 630-653).

I. Dissemination of knowledge and training of professionals

26. Knowledge of the Convention and its specific provisions devoted to children with disabilities is a necessary and powerful tool to ensure the realization of these rights. States parties are encouraged to disseminate knowledge by, inter alia, conducting systematic awareness-raising campaigns, producing appropriate material, such as a child friendly version of the Convention in print and Braille, and using the mass media to foster positive attitudes towards children with disabilities.

27. As for professionals working with and for children with disabilities, training programmes must include targeted and focused education on the rights of children with disabilities as a prerequisite for qualification. These professionals include but are not limited to policymakers, judges, lawyers, law enforcement officers, educators, health workers, social workers and media staff among others.

IV. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Article 2 - Non-discrimination

28. See paragraphs 8-10 above.

Article 3 - Best interests of the child

29. “In all actions concerning children...the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration”. The broad nature of this article aims at covering all aspects of care and protection for children in all settings. It addresses legislators who are entrusted with setting the legal framework for protecting the rights of children with disabilities as well as the decisions-making processes concerning children with disabilities. Article 3 should be the basis on which programmes and policies are set and it should be duly taken into account in every service provided for children with disabilities and any other action affecting them.

30. The best interests of the child is of particular relevance in institutions and other facilities that provide services for children with disabilities as they are expected to conform to standards and regulations and should have the safety, protection and care of children as their primary consideration, and this consideration should outweigh any other and under all circumstances, for example, when allocating budgets.

Article 6 - Right to life, survival and development

31. The inherent right to life, survival and development is a right that warrants particular attention where children with disabilities are concerned. In many countries of the world children with disabilities are subject to a variety of practices that completely or partially compromise this right. In addition to being more vulnerable to infanticide, some cultures view a child with any form of disability as a bad omen that may “tarnish the family pedigree” and, accordingly, a certain designated individual from the community systematically kills children with disabilities. These crimes often go unpunished or perpetrators receive reduced sentences. States parties are urged to undertake all the necessary measures required to put an end to these practices, including raising public awareness, setting up appropriate legislation and enforcing laws that ensure appropriate punishment to all those who directly or indirectly violate the right to life, survival and development of children with disabilities.

Article 12 - Respect for the views of the child

32. More often than not, adults with and without disabilities make policies and decisions related to children with disabilities while the children themselves are left out of the process. It is essential that children with disabilities be heard in all procedures affecting them and that their views be respected in accordance with their evolving capacities. In order for this principle to be respected, children should be represented in various bodies such as parliament, committees and other forums where they may voice views and participate in the making of decisions that affect them as children in general and as children with disabilities specifically. Engaging children in such a process not only ensures that the policies are targeted to their needs and desires, but also functions as a valuable tool for inclusion since it ensures that the decision-making process is a participatory one. Children should be provided with whatever mode of communication they need

to facilitate expressing their views. Furthermore, States parties should support the training for families and professionals on promoting and respecting the evolving capacities of children to take increasing responsibilities for decision-making in their own lives.

33. Children with disabilities often require special services in health and education to allow them to achieve their fullest potential and these are further discussed in the relevant paragraphs below. However it should be noted that spiritual, emotional and cultural development and well-being of children with disabilities are very often overlooked. Their participation in events and activities catering to these essential aspects of any child's life is either totally lacking or minimal. Furthermore, when their participation is invited, it is often limited to activities specifically designed for and targeted at children with disabilities. This practice only leads to further marginalization of children with disabilities and increases their feelings of isolation. Programmes and activities designed for the child's cultural development and spiritual well-being should involve and cater to both children with and without disabilities in an integrated and participatory fashion.

V. CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS (arts. 7, 8, 13-17, and 37 a)

34. The right to name and nationality, preservation of identity, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of association and peaceful assembly, the right to privacy and the right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and not to be unlawfully deprived of liberty are all universal civil rights and freedoms which must be respected, protected and promoted for all, including children with disabilities. Particular attention should be paid here on areas where the rights of children with disabilities are more likely to be violated or where special programmes are needed for their protection.

A. Birth registration

35. Children with disabilities are disproportionately vulnerable to non-registration at birth. Without birth registration they are not recognized by law and become invisible in government statistics. Non-registration has profound consequences for the enjoyment of their human rights, including the lack of citizenship and access to social and health services and to education. Children with disabilities who are not registered at birth are at greater risk of neglect, institutionalization, and even death.

36. In the light of article 7 of the Convention, the Committee recommends that States parties adopt all appropriate measures to ensure the registration of children with disabilities at birth. Such measures should include developing and implementing an effective system of birth registration, waiving registration fees, introducing mobile registration offices and, for children who are not yet registered, providing registration units in schools. In this context, States parties should ensure that the provisions of article 7 are fully enforced in conformity with the principles of non-discrimination (art. 2) and of the best interests of the child (art. 3).

B. Access to appropriate information and mass media

37. Access to information and means of communication, including information and communication technologies and systems, enables children with disabilities to live independently

and participate fully in all aspects of life. Children with disabilities and their caregivers should have access to information concerning their disabilities so that they can be adequately educated on the disability, including its causes, management and prognosis. This knowledge is extremely valuable as it does not only enable them to adjust and live better with their disabilities, but also allows them to be more involved in and to make informed decisions about their own care. Children with disabilities should also be provided with the appropriate technology and other services and/or languages, e.g. Braille and sign language, which would enable them to have access to all forms of media, including television, radio and printed material as well as new information and communication technologies and systems, such as the Internet.

38. On the other hand, States parties are required to protect all children, including children with disabilities from harmful information, especially pornographic material and material that promotes xenophobia or any other form of discrimination and could potentially reinforce prejudices.

C. Accessibility to public transportation and facilities

39. The physical inaccessibility of public transportation and other facilities, including governmental buildings, shopping areas, recreational facilities among others, is a major factor in the marginalization and exclusion of children with disabilities and markedly compromises their access to services, including health and education. Although this provision may be mostly realized in developed countries, it remains largely un-addressed in the developing world. All States parties are urged to set out appropriate policies and procedures to make public transportation safe, easily accessible to children with disabilities, and free of charge, whenever possible, taking into account the financial resources of the parents or others caring for the child.

40. All new public buildings should comply with international specifications for access of persons with disabilities and existing public buildings, including schools, health facilities, governmental buildings, shopping areas, undergo necessary alterations that make them as accessible as possible.

VI. FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE (arts. 5, 18 (1-2), 9-11, 19-21, 25, 27 (4), and 39)

A. Family support and parental responsibilities

41. Children with disabilities are best cared for and nurtured within their own family environment provided that the family is adequately provided for in all aspects. Such support to families includes education of parent/s and siblings, not only on the disability and its causes but also on each child's unique physical and mental requirements; psychological support that is sensitive to the stress and difficulties imposed on families of children with disabilities; education on the family's common language, for example sign language, so that parents and siblings can communicate with family members with disabilities; material support in the form of special allowances as well as consumable supplies and necessary equipment, such as special furniture and mobility devices that is deemed necessary for the child with a disability to live a dignified, self-reliant lifestyle, and be fully included in the family and community. In this context, support should also be extended to children who are affected by the disabilities of their caregivers. For example, a child living with a parent or other caregiver with disabilities should receive the

support that would protect fully his or her rights and allow him or her to continue to live with this parent whenever it is in his or her best interests. Support services should also include different forms of respite care, such as care assistance in the home and day-care facilities directly accessible at community level. Such services enable parents to work, as well as relieve stress and maintain healthy family environments.

B. Violence, abuse and neglect

42. Children with disabilities are more vulnerable to all forms of abuse be it mental, physical or sexual in all settings, including the family, schools, private and public institutions, inter alia alternative care, work environment and community at large. It is often quoted that children with disabilities are five times more likely to be victims of abuse. In the home and in institutions, children with disabilities are often subjected to mental and physical violence and sexual abuse, and they are also particularly vulnerable to neglect and negligent treatment since they often present an extra physical and financial burden on the family. In addition, the lack of access to a functional complaint receiving and monitoring mechanism is conducive to systematic and continuing abuse. School bullying is a particular form of violence that children are exposed to and more often than not, this form of abuse targets children with disabilities. Their particular vulnerability may be explained inter alia by the following main reasons:

(a) Their inability to hear, move, and dress, toilet, and bath independently increases their vulnerability to intrusive personal care or abuse;

(b) Living in isolation from parents, siblings, extended family and friends increases the likelihood of abuse;

(c) Should they have communication or intellectual impairments, they may be ignored, disbelieved or misunderstood should they complain about abuse;

(d) Parents or others taking care of the child may be under considerable pressure or stress because of physical, financial and emotional issues in caring for their child. Studies indicate that those under stress may be more likely to commit abuse;

(e) Children with disabilities are often wrongly perceived as being non-sexual and not having an understanding of their own bodies and, therefore, they can be targets of abusive people, particularly those who base abuse on sexuality.

43. In addressing the issue of violence and abuse, States parties are urged to take all necessary measures for the prevention of abuse of and violence against children with disabilities, such as:

(a) Train and educate parents or others caring for the child to understand the risks and detect the signs of abuse of the child;

(b) Ensure that parents are vigilant about choosing caregivers and facilities for their children and improve their ability to detect abuse;

(c) Provide and encourage support groups for parents, siblings and others taking care of the child to assist them in caring for their children and coping with their disabilities;

(d) Ensure that children and caregivers know that the child is entitled as a matter of right to be treated with dignity and respect and they have the right to complain to appropriate authorities if those rights are breached;

(e) Ensure that schools take all measures to combat school bullying and pay particular attention to children with disabilities providing them with the necessary protection while maintaining their inclusion into the mainstream education system;

(f) Ensure that institutions providing care for children with disabilities are staffed with specially trained personnel, subject to appropriate standards, regularly monitored and evaluated, and have accessible and sensitive complaint mechanisms;

(g) Establish an accessible, child-sensitive complaint mechanism and a functioning monitoring system based on the Paris Principles (see paragraph 24 above);

(h) Take all necessary legislative measures required to punish and remove perpetrators from the home ensuring that the child is not deprived of his or her family and continue to live in a safe and healthy environment;

(i) Ensure the treatment and re-integration of victims of abuse and violence with a special focus on their overall recovery programmes.

44. In this context the Committee would also like to draw States parties' attention to the report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children (A/61/299) which refers to children with disabilities as a group of children especially vulnerable to violence. The Committee encourages States parties to take all appropriate measures to implement the overarching recommendations and setting-specific recommendations contained in this report.

C. Family-type alternative care

45. The role of the extended family, which is still a main pillar of childcare in many communities and is considered one of the best alternatives for childcare, should be strengthened and empowered to support the child and his or her parents or others taking care of the child.

46. Recognizing that the foster family is an accepted and practiced form of alternative care in many States parties, it is nevertheless a fact that many foster families are reluctant to take on the care of a child with disability as children with disabilities often pose a challenge in the extra care they may need and the special requirements in their physical, psychological and mental upbringing. Organizations that are responsible for foster placement of children must, therefore, conduct the necessary training and encouragement of suitable families and provide the support that will allow the foster family to appropriately take care of the child with disability.

D. Institutions

47. The Committee has often expressed its concern at the high number of children with disabilities placed in institutions and that institutionalization is the preferred placement option in many countries. The quality of care provided, whether educational, medical or rehabilitative, is often much inferior to the standards necessary for the care of children with disabilities either because of lack of identified standards or lack of implementation and monitoring of these

standards. Institutions are also a particular setting where children with disabilities are more vulnerable to mental, physical, sexual and other forms of abuse as well as neglect and negligent treatment (see paragraphs 42-44 above). The Committee therefore urges States parties to use the placement in institution only as a measure of last resort, when it is absolutely necessary and in the best interests of the child. It recommends that the States parties prevent the use of placement in institution merely with the goal of limiting the child's liberty or freedom of movement. In addition, attention should be paid to transforming existing institutions, with a focus on small residential care facilities organized around the rights and needs of the child, to developing national standards for care in institutions, and to establishing rigorous screening and monitoring procedures to ensure effective implementation of these standards.

48. The Committee is concerned at the fact that children with disabilities are not often heard in separation and placement processes. In general, decision-making processes do not attach enough weight to children as partners even though these decisions have a far-reaching impact on the child's life and future. Therefore, the Committee recommends that States parties continue and strengthen their efforts to take into consideration the views of children with disabilities and facilitate their participation in all matters affecting them within the evaluation, separation and placement process in out-of-home care, and during the transition process. The Committee also emphasizes that children should be heard throughout the protection measure process, before making the decision as well as during and after its implementation. In this context, the Committee draws the attention of the States parties to the Committee's recommendations adopted on its day of general discussion on children without parental care, held on 16 September 2005 (CRC/C/153, paragraphs 636-689).

49. In addressing institutionalization, States parties are therefore urged to set up programmes for de-institutionalization of children with disabilities, re-placing them with their families, extended families or foster care system. Parents and other extended family members should be provided with the necessary and systematic support/training for including their child back into their home environment.

E. Periodic review of placement

50. Whatever form of placement chosen for children with disabilities by the competent authorities, it is essential that a periodic review of the treatment provided to the child, and all other circumstances relevant to his or her placement, is carried out to monitor his or her well being.

VII. BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE (arts. 6, 18 (3), 23, 24, 26, and 27 (1-3))

A. Right to health

51. Attainment of the highest possible standard of health as well as access and affordability of quality healthcare is an inherent right for all children. Children with disabilities are often left out because of several challenges, including discrimination, inaccessibility due to the lack of information and/or financial resources, transportation, geographic distribution and physical access to health care facilities. Another factor is the absence of targeted health care programmes that address the specific needs of children with disabilities. Health policies should be

comprehensive and address early detection of disabilities, early intervention, including psychological and physical treatment, rehabilitation including physical aids, for example limb prosthesis, mobility devices, hearing aids and visual aids.

52. It is important to emphasize that health services should be provided within the same public health system that provides for children with no disabilities, free of charge, whenever possible, and as updated and modernized as possible. The importance of community-based assistance and rehabilitation strategies should be emphasized when providing health services for children with disabilities. States parties must ensure that health professionals working with children with disabilities are trained to the highest possible standard and practice based on a child-centred approach. In this respect, many States parties would greatly benefit from international cooperation with international organizations as well as other States parties.

B. Prevention

53. Causes of disabilities are multiple and, therefore, the quality and level of prevention vary. Inherited diseases that often cause disabilities can be prevented in some societies that practice consanguineous marriages and under such circumstances public awareness and appropriate pre-conception testing would be recommended. Communicable diseases are still the cause of many disabilities around the world and immunization programmes need to be stepped up aiming to achieve universal immunization against all preventable communicable diseases. Poor nutrition has a long-term impact upon children's development and it can lead to disabilities, such as blindness caused by Vitamin A deficiency. The Committee recommends that States parties introduce and strengthen prenatal care for children and ensure adequate quality of the assistance given during the delivery. It also recommends that States parties provide adequate post-natal health-care services and develop campaigns to inform parents and others caring for the child about basic child healthcare and nutrition. In this regard, the Committee also recommends that the States parties continue to cooperate and seek technical assistance with, among others, WHO and UNICEF.

54. Domestic and road traffic accidents are a major cause of disability in some countries and policies of prevention need to be established and implemented such as the laws on seat belts and traffic safety. Lifestyle issues, such as alcohol and drug abuse during pregnancy, are also preventable causes of disabilities and in some countries the fetal alcohol syndrome presents a major cause for concern. Public education, identification and support for pregnant mothers who may be abusing such substances are just some of the measures that may be taken to prevent such causes of disability among children. Hazardous environment toxins also contribute to the causes of many disabilities. Toxins, such as lead, mercury, asbestos, etc., are commonly found in most countries. Countries should establish and implement policies to prevent dumping of hazardous materials and other means of polluting the environment. Furthermore, strict guidelines and safeguards should also be established to prevent radiation accidents.

55. Armed conflicts and their aftermath, including availability and accessibility of small arms and light weapons, are also major causes of disabilities. States parties are obliged to take all necessary measures to protect children from the detrimental effects of war and armed violence and to ensure that children affected by armed conflict have access to adequate health and social services, including psychosocial recovery and social reintegration. In particular, the Committee stresses the importance of educating children, parents and the public at large about the dangers of

landmines and unexploded ordnance in order to prevent injury and death. It is crucial that States parties continue to locate landmines and unexploded ordnance, take measures to keep children away from suspected areas, and strengthen their mine clearance activities and, when appropriate, seek the necessary technical and financial support within a framework of international cooperation, including from United Nations agencies. (See also paragraph 23 above on landmines and unexploded ordnance and paragraph 78 below on armed conflicts under special protection measures.)

C. Early identification

56. Very often, disabilities are detected quite late in the child's life, which deprives him or her of effective treatment and rehabilitation. Early identification requires high awareness among health professionals, parents, teachers as well as other professionals working with children. They should be able to identify the earliest signs of disability and make the appropriate referrals for diagnosis and management. Therefore, the Committee recommends that States parties establish systems of early identification and early intervention as part of their health services, together with birth registration and procedures for following the progress of children identified with disabilities at an early age. Services should be both community- and home-based, and easy to access. Furthermore, links should be established between early intervention services, pre-schools and schools to facilitate the smooth transition of the child.

57. Following identification, the systems in place must be capable of early intervention including treatment and rehabilitation providing all necessary devices that enable children with disabilities to achieve their full functional capacity in terms of mobility, hearing aids, visual aids, and prosthetics among others. It should also be emphasized that these provisions should be offered free of cost, whenever possible, and the process of acquiring such services should be efficient and simple avoiding long waits and bureaucracies.

D. Multidisciplinary care

58. Children with disabilities very often have multiple health issues that need to be addressed in a team approach. Very often, many professionals are involved in the care of the child, such as neurologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, orthopaedic surgeons and physiotherapists among others. Ideally these professionals should collectively identify a plan of management for the child with disability that would ensure the most efficient healthcare is provided.

E. Adolescent health and development

59. The Committee notes that children with disabilities are, particularly during their adolescence, facing multiple challenges and risks in the area of establishing relationships with peers and reproductive health. Therefore, the Committee recommends that States parties provide adolescents with disabilities with adequate, and where appropriate, disability specific information, guidance and counselling and fully take into account the Committee's general comments No. 3 (2003) on HIV/AIDS and the rights of the child and No. 4 (2003) on adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

60. The Committee is deeply concerned about the prevailing practice of forced sterilisation of children with disabilities, particularly girls with disabilities. This practice, which still exists,

seriously violates the right of the child to her or his physical integrity and results in adverse life-long physical and mental health effects. Therefore, the Committee urges States parties to prohibit by law the forced sterilisation of children on grounds of disability.

F. Research

61. Causes, prevention and management of disabilities do not receive the much needed attention on national and international research agendas. States parties are encouraged to award this issue priority status ensuring funding and monitoring of disability focused research paying particular attention to ethical implications.

VIII. EDUCATION AND LEISURE (arts. 28, 29 and 31)

A. Quality education

62. Children with disabilities have the same right to education as all other children and shall enjoy this right without any discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity as stipulated in the Convention.⁴ For this purpose, effective access of children with disabilities to education has to be ensured to promote “the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (see articles 28 and 29 of the Convention and the Committee’s general comment No. 1 (2001) on the aims of education). The Convention recognizes the need for modification to school practices and for training of regular teachers to prepare them to teach children with diverse abilities and ensure that they achieve positive educational outcomes.

63. As children with disabilities are very different from each other, parents, teachers and other specialized professionals have to help each individual child to develop his or her ways and skills of communication, language, interaction, orientation and problem-solving which best fit the potential of this child. Everybody, who furthers the child’s skills, abilities and self-development, has to precisely observe the child’s progress and carefully listen to the child’s verbal and emotional communication in order to support education and development in a well-targeted and most appropriate manner.

B. Self-esteem and self-reliance

64. It is crucial that the education of a child with disability includes the strengthening of positive self-awareness, making sure that the child feels he or she is respected by others as a human being without any limitation of dignity. The child must be able to observe that others respect him or her and recognize his or her human rights and freedoms. Inclusion of the child with disability in the groups of children of the classroom can show the child that he or she has recognized identity and belongs to the community of learners, peers, and citizens. Peer support enhancing self-esteem of children with disabilities should be more widely recognized and promoted. Education also has to provide the child with empowering experience of control, achievement, and success to the maximum extent possible for the child.

C. Education in the school system

65. Early childhood education is of particular relevance for children with disabilities as often their disabilities and special needs are first recognized in these institutions. Early intervention is

of utmost importance to help children to develop their full potential. If a child is identified as having a disability or developmental delay at an early stage, the child has much better opportunities to benefit from early childhood education which should be designed to respond to her or his individual needs. Early childhood education provided by the State, the community or civil society institutions can provide important assistance to the well-being and development of all children with disabilities (see the Committee's general comment No. 7 (2005) on implementing child rights in early childhood). Primary education, including primary school and, in many States parties, also secondary school, has to be provided for children with disabilities free of costs. All schools should be without communicational barriers as well as physical barriers impeding the access of children with reduced mobility. Also higher education, accessible on the basis of capacities, has to be accessible for qualified adolescents with disabilities. In order to fully exercise their right to education, many children need personal assistance, in particular, teachers trained in methodology and techniques, including appropriate languages, and other forms of communication, for teaching children with a diverse range of abilities capable of using child-centred and individualised teaching strategies, and appropriate and accessible teaching materials, equipment and assistive devices, which States parties should provide to the maximum extent of available resources.

D. Inclusive education

66. Inclusive education⁵ should be the goal of educating children with disabilities. The manner and form of inclusion must be dictated by the individual educational needs of the child, since the education of some children with disabilities requires a kind of support which may not be readily available in the regular school system. The Committee notes the explicit commitment towards the goal of inclusive education contained in the draft convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and the obligation for States to ensure that persons including children with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability and that they receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education. It encourages States parties which have not yet begun a programme towards inclusion to introduce the necessary measures to achieve this goal. However, the Committee underlines that the extent of inclusion within the general education system may vary. A continuum of services and programme options must be maintained in circumstances where fully inclusive education is not feasible to achieve in the immediate future.

67. The movement towards inclusive education has received much support in recent years. However, the term inclusive may have different meanings. At its core, inclusive education is a set of values, principles and practices that seeks meaningful, effective, and quality education for all students, that does justice to the diversity of learning conditions and requirements not only of children with disabilities, but for all students. This goal can be achieved by different organizational means which respect the diversity of children. Inclusion may range from full-time placement of all students with disabilities into one regular classroom or placement into the regular class room with varying degree of inclusion, including a certain portion of special education. It is important to understand that inclusion should not be understood nor practiced as simply integrating children with disabilities into the regular system regardless of their challenges and needs. Close cooperation among special educators and regular educators is essential.

Schools' curricula must be re-evaluated and developed to meet the needs of children with and without disabilities. Modification in training programmes for teachers and other personnel involved in the educational system must be achieved in order to fully implement the philosophy of inclusive education.

E. Career education and vocational training

68. Education for career development and transition is for all persons with disabilities regardless of their age. It is imperative to begin preparation at an early age because career development is seen as a process that begins early and continues throughout life. Developing career awareness and vocational skills as early as possible, beginning in the elementary school, enables children to make better choices later in life in terms of employment. Career education in the elementary school does not mean using young children to perform labour that ultimately opens the door for economic exploitation. It begins with students choosing goals according to their evolving capacities in the early years. It should then be followed by a functional secondary school curriculum that offers adequate skills and access to work experience, under systematic coordination and monitoring between the school and the work place.

69. Career development and vocational skills should be included in the school curriculum. Career awareness and vocational skills should be incorporated into the years of compulsory education. In countries where compulsory education does not go beyond the elementary school years, vocational training beyond elementary school should be mandatory for children with disabilities. Governments must establish policies and allocate sufficient funds for vocational training.

F. Recreation and cultural activities

70. The Convention stipulates in article 31 the right of the child to recreation and cultural activities appropriate to the age of the child. This article should be interpreted to include mental, psychological as well as the physical ages and capabilities of the child. Play has been recognized as the best source of learning various skills, including social skills. The attainment of full inclusion of children with disabilities in the society is realized when children are given the opportunity, places, and time to play with each other (children with disabilities and no disabilities). Training for recreation, leisure and play should be included for school-aged children with disabilities.

71. Children with disabilities should be provided with equal opportunities to participate in various cultural and arts activities as well as sports. These activities must be viewed as both medium of expression and medium of realizing self-satisfying, quality of life.

G. Sports

72. Competitive and non-competitive sports activities must be designed to include children with disabilities in an inclusive manner, whenever possible. That is to say, a child with a disability who is able to compete with children with no disability should be encouraged and supported to do so. But sports are an area where, because of the physical demands of the sport,

children with disabilities will often need to have exclusive games and activities where they can compete fairly and safely. It must be emphasized though that when such exclusive events take place, the media must play its role responsibly by giving the same attention as it does to sports for children with no disabilities.

IX. SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES **(arts. 22, 38, 39, 40, 37 b-d, and 32-36)**

A. Juvenile justice system

73. In the light of article 2 States parties have the obligation to ensure that children with disabilities who are in conflict with the law (as described in article 40, paragraph 1) will be protected not only by the provisions of the Convention which specifically relate to juvenile justice (arts. 40, 37 and 39) but by all other relevant provisions and guarantees contained in the Convention, for example in the area of health care and education. In addition, States parties should take where necessary specific measures to ensure that children with disabilities de facto are protected by and do benefit from the rights mentioned above.

74. With reference to the rights enshrined in article 23 and given the high level of vulnerability of children with disabilities, the Committee recommends - in addition to the general recommendation made in paragraph 73 above - that the following elements of the treatment of children with disabilities (allegedly) in conflict with the law be taken into account:

(a) A child with disability who comes in conflict with the law should be interviewed using appropriate languages and otherwise dealt with by professionals such as police officers, attorneys/advocates/social workers, prosecutors and/or judges, who have received proper training in this regard;

(b) Governments should develop and implement alternative measures with a variety and a flexibility that allow for an adjustment of the measure to the individual capacities and abilities of the child in order to avoid the use of judicial proceedings. Children with disabilities in conflict with the law should be dealt with as much as possible without resorting to formal/legal procedures. Such procedures should only be considered when necessary in the interest of public order. In those cases special efforts have to be made to inform the child about the juvenile justice procedure and his or her rights therein;

(c) Children with disabilities in conflict with the law should not be placed in a regular juvenile detention centre by way of pre-trial detention nor by way of a punishment. Deprivation of liberty should only be applied if necessary with a view to providing the child with adequate treatment for addressing his or her problems which have resulted in the commission of a crime and the child should be placed in an institution that has the specially trained staff and other facilities to provide this specific treatment. In making such decisions the competent authority should make sure that the human rights and legal safeguards are fully respected.

B. Economic exploitation

75. Children with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to different forms of economic exploitation, including the worst forms of child labour as well as drug trafficking and begging. In

this context, the Committee recommends that States parties which have not yet done so ratify the Convention No. 138 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning the minimum age for admission to employment and ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the prohibition of and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour. In the implementation of these conventions States parties should pay special attention to the vulnerability and needs of children with disabilities.

C. Street children

76. Children with disabilities, specifically physical disabilities, often end up on the streets for a variety of reasons, including economic and social factors. Children with disabilities living and/or working on the streets need to be provided with adequate care, including nutrition, clothing, housing, educational opportunities, life-skills training as well as protection from the different dangers including economic and sexual exploitation. In this regard an individualized approach is necessary which takes full account of the special needs and the capacities of the child. The Committee is particularly concerned that children with disabilities are sometimes exploited for the purpose of begging in the streets or elsewhere; sometimes disabilities are inflicted on children for the purpose of begging. States parties are required to take all necessary actions to prevent this form of exploitation and to explicitly criminalize exploitation in such manner and take effective measures to bring the perpetrators to justice.

D. Sexual exploitation

77. The Committee has often expressed grave concern at the growing number of child victims of child prostitution and child pornography. Children with disabilities are more likely than others to become victims of these serious crimes. Governments are urged to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC) and, in fulfilling their obligations to the Optional Protocol, States parties should pay particular attention to the protection of children with disabilities recognizing their particular vulnerability.

E. Children in armed conflict

78. As previously noted above, armed conflicts are a major cause of disabilities whether children are actually involved in the conflict or are victims of combat. In this context, Governments are urged to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC). Special attention should be paid to the recovery and social re-integration of children who suffer disabilities as a result of armed conflicts. Furthermore, the Committee recommends that States parties explicitly exclude children with disabilities from recruitment in armed forces and take the necessary legislative and other measures to fully implement that prohibition.

F. Refugee and internally displaced children, children belonging to minorities and indigenous children

79. Certain disabilities result directly from the conditions that have led some individuals to become refugees or internally displaced persons, such as human-caused or natural disasters. For example, landmines and unexploded ordnance kill and injure refugee, internally displaced and resident children long after armed conflicts have ceased. Refugee and internally displaced

children with disabilities are vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination, particularly refugee and internally displaced girls with disabilities, who are more often than boys subject to abuse, including sexual abuse, neglect and exploitation. The Committee strongly emphasizes that refugee and internally displaced children with disabilities should be given high priority for special assistance, including preventative assistance, access to adequate health and social services, including psychosocial recovery and social reintegration. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has made children a policy priority and adopted several documents to guide its work in that area, including the Guidelines on Refugee Children in 1988, which are incorporated into UNHCR Policy on Refugee Children. The Committee also recommends that States parties take into account the Committee's general comment No. 6 (2005) on the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside of their country of origin.

80. All appropriate and necessary measures undertaken to protect and promote the rights of children with disabilities must include and pay special attention to the particular vulnerability and needs of children belonging to minorities and indigenous children who are more likely to be already marginalized within their communities. Programmes and policies must always be culturally and ethnically sensitive.

Notes

¹ See Wouter Vandenhoe, *Non-Discrimination and Equality in the View of the UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies*, p.170-172, Antwerpen/Oxford, Intersentia 2005.

² In the present general comment the Committee focuses on the need to pay special attention to children with disabilities in the context of the general measures. For a more elaborated explanation of the content and importance of these measures, see the Committee's general comment No. 5 (2003) on general measures of implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³ See also the general comment No. 5 (1994) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights regarding persons with disabilities.

⁴ In this context the Committee would like to make a reference to the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/RES/55/2) and in particular to the Millennium Development Goal No. 2 relating to universal primary education according to which Governments are committed to "ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education". The Committee would also like to refer to other international commitments which endorse the idea of inclusive education, inter alia, the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality, Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994 (UNESCO and Ministry of Education and Science of Spain) and the Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments, adopted by the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000.

⁵ UNESCO's Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All (UNESCO 2005) provides the following definition "Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children ... Inclusion is concerned with the identification and removal of barriers..." (pp. 13 and 15).

Forty-fourth session (2007)

General comment No. 10: Children's rights in juvenile justice

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In the reports they submit to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereafter: the Committee), States parties often pay quite detailed attention to the rights of children alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law, also referred to as "children in conflict with the law". In line with the Committee's guidelines for periodic reporting, the implementation of articles 37 and 40 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (hereafter: CRC) is the main focus of the information provided by the States parties. The Committee notes with appreciation the many efforts to establish an administration of juvenile justice in compliance with CRC. However, it is also clear that many States parties still have a long way to go in achieving full compliance with CRC, e.g. in the areas of procedural rights, the development and implementation of measures for dealing with children in conflict with the law without resorting to judicial proceedings, and the use of deprivation of liberty only as a measure of last resort.

2. The Committee is equally concerned about the lack of information on the measures that States parties have taken to prevent children from coming into conflict with the law. This may be the result of a lack of a comprehensive policy for the field of juvenile justice. This may also explain why many States parties are providing only very limited statistical data on the treatment of children in conflict with the law.

3. The experience in reviewing the States parties' performance in the field of juvenile justice is the reason for the present general comment, by which the Committee wants to provide the States parties with more elaborated guidance and recommendations for their efforts to establish an administration of juvenile justice in compliance with CRC. This juvenile justice, which should promote, inter alia, the use of alternative measures such as diversion and restorative justice, will provide States parties with possibilities to respond to children in conflict with the law in an effective manner serving not only the best interests of these children, but also the short- and long-term interest of the society at large.

II. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PRESENT GENERAL COMMENT

4. At the outset, the Committee wishes to underscore that CRC requires States parties to develop and implement a comprehensive juvenile justice policy. This comprehensive approach

should not be limited to the implementation of the specific provisions contained in articles 37 and 40 of CRC, but should also take into account the general principles enshrined in articles 2, 3, 6 and 12, and in all other relevant articles of CRC, such as articles 4 and 39. Therefore, the objectives of this general comment are:

- To encourage States parties to develop and implement a comprehensive juvenile justice policy to prevent and address juvenile delinquency based on and in compliance with CRC, and to seek in this regard advice and support from the Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice, with representatives of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), established by ECOSOC resolution 1997/30;
- To provide States parties with guidance and recommendations for the content of this comprehensive juvenile justice policy, with special attention to prevention of juvenile delinquency, the introduction of alternative measures allowing for responses to juvenile delinquency without resorting to judicial procedures, and for the interpretation and implementation of all other provisions contained in articles 37 and 40 of CRC;
- To promote the integration, in a national and comprehensive juvenile justice policy, of other international standards, in particular, the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (the “Beijing Rules”), the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty (the “Havana Rules”), and the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the “Riyadh Guidelines”).

III. JUVENILE JUSTICE: THE LEADING PRINCIPLES OF A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY

5. Before elaborating on the requirements of CRC in more detail, the Committee will first mention the leading principles of a comprehensive policy for juvenile justice. In the administration of juvenile justice, States parties have to apply systematically the general principles contained in articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 of CRC, as well as the fundamental principles of juvenile justice enshrined in articles 37 and 40.

Non-discrimination (art. 2)

6. States parties have to take all necessary measures to ensure that all children in conflict with the law are treated equally. Particular attention must be paid to de facto discrimination and disparities, which may be the result of a lack of a consistent policy and involve vulnerable groups of children, such as street children, children belonging to racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, indigenous children, girl children, children with disabilities and children who are repeatedly in conflict with the law (recidivists). In this regard, training of all professionals involved in the administration of juvenile justice is important (see paragraph 97 below), as well as the establishment of rules, regulations or protocols which enhance equal treatment of child offenders and provide redress, remedies and compensation.

7. Many children in conflict with the law are also victims of discrimination, e.g. when they try to get access to education or to the labour market. It is necessary that measures are taken to prevent such discrimination, inter alia, as by providing former child offenders with appropriate support and assistance in their efforts to reintegrate in society, and to conduct public campaigns emphasizing their right to assume a constructive role in society (art. 40 (1)).

8. It is quite common that criminal codes contain provisions criminalizing behavioural problems of children, such as vagrancy, truancy, runaways and other acts, which often are the result of psychological or socio-economic problems. It is particularly a matter of concern that girls and street children are often victims of this criminalization. These acts, also known as Status Offences, are not considered to be such if committed by adults. The Committee recommends that the States parties abolish the provisions on status offences in order to establish an equal treatment under the law for children and adults. In this regard, the Committee also refers to article 56 of the Riyadh Guidelines which reads: "In order to prevent further stigmatization, victimization and criminalization of young persons, legislation should be enacted to ensure that any conduct not considered an offence or not penalized if committed by an adult is not considered an offence and not penalized if committed by a young person."

9. In addition, behaviour such as vagrancy, roaming the streets or runaways should be dealt with through the implementation of child protective measures, including effective support for parents and/or other caregivers and measures which address the root causes of this behaviour.

Best interests of the child (art. 3)

10. In all decisions taken within the context of the administration of juvenile justice, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration. Children differ from adults in their physical and psychological development, and their emotional and educational needs. Such differences constitute the basis for the lesser culpability of children in conflict with the law. These and other differences are the reasons for a separate juvenile justice system and require a different treatment for children. The protection of the best interests of the child means, for instance, that the traditional objectives of criminal justice, such as repression/retribution, must give way to rehabilitation and restorative justice objectives in dealing with child offenders. This can be done in concert with attention to effective public safety.

The right to life, survival and development (art. 6)

11. This inherent right of every child should guide and inspire States parties in the development of effective national policies and programmes for the prevention of juvenile delinquency, because it goes without saying that delinquency has a very negative impact on the child's development. Furthermore, this basic right should result in a policy of responding to juvenile delinquency in ways that support the child's development. The death penalty and a life sentence without parole are explicitly prohibited under article 37 (a) of CRC (see paragraphs 75-77 below). The use of deprivation of liberty has very negative consequences for the child's harmonious development and seriously hampers his/her reintegration in society. In this regard, article 37 (b) explicitly provides that deprivation of liberty, including arrest, detention and imprisonment, should be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, so that the child's right to development is fully respected and ensured (see paragraphs 78-88 below).¹

The right to be heard (art. 12)

12. The right of the child to express his/her views freely in all matters affecting the child should be fully respected and implemented throughout every stage of the process of juvenile justice (see paragraphs 43-45 below). The Committee notes that the voices of children involved in the juvenile justice system are increasingly becoming a powerful force for improvements and reform, and for the fulfilment of their rights.

Dignity (art. 40 (1))

13. CRC provides a set of fundamental principles for the treatment to be accorded to children in conflict with the law:

- *Treatment that is consistent with the child's sense of dignity and worth.* This principle reflects the fundamental human right enshrined in article 1 of UDHR, which stipulates that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. This inherent right to dignity and worth, to which the preamble of CRC makes explicit reference, has to be respected and protected throughout the entire process of dealing with the child, from the first contact with law enforcement agencies and all the way to the implementation of all measures for dealing with the child;
- *Treatment that reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and freedoms of others.* This principle is in line with the consideration in the preamble that a child should be brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations. It also means that, within the juvenile justice system, the treatment and education of children shall be directed to the development of respect for human rights and freedoms (art. 29 (1) (b) of CRC and general comment No. 1 on the aims of education). It is obvious that this principle of juvenile justice requires a full respect for and implementation of the guarantees for a fair trial recognized in article 40 (2) (see paragraphs 40-67 below). If the key actors in juvenile justice, such as police officers, prosecutors, judges and probation officers, do not fully respect and protect these guarantees, how can they expect that with such poor examples the child will respect the human rights and fundamental freedom of others?;
- *Treatment that takes into account the child's age and promotes the child's reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society.* This principle must be applied, observed and respected throughout the entire process of dealing with the child, from the first contact with law enforcement agencies all the way to the implementation of all measures for dealing with the child. It requires that all professionals involved in the administration of juvenile justice be knowledgeable about child development, the dynamic and continuing growth of children, what is appropriate to their well-being, and the pervasive forms of violence against children;
- *Respect for the dignity of the child requires that all forms of violence in the treatment of children in conflict with the law must be prohibited and prevented.* Reports received by the Committee show that violence occurs in all phases of the juvenile justice process, from the first contact with the police, during pretrial detention and during the stay in treatment and other facilities for children sentenced to deprivation of liberty. The

committee urges the States parties to take effective measures to prevent such violence and to make sure that the perpetrators are brought to justice and to give effective follow-up to the recommendations made in the report on the United Nations Study on Violence Against Children presented to the General Assembly in October 2006 (A/61/299).

14. The Committee acknowledges that the preservation of public safety is a legitimate aim of the justice system. However, it is of the opinion that this aim is best served by a full respect for and implementation of the leading and overarching principles of juvenile justice as enshrined in CRC.

IV. JUVENILE JUSTICE: THE CORE ELEMENTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY

15. A comprehensive policy for juvenile justice must deal with the following core elements: the prevention of juvenile delinquency; interventions without resorting to judicial proceedings and interventions in the context of judicial proceedings; the minimum age of criminal responsibility and the upper age-limits for juvenile justice; the guarantees for a fair trial; and deprivation of liberty including pretrial detention and post-trial incarceration.

A. Prevention of juvenile delinquency

16. One of the most important goals of the implementation of CRC is to promote the full and harmonious development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities (preamble, and articles 6 and 29). The child should be prepared to live an individual and responsible life in a free society (preamble, and article 29), in which he/she can assume a constructive role with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (arts. 29 and 40). In this regard, parents have the responsibility to provide the child, in a manner consistent with his evolving capacities, with appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise of her/his rights as recognized in the Convention. In the light of these and other provisions of CRC, it is obviously not in the best interests of the child if he/she grows up in circumstances that may cause an increased or serious risk of becoming involved in criminal activities. Various measures should be taken for the full and equal implementation of the rights to an adequate standard of living (art. 27), to the highest attainable standard of health and access to health care (art. 24), to education (arts. 28 and 29), to protection from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse (art. 19), and from economic or sexual exploitation (arts. 32 and 34), and to other appropriate services for the care or protection of children.

17. As stated above, a juvenile justice policy without a set of measures aimed at preventing juvenile delinquency suffers from serious shortcomings. States parties should fully integrate into their comprehensive national policy for juvenile justice the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (the Riyadh Guidelines) adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 45/112 of 14 December 1990.

18. The Committee fully supports the Riyadh Guidelines and agrees that emphasis should be placed on prevention policies that facilitate the successful socialization and integration of all

children, in particular through the family, the community, peer groups, schools, vocational training and the world of work, as well as through voluntary organizations. This means, inter alia that prevention programmes should focus on support for particularly vulnerable families, the involvement of schools in teaching basic values (including information about the rights and responsibilities of children and parents under the law), and extending special care and attention to young persons at risk. In this regard, particular attention should also be given to children who drop out of school or otherwise do not complete their education. The use of peer group support and a strong involvement of parents are recommended. The States parties should also develop community-based services and programmes that respond to the special needs, problems, concerns and interests of children, in particular of children repeatedly in conflict with the law, and that provide appropriate counselling and guidance to their families.

19. Articles 18 and 27 of CRC confirm the importance of the responsibility of parents for the upbringing of their children, but at the same time CRC requires States parties to provide the necessary assistance to parents (or other caretakers), in the performance of their parental responsibilities. The measures of assistance should not only focus on the prevention of negative situations, but also and even more on the promotion of the social potential of parents. There is a wealth of information on home- and family-based prevention programmes, such as parent training, programmes to enhance parent-child interaction and home visitation programmes, which can start at a very young age of the child. In addition, early childhood education has shown to be correlated with a lower rate of future violence and crime. At the community level, positive results have been achieved with programmes such as Communities that Care (CTC), a risk-focused prevention strategy.

20. States parties should fully promote and support the involvement of children, in accordance with article 12 of CRC, and of parents, community leaders and other key actors (e.g. representatives of NGOs, probation services and social workers), in the development and implementation of prevention programmes. The quality of this involvement is a key factor in the success of these programmes.

21. The Committee recommends that States parties seek support and advice from the Interagency Panel on Juvenile Justice in their efforts to develop effective prevention programmes.

B. Interventions/diversion (see also section E below)

22. Two kinds of interventions can be used by the State authorities for dealing with children alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law: measures without resorting to judicial proceedings and measures in the context of judicial proceedings. The Committee reminds States parties that utmost care must be taken to ensure that the child's human rights and legal safeguards are thereby fully respected and protected.

23. Children in conflict with the law, including child recidivists, have the right to be treated in ways that promote their reintegration and the child's assuming a constructive role in society (art. 40 (1) of CRC). The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child may be used only as a measure of last resort (art. 37 (b)). It is, therefore, necessary - as part of a comprehensive policy for juvenile justice - to develop and implement a wide range of measures to ensure that children are dealt with in a manner appropriate to their well-being, and proportionate to both their

circumstances and the offence committed. These should include care, guidance and supervision, counselling, probation, foster care, educational and training programmes, and other alternatives to institutional care (art. 40 (4)).

Interventions without resorting to judicial proceedings

24. According to article 40 (3) of CRC, the States parties shall seek to promote measures for dealing with children alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law without resorting to judicial proceedings, whenever appropriate and desirable. Given the fact that the majority of child offenders commit only minor offences, a range of measures involving removal from criminal/juvenile justice processing and referral to alternative (social) services (i.e. diversion) should be a well-established practice that can and should be used in most cases.

25. In the opinion of the Committee, the obligation of States parties to promote measures for dealing with children in conflict with the law without resorting to judicial proceedings applies, but is certainly not limited to children who commit minor offences, such as shoplifting or other property offences with limited damage, and first-time child offenders. Statistics in many States parties indicate that a large part, and often the majority, of offences committed by children fall into these categories. It is in line with the principles set out in article 40 (1) of CRC to deal with all such cases without resorting to criminal law procedures in court. In addition to avoiding stigmatization, this approach has good results for children and is in the interests of public safety, and has proven to be more cost-effective.

26. States parties should take measures for dealing with children in conflict with the law without resorting to judicial proceedings as an integral part of their juvenile justice system, and ensure that children's human rights and legal safeguards are thereby fully respected and protected (art. 40 (3) (b)).

27. It is left to the discretion of States parties to decide on the exact nature and content of the measures for dealing with children in conflict with the law without resorting to judicial proceedings, and to take the necessary legislative and other measures for their implementation. Nonetheless, on the basis of the information provided in the reports from some States parties, it is clear that a variety of community-based programmes have been developed, such as community service, supervision and guidance by for example social workers or probation officers, family conferencing and other forms of restorative justice including restitution to and compensation of victims. Other States parties should benefit from these experiences. As far as full respect for human rights and legal safeguards is concerned, the Committee refers to the relevant parts of article 40 of CRC and emphasizes the following:

- Diversion (i.e. measures for dealing with children, alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law without resorting to judicial proceedings) should be used only when there is compelling evidence that the child committed the alleged offence, that he/she freely and voluntarily admits responsibility, and that no intimidation or pressure has been used to get that admission and, finally, that the admission will not be used against him/her in any subsequent legal proceeding;
- The child must freely and voluntarily give consent in writing to the diversion, a consent that should be based on adequate and specific information on the nature, content and

duration of the measure, and on the consequences of a failure to cooperate, carry out and complete the measure. With a view to strengthening parental involvement, States parties may also consider requiring the consent of parents, in particular when the child is below the age of 16 years;

- The law has to contain specific provisions indicating in which cases diversion is possible, and the powers of the police, prosecutors and/or other agencies to make decisions in this regard should be regulated and reviewed, in particular to protect the child from discrimination;
- The child must be given the opportunity to seek legal or other appropriate assistance on the appropriateness and desirability of the diversion offered by the competent authorities, and on the possibility of review of the measure;
- The completion of the diversion by the child should result in a definite and final closure of the case. Although confidential records can be kept of diversion for administrative and review purposes, they should not be viewed as “criminal records” and a child who has been previously diverted must not be seen as having a previous conviction. If any registration takes place of this event, access to that information should be given exclusively and for a limited period of time, e.g. for a maximum of one year, to the competent authorities authorized to deal with children in conflict with the law.

Interventions in the context of judicial proceedings

28. When judicial proceedings are initiated by the competent authority (usually the prosecutor’s office), the principles of a fair and just trial must be applied (see section D below). At the same time, the juvenile justice system should provide for ample opportunities to deal with children in conflict with the law by using social and/or educational measures, and to strictly limit the use of deprivation of liberty, and in particular pretrial detention, as a measure of last resort. In the disposition phase of the proceedings, deprivation of liberty must be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time (art. 37 (b)). This means that States parties should have in place a well-trained probation service to allow for the maximum and effective use of measures such as guidance and supervision orders, probation, community monitoring or day report centres, and the possibility of early release from detention.

29. The Committee reminds States parties that, pursuant to article 40 (1) of CRC, reintegration requires that no action may be taken that can hamper the child’s full participation in his/her community, such as stigmatization, social isolation, or negative publicity of the child. For a child in conflict with the law to be dealt with in a way that promotes reintegration requires that all actions should support the child becoming a full, constructive member of his/her society.

C. Age and children in conflict with the law

The minimum age of criminal responsibility

30. The reports submitted by States parties show the existence of a wide range of minimum ages of criminal responsibility. They range from a very low level of age 7 or 8 to the commendable high level of age 14 or 16. Quite a few States parties use two minimum ages of

criminal responsibility. Children in conflict with the law who at the time of the commission of the crime are at or above the lower minimum age but below the higher minimum age are assumed to be criminally responsible only if they have the required maturity in that regard. The assessment of this maturity is left to the court/judge, often without the requirement of involving a psychological expert, and results in practice in the use of the lower minimum age in cases of serious crimes. The system of two minimum ages is often not only confusing, but leaves much to the discretion of the court/judge and may result in discriminatory practices. In the light of this wide range of minimum ages for criminal responsibility the Committee feels that there is a need to provide the States parties with clear guidance and recommendations regarding the minimum age of criminal responsibility.

31. Article 40 (3) of CRC requires States parties to seek to promote, inter alia, the establishment of a minimum age below which children shall be presumed not to have the capacity to infringe the penal law, but does not mention a specific minimum age in this regard. The committee understands this provision as an obligation for States parties to set a minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR). This minimum age means the following:

- Children who commit an offence at an age below that minimum cannot be held responsible in a penal law procedure. Even (very) young children do have the capacity to infringe the penal law but if they commit an offence when below MACR the irrefutable assumption is that they cannot be formally charged and held responsible in a penal law procedure. For these children special protective measures can be taken if necessary in their best interests;
- Children at or above the MACR at the time of the commission of an offence (or: infringement of the penal law) but younger than 18 years (see also paragraphs 35-38 below) can be formally charged and subject to penal law procedures. But these procedures, including the final outcome, must be in full compliance with the principles and provisions of CRC as elaborated in the present general comment.

32. Rule 4 of the Beijing Rules recommends that the beginning of MACR shall not be fixed at too low an age level, bearing in mind the facts of emotional, mental and intellectual maturity. In line with this rule the Committee has recommended States parties not to set a MACR at a too low level and to increase the existing low MACR to an internationally acceptable level. From these recommendations, it can be concluded that a minimum age of criminal responsibility below the age of 12 years is considered by the Committee not to be internationally acceptable. States parties are encouraged to increase their lower MACR to the age of 12 years as the absolute minimum age and to continue to increase it to a higher age level.

33. At the same time, the Committee urges States parties not to lower their MACR to the age of 12. A higher MACR, for instance 14 or 16 years of age, contributes to a juvenile justice system which, in accordance with article 40 (3) (b) of CRC, deals with children in conflict with the law without resorting to judicial proceedings, providing that the child's human rights and legal safeguards are fully respected. In this regard, States parties should inform the Committee in their reports in specific detail how children below the MACR set in their laws are treated when they are recognized as having infringed the penal law, or are alleged as or accused of having done so, and what kinds of legal safeguards are in place to ensure that their treatment is as fair and just as that of children at or above MACR.

34. The Committee wishes to express its concern about the practice of allowing exceptions to a MACR which permit the use of a lower minimum age of criminal responsibility in cases where the child, for example, is accused of committing a serious offence or where the child is considered mature enough to be held criminally responsible. The Committee strongly recommends that States parties set a MACR that does not allow, by way of exception, the use of a lower age.

35. If there is no proof of age and it cannot be established that the child is at or above the MACR, the child shall not be held criminally responsible (see also paragraph 39 below).

The upper age-limit for juvenile justice

36. The Committee also wishes to draw the attention of States parties to the upper age-limit for the application of the rules of juvenile justice. These special rules - in terms both of special procedural rules and of rules for diversion and special measures - should apply, starting at the MACR set in the country, for all children who, at the time of their alleged commission of an offence (or act punishable under the criminal law), have not yet reached the age of 18 years.

37. The Committee wishes to remind States parties that they have recognized the right of every child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law to be treated in accordance with the provisions of article 40 of CRC. This means that every person under the age of 18 years at the time of the alleged commission of an offence must be treated in accordance with the rules of juvenile justice.

38. The Committee, therefore, recommends that those States parties which limit the applicability of their juvenile justice rules to children under the age of 16 (or lower) years, or which allow by way of exception that 16 or 17-year-old children are treated as adult criminals, change their laws with a view to achieving a non-discriminatory full application of their juvenile justice rules to all persons under the age of 18 years. The Committee notes with appreciation that some States parties allow for the application of the rules and regulations of juvenile justice to persons aged 18 and older, usually till the age of 21, either as a general rule or by way of exception.

39. Finally, the Committee wishes to emphasize the fact that it is crucial for the full implementation of article 7 of CRC requiring, *inter alia*, that every child shall be registered immediately after birth to set age-limits one way or another, which is the case for all States parties. A child without a provable date of birth is extremely vulnerable to all kinds of abuse and injustice regarding the family, work, education and labour, particularly within the juvenile justice system. Every child must be provided with a birth certificate free of charge whenever he/she needs it to prove his/her age. If there is no proof of age, the child is entitled to a reliable medical or social investigation that may establish his/her age and, in the case of conflict or inconclusive evidence, the child shall have the right to the rule of the benefit of the doubt.

D. The guarantees for a fair trial

40. Article 40 (2) of CRC contains an important list of rights and guarantees that are all meant to ensure that every child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law receives fair treatment and trial. Most of these guarantees can also be found in article 14 of the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which the Human Rights Committee elaborated and commented on in its general comment No. 13 (1984) (Administration of justice) which is currently in the process of being reviewed. However, the implementation of these guarantees for children does have some specific aspects which will be presented in this section. Before doing so, the Committee wishes to emphasize that a key condition for a proper and effective implementation of these rights or guarantees is the quality of the persons involved in the administration of juvenile justice. The training of professionals, such as police officers, prosecutors, legal and other representatives of the child, judges, probation officers, social workers and others is crucial and should take place in a systematic and ongoing manner. These professionals should be well informed about the child's, and particularly about the adolescent's physical, psychological, mental and social development, as well as about the special needs of the most vulnerable children, such as children with disabilities, displaced children, street children, refugee and asylum-seeking children, and children belonging to racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic or other minorities (see paragraphs 6-9 above). Since girls in the juvenile justice system may be easily overlooked because they represent only a small group, special attention must be paid to the particular needs of the girl child, e.g. in relation to prior abuse and special health needs. Professionals and staff should act under all circumstances in a manner consistent with the child's dignity and worth, which reinforces the child's respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others, and which promotes the child's reintegration and his/her assuming a constructive role in society (art. 40 (1)). All the guarantees recognized in article 40 (2), which will be dealt with hereafter, are minimum standards, meaning that States parties can and should try to establish and observe higher standards, e.g. in the areas of legal assistance and the involvement of the child and her/his parents in the judicial process.

No retroactive juvenile justice (art. 40 (2) (a))

41. Article 40 (2) (a) of CRC affirms that the rule that no one shall be held guilty of any criminal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a criminal offence, under national or international law, at the time it was committed is also applicable to children (see also article 15 of ICCPR). It means that no child can be charged with or sentenced under the penal law for acts or omissions which at the time they were committed were not prohibited under national or international law. In the light of the fact that many States parties have recently strengthened and/or expanded their criminal law provisions to prevent and combat terrorism, the Committee recommends that States parties ensure that these changes do not result in retroactive or unintended punishment of children. The Committee also wishes to remind States parties that the rule that no heavier penalty shall be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time when the criminal offence was committed, as expressed in article 15 of ICCPR, is in the light of article 41 of CRC, applicable to children in the States parties to ICCPR. No child shall be punished with a heavier penalty than the one applicable at the time of his/her infringement of the penal law. But if a change of law after the act provides for a lighter penalty, the child should benefit from this change.

The presumption of innocence (art. 40 (2) (b) (i))

42. The presumption of innocence is fundamental to the protection of the human rights of children in conflict with the law. It means that the burden of proof of the charge(s) brought against the child is on the prosecution. The child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law has the benefit of doubt and is only guilty as charged if these charges have been

proven beyond reasonable doubt. The child has the right to be treated in accordance with this presumption and it is the duty of all public authorities or others involved to refrain from prejudging the outcome of the trial. States parties should provide information about child development to ensure that this presumption of innocence is respected in practice. Due to the lack of understanding of the process, immaturity, fear or other reasons, the child may behave in a suspicious manner, but the authorities must not assume that the child is guilty without proof of guilt beyond any reasonable doubt.

The right to be heard (art. 12)

43. Article 12 (2) of CRC requires that a child be provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial or administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly or through a representative or an appropriate body in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

44. It is obvious that for a child alleged as, accused of, or recognized as having infringed the penal law, the right to be heard is fundamental for a fair trial. It is equally obvious that the child has the right to be heard directly and not only through a representative or an appropriate body if it is in her/his best interests. This right must be fully observed at all stages of the process, starting with pretrial stage when the child has the right to remain silent, as well as the right to be heard by the police, the prosecutor and the investigating judge. But it also applies to the stages of adjudication and of implementation of the imposed measures. In other words, the child must be given the opportunity to express his/her views freely, and those views should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (art. 12 (1)), throughout the juvenile justice process. This means that the child, in order to effectively participate in the proceedings, must be informed not only of the charges (see paragraphs 47-48 below), but also of the juvenile justice process as such and of the possible measures.

45. The child should be given the opportunity to express his/her views concerning the (alternative) measures that may be imposed, and the specific wishes or preferences he/she may have in this regard should be given due weight. Alleging that the child is criminally responsible implies that he/she should be competent and able to effectively participate in the decisions regarding the most appropriate response to allegations of his/her infringement of the penal law (see paragraph 46 below). It goes without saying that the judges involved are responsible for taking the decisions. But to treat the child as a passive object does not recognize his/her rights nor does it contribute to an effective response to his/her behaviour. This also applies to the implementation of the measure(s) imposed. Research shows that an active engagement of the child in this implementation will, in most cases, contribute to a positive result.

The right to effective participation in the proceedings (art 40 (2) (b) (iv))

46. A fair trial requires that the child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law be able to effectively participate in the trial, and therefore needs to comprehend the charges, and possible consequences and penalties, in order to direct the legal representative, to challenge witnesses, to provide an account of events, and to make appropriate decisions about evidence, testimony and the measure(s) to be imposed. Article 14 of the Beijing Rules provides that the

proceedings should be conducted in an atmosphere of understanding to allow the child to participate and to express himself/herself freely. Taking into account the child's age and maturity may also require modified courtroom procedures and practices.

Prompt and direct information of the charge(s) (art. 40 (2) (b) (ii))

47. Every child alleged as or accused of having infringed the penal law has the right to be informed promptly and directly of the charges brought against him/her. Prompt and direct means as soon as possible, and that is when the prosecutor or the judge initially takes procedural steps against the child. But also when the authorities decide to deal with the case without resorting to judicial proceedings, the child must be informed of the charge(s) that may justify this approach. This is part of the requirement of article 40 (3) (b) of CRC that legal safeguards should be fully respected. The child should be informed in a language he/she understands. This may require a presentation of the information in a foreign language but also a "translation" of the formal legal jargon often used in criminal/juvenile charges into a language that the child can understand.

48. Providing the child with an official document is not enough and an oral explanation may often be necessary. The authorities should not leave this to the parents or legal guardians or the child's legal or other assistance. It is the responsibility of the authorities (e.g. police, prosecutor, judge) to make sure that the child understands each charge brought against him/her. The Committee is of the opinion that the provision of this information to the parents or legal guardians should not be an alternative to communicating this information to the child. It is most appropriate if both the child and the parents or legal guardians receive the information in such a way that they can understand the charge(s) and the possible consequences.

Legal or other appropriate assistance (art. 40 (2) (b) (ii))

49. The child must be guaranteed legal or other appropriate assistance in the preparation and presentation of his/her defence. CRC does require that the child be provided with assistance, which is not necessarily under all circumstances legal but it must be appropriate. It is left to the discretion of States parties to determine how this assistance is provided but it should be free of charge. The Committee recommends the State parties provide as much as possible for adequate trained legal assistance, such as expert lawyers or paralegal professionals. Other appropriate assistance is possible (e.g. social worker), but that person must have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the various legal aspects of the process of juvenile justice and must be trained to work with children in conflict with the law.

50. As required by article 14 (3) (b) of ICCPR, the child and his/her assistant must have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his/her defence. Communications between the child and his/her assistance, either in writing or orally, should take place under such conditions that the confidentiality of such communications is fully respected in accordance with the guarantee provided for in article 40 (2) (b) (vii) of CRC, and the right of the child to be protected against interference with his/her privacy and correspondence (art. 16 of CRC). A number of States parties have made reservations regarding this guarantee (art. 40 (2) (b) (ii) of CRC), apparently assuming that it requires exclusively the provision of legal assistance and therefore by a lawyer. That is not the case and such reservations can and should be withdrawn.

Decisions without delay and with involvement of parents (art. 40 (2) (b) (iii))

51. Internationally there is a consensus that for children in conflict with the law the time between the commission of the offence and the final response to this act should be as short as possible. The longer this period, the more likely it is that the response loses its desired positive, pedagogical impact, and the more the child will be stigmatized. In this regard, the Committee also refers to article 37 (d) of CRC, where the child deprived of liberty has the right to a prompt decision on his/her action to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his/her liberty. The term “prompt” is even stronger - and justifiably so given the seriousness of deprivation of liberty - than the term “without delay” (art. 40 (2) (b) (iii) of CRC), which is stronger than the term “without undue delay” of article 14 (3) (c) of ICCPR.

52. The Committee recommends that the States parties set and implement time limits for the period between the commission of the offence and the completion of the police investigation, the decision of the prosecutor (or other competent body) to bring charges against the child, and the final adjudication and decision by the court or other competent judicial body. These time limits should be much shorter than those set for adults. But at the same time, decisions without delay should be the result of a process in which the human rights of the child and legal safeguards are fully respected. In this decision-making process without delay, the legal or other appropriate assistance must be present. This presence should not be limited to the trial before the court or other judicial body, but also applies to all other stages of the process, beginning with the interviewing (interrogation) of the child by the police.

53. Parents or legal guardians should also be present at the proceedings because they can provide general psychological and emotional assistance to the child. The presence of parents does not mean that parents can act in defence of the child or be involved in the decision-making process. However, the judge or competent authority may decide, at the request of the child or of his/her legal or other appropriate assistance or because it is not in the best interests of the child (art. 3 of CRC), to limit, restrict or exclude the presence of the parents from the proceedings.

54. The Committee recommends that States parties explicitly provide by law for the maximum possible involvement of parents or legal guardians in the proceedings against the child. This involvement shall in general contribute to an effective response to the child’s infringement of the penal law. To promote parental involvement, parents must be notified of the apprehension of their child as soon as possible.

55. At the same time, the Committee regrets the trend in some countries to introduce the punishment of parents for the offences committed by their children. Civil liability for the damage caused by the child’s act can, in some limited cases, be appropriate, in particular for the younger children (e.g. below 16 years of age). But criminalizing parents of children in conflict with the law will most likely not contribute to their becoming active partners in the social reintegration of their child.

Freedom from compulsory self-incrimination (art. 40 (2) (b) (iii))

56. In line with article 14 (3) (g) of ICCPR, CRC requires that a child be not compelled to give testimony or to confess or acknowledge guilt. This means in the first place - and self-evidently - that torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment in order to extract an admission or a

confession constitutes a grave violation of the rights of the child (art. 37 (a) of CRC) and is wholly unacceptable. No such admission or confession can be admissible as evidence (article 15 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment).

57. There are many other less violent ways to coerce or to lead the child to a confession or a self-incriminatory testimony. The term “compelled” should be interpreted in a broad manner and not be limited to physical force or other clear violations of human rights. The age of the child, the child’s development, the length of the interrogation, the child’s lack of understanding, the fear of unknown consequences or of a suggested possibility of imprisonment may lead him/her to a confession that is not true. That may become even more likely if rewards are promised such as: “You can go home as soon as you have given us the true story”, or lighter sanctions or release are promised.

58. The child being questioned must have access to a legal or other appropriate representative, and must be able to request the presence of his/her parent(s) during questioning. There must be independent scrutiny of the methods of interrogation to ensure that the evidence is voluntary and not coerced, given the totality of the circumstances, and is reliable. The court or other judicial body, when considering the voluntary nature and reliability of an admission or confession by a child, must take into account the age of the child, the length of custody and interrogation, and the presence of legal or other counsel, parent(s), or independent representatives of the child. Police officers and other investigating authorities should be well trained to avoid interrogation techniques and practices that result in coerced or unreliable confessions or testimonies.

Presence and examination of witnesses (art. 40 (2) (b) (iv))

59. The guarantee in article 40 (2) (b) (iv) of CRC underscores that the principle of equality of arms (i.e. under conditions of equality or parity between defence and prosecution) should be observed in the administration of juvenile justice. The term “to examine or to have examined” refers to the fact that there are distinctions in the legal systems, particularly between the accusatorial and inquisitorial trials. In the latter, the defendant is often allowed to examine witnesses although he/she rarely uses this right, leaving examination of the witnesses to the lawyer or, in the case of children, to another appropriate body. However, it remains important that the lawyer or other representative informs the child of the possibility to examine witnesses and to allow him/her to express his/her views in that regard, views which should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (art. 12).

The right to appeal (art. 40 (2) (b) (v))

60. The child has the right to appeal against the decision by which he is found guilty of the charge(s) brought against him/her and against the measures imposed as a consequence of this guilty verdict. This appeal should be decided by a higher, competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body, in other words, a body that meets the same standards and requirements as the one that dealt with the case in the first instance. This guarantee is similar to the one expressed in article 14 (5) of ICCPR. This right of appeal is not limited to the most serious offences.

61. This seems to be the reason why quite a few States parties have made reservations regarding this provision in order to limit this right of appeal by the child to the more serious offences and/or imprisonment sentences. The Committee reminds States parties to the ICCPR that a similar provision is made in article 14 (5) of the Covenant. In the light of article 41 of CRC, it means that this article should provide every adjudicated child with the right to appeal. The Committee recommends that the States parties withdraw their reservations to the provision in article 40 (2) (b) (v).

Free assistance of an interpreter (art. 40 (2) (vi))

62. If a child cannot understand or speak the language used by the juvenile justice system, he/she has the right to get free assistance of an interpreter. This assistance should not be limited to the court trial but should also be available at all stages of the juvenile justice process. It is also important that the interpreter has been trained to work with children, because the use and understanding of their mother tongue might be different from that of adults. Lack of knowledge and/or experience in that regard may impede the child's full understanding of the questions raised, and interfere with the right to a fair trial and to effective participation. The condition starting with "if", "if the child cannot understand or speak the language used", means that a child of a foreign or ethnic origin for example, who - besides his/her mother tongue - understands and speaks the official language, does not have to be provided with the free assistance of an interpreter.

63. The Committee also wishes to draw the attention of States parties to children with speech impairment or other disabilities. In line with the spirit of article 40 (2) (vi), and in accordance with the special protection measures provided to children with disabilities in article 23, the Committee recommends that States parties ensure that children with speech impairment or other disabilities are provided with adequate and effective assistance by well-trained professionals, e.g. in sign language, in case they are subject to the juvenile justice process (see also in this regard general comment No. 9 (The rights of children with disabilities) of the Committee on the Rights of the Child).

Full respect of privacy (arts. 16 and 40 (2) (b) (vii))

64. The right of a child to have his/her privacy fully respected during all stages of the proceedings reflects the right to protection of privacy enshrined in article 16 of CRC. "All stages of the proceedings" includes from the initial contact with law enforcement (e.g. a request for information and identification) up until the final decision by a competent authority, or release from supervision, custody or deprivation of liberty. In this particular context, it is meant to avoid harm caused by undue publicity or by the process of labelling. No information shall be published that may lead to the identification of a child offender because of its effect of stigmatization, and possible impact on his/her ability to have access to education, work, housing or to be safe. It means that a public authority should be very reluctant with press releases related to offences allegedly committed by children and limit them to very exceptional cases. They must take measures to guarantee that children are not identifiable via these press releases. Journalists who violate the right to privacy of a child in conflict with the law should be sanctioned with disciplinary and when necessary (e.g. in case of recidivism) with penal law sanctions.

65. In order to protect the privacy of the child, most States parties have as a rule - sometimes with the possibility of exceptions - that the court or other hearings of a child accused of an infringement of the penal law should take place behind closed doors. This rule allows for the presence of experts or other professionals with a special permission of the court. Public hearings in juvenile justice should only be possible in well-defined cases and at the written decision of the court. Such a decision should be open for appeal by the child.

66. The Committee recommends that all States parties introduce the rule that court and other hearings of a child in conflict with the law be conducted behind closed doors. Exceptions to this rule should be very limited and clearly stated in the law. The verdict/sentence should be pronounced in public at a court session in such a way that the identity of the child is not revealed. The right to privacy (art. 16) requires all professionals involved in the implementation of the measures taken by the court or another competent authority to keep all information that may result in the identification of the child confidential in all their external contacts. Furthermore, the right to privacy also means that the records of child offenders should be kept strictly confidential and closed to third parties except for those directly involved in the investigation and adjudication of, and the ruling on, the case. With a view to avoiding stigmatization and/or prejudgements, records of child offenders should not be used in adult proceedings in subsequent cases involving the same offender (see the Beijing Rules, rules 21.1 and 21.2), or to enhance such future sentencing.

67. The Committee also recommends that the States parties introduce rules which would allow for an automatic removal from the criminal records of the name of the child who committed an offence upon reaching the age of 18, or for certain limited, serious offences where removal is possible at the request of the child, if necessary under certain conditions (e.g. not having committed an offence within two years after the last conviction).

E. Measures (see also chapter IV, section B, above)

Pretrial alternatives

68. The decision to initiate a formal criminal law procedure does not necessarily mean that this procedure must be completed with a formal court sentence for a child. In line with the observations made above in section B, the Committee wishes to emphasize that the competent authorities - in most States the office of the public prosecutor - should continuously explore the possibilities of alternatives to a court conviction. In other words, efforts to achieve an appropriate conclusion of the case by offering measures like the ones mentioned above in section B should continue. The nature and duration of these measures offered by the prosecution may be more demanding, and legal or other appropriate assistance for the child is then necessary. The performance of such a measure should be presented to the child as a way to suspend the formal criminal/juvenile law procedure, which will be terminated if the measure has been carried out in a satisfactory manner.

69. In this process of offering alternatives to a court conviction at the level of the prosecutor, the child's human rights and legal safeguards should be fully respected. In this regard, the Committee refers to the recommendations set out in paragraph 27 above, which equally apply here.

Dispositions by the juvenile court/judge

70. After a fair and just trial in full compliance with article 40 of CRC (see chapter IV, section D, above), a decision is made regarding the measures which should be imposed on the child found guilty of the alleged offence(s). The laws must provide the court/judge, or other competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body, with a wide variety of possible alternatives to institutional care and deprivation of liberty, which are listed in a non-exhaustive manner in article 40 (4) of CRC, to assure that deprivation of liberty be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest possible period of time (art. 37 (b) of CRC).

71. The Committee wishes to emphasize that the reaction to an offence should always be in proportion not only to the circumstances and the gravity of the offence, but also to the age, lesser culpability, circumstances and needs of the child, as well as to the various and particularly long-term needs of the society. A strictly punitive approach is not in accordance with the leading principles for juvenile justice spelled out in article 40 (1) of CRC (see paragraphs 5-14 above). The Committee reiterates that corporal punishment as a sanction is a violation of these principles as well as of article 37 which prohibits all forms of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment (see also the Committee's general comment No. 8 (2006) (The right of the child to protection from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment)). In cases of severe offences by children, measures proportionate to the circumstances of the offender and to the gravity of the offence may be considered, including considerations of the need of public safety and sanctions. In the case of children, such considerations must always be outweighed by the need to safeguard the well-being and the best interests of the child and to promote his/her reintegration.

72. The Committee notes that if a penal disposition is linked to the age of a child, and there is conflicting, inconclusive or uncertain evidence of the child's age, he/she shall have the right to the rule of the benefit of the doubt (see also paragraphs 35 and 39 above).

73. As far as alternatives to deprivation of liberty/institutional care are concerned, there is a wide range of experience with the use and implementation of such measures. States parties should benefit from this experience, and develop and implement these alternatives by adjusting them to their own culture and tradition. It goes without saying that measures amounting to forced labour or to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment must be explicitly prohibited, and those responsible for such illegal practices should be brought to justice.

74. After these general remarks, the Committee wishes to draw attention to the measures prohibited under article 37 (a) of CRC, and to deprivation of liberty.

Prohibition of the death penalty

75. Article 37 (a) of CRC reaffirms the internationally accepted standard (see for example article 6 (5) of ICCPR) that the death penalty cannot be imposed for a crime committed by a person who at that time was under 18 years of age. Although the text is clear, there are States parties that assume that the rule only prohibits the execution of persons below the age of 18 years. However, under this rule the explicit and decisive criteria is the age at the time of the

commission of the offence. It means that a death penalty may not be imposed for a crime committed by a person under 18 regardless of his/her age at the time of the trial or sentencing or of the execution of the sanction.

76. The Committee recommends the few States parties that have not done so yet to abolish the death penalty for all offences committed by persons below the age of 18 years and to suspend the execution of all death sentences for those persons till the necessary legislative measures abolishing the death penalty for children have been fully enacted. The imposed death penalty should be changed to a sanction that is in full conformity with CRC.

No life imprisonment without parole

77. No child who was under the age of 18 at the time he or she committed an offence should be sentenced to life without the possibility of release or parole. For all sentences imposed upon children the possibility of release should be realistic and regularly considered. In this regard, the Committee refers to article 25 of CRC providing the right to periodic review for all children placed for the purpose of care, protection or treatment. The Committee reminds the States parties which do sentence children to life imprisonment with the possibility of release or parole that this sanction must fully comply with and strive for the realization of the aims of juvenile justice enshrined in article 40 (1) of CRC. This means inter alia that the child sentenced to this imprisonment should receive education, treatment, and care aiming at his/her release, reintegration and ability to assume a constructive role in society. This also requires a regular review of the child's development and progress in order to decide on his/her possible release. Given the likelihood that a life imprisonment of a child will make it very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve the aims of juvenile justice despite the possibility of release, the Committee strongly recommends the States parties to abolish all forms of life imprisonment for offences committed by persons under the age of 18.

F. Deprivation of liberty, including pretrial detention and post-trial incarceration

78. Article 37 of CRC contains the leading principles for the use of deprivation of liberty, the procedural rights of every child deprived of liberty, and provisions concerning the treatment of and conditions for children deprived of their liberty.

Basic principles

79. The leading principles for the use of deprivation of liberty are: (a) the arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time; and (b) no child shall be deprived of his/her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily.

80. The Committee notes with concern that, in many countries, children languish in pretrial detention for months or even years, which constitutes a grave violation of article 37 (b) of CRC. An effective package of alternatives must be available (see chapter IV, section B, above), for the States parties to realize their obligation under article 37 (b) of CRC to use deprivation of liberty only as a measure of last resort. The use of these alternatives must be carefully structured to reduce the use of pretrial detention as well, rather than "widening the net" of sanctioned children.

In addition, the States parties should take adequate legislative and other measures to reduce the use of pretrial detention. Use of pretrial detention as a punishment violates the presumption of innocence. The law should clearly state the conditions that are required to determine whether to place or keep a child in pretrial detention, in particular to ensure his/her appearance at the court proceedings, and whether he/she is an immediate danger to himself/herself or others. The duration of pretrial detention should be limited by law and be subject to regular review.

81. The Committee recommends that the State parties ensure that a child can be released from pretrial detention as soon as possible, and if necessary under certain conditions. Decisions regarding pretrial detention, including its duration, should be made by a competent, independent and impartial authority or a judicial body, and the child should be provided with legal or other appropriate assistance.

Procedural rights (art. 37 (d))

82. Every child deprived of his/her liberty has the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of his/her liberty before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority, and to a prompt decision on any such action.

83. Every child arrested and deprived of his/her liberty should be brought before a competent authority to examine the legality of (the continuation of) this deprivation of liberty within 24 hours. The Committee also recommends that the States parties ensure by strict legal provisions that the legality of a pretrial detention is reviewed regularly, preferably every two weeks. In case a conditional release of the child, e.g. by applying alternative measures, is not possible, the child should be formally charged with the alleged offences and be brought before a court or other competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body, not later than 30 days after his/her pretrial detention takes effect. The Committee, conscious of the practice of adjourning court hearings, often more than once, urges the States parties to introduce the legal provisions necessary to ensure that the court/juvenile judge or other competent body makes a final decision on the charges not later than six months after they have been presented.

84. The right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of liberty includes not only the right to appeal, but also the right to access the court, or other competent, independent and impartial authority or judicial body, in cases where the deprivation of liberty is an administrative decision (e.g. the police, the prosecutor and other competent authority). The right to a prompt decision means that a decision must be rendered as soon as possible, e.g. within or not later than two weeks after the challenge is made.

Treatment and conditions (art. 37 (c))

85. Every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults. A child deprived of his/her liberty shall not be placed in an adult prison or other facility for adults. There is abundant evidence that the placement of children in adult prisons or jails compromises their basic safety, well-being, and their future ability to remain free of crime and to reintegrate. The permitted exception to the separation of children from adults stated in article 37 (c) of CRC, “unless it is

considered in the child's best interests not to do so", should be interpreted narrowly; the child's best interests does not mean for the convenience of the States parties. States parties should establish separate facilities for children deprived of their liberty, which include distinct, child-centred staff, personnel, policies and practices.

86. This rule does not mean that a child placed in a facility for children has to be moved to a facility for adults immediately after he/she turns 18. Continuation of his/her stay in the facility for children should be possible if that is in his/her best interest and not contrary to the best interests of the younger children in the facility.

87. Every child deprived of liberty has the right to maintain contact with his/her family through correspondence and visits. In order to facilitate visits, the child should be placed in a facility that is as close as possible to the place of residence of his/her family. Exceptional circumstances that may limit this contact should be clearly described in the law and not be left to the discretion of the competent authorities.

88. The Committee draws the attention of States parties to the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 45/113 of 14 December 1990. The Committee urges the States parties to fully implement these rules, while also taking into account as far as relevant the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (see also rule 9 of the Beijing Rules). In this regard, the Committee recommends that the States parties incorporate these rules into their national laws and regulations, and make them available, in the national or regional language, to all professionals, NGOs and volunteers involved in the administration of juvenile justice.

89. The Committee wishes to emphasize that, inter alia, the following principles and rules need to be observed in all cases of deprivation of liberty:

- Children should be provided with a physical environment and accommodations which are in keeping with the rehabilitative aims of residential placement, and due regard must be given to their needs for privacy, sensory stimuli, opportunities to associate with their peers, and to participate in sports, physical exercise, in arts, and leisure time activities;
- Every child of compulsory school age has the right to education suited to his/her needs and abilities, and designed to prepare him/her for return to society; in addition, every child should, when appropriate, receive vocational training in occupations likely to prepare him/her for future employment;
- Every child has the right to be examined by a physician upon admission to the detention/correctional facility and shall receive adequate medical care throughout his/her stay in the facility, which should be provided, where possible, by health facilities and services of the community;
- The staff of the facility should promote and facilitate frequent contacts of the child with the wider community, including communications with his/her family, friends and other persons or representatives of reputable outside organizations, and the opportunity to visit his/her home and family;

- Restraint or force can be used only when the child poses an imminent threat of injury to him or herself or others, and only when all other means of control have been exhausted. The use of restraint or force, including physical, mechanical and medical restraints, should be under close and direct control of a medical and/or psychological professional. It must never be used as a means of punishment. Staff of the facility should receive training on the applicable standards and members of the staff who use restraint or force in violation of the rules and standards should be punished appropriately;
- Any disciplinary measure must be consistent with upholding the inherent dignity of the juvenile and the fundamental objectives of institutional care; disciplinary measures in violation of article 37 of CRC must be strictly forbidden, including corporal punishment, placement in a dark cell, closed or solitary confinement, or any other punishment that may compromise the physical or mental health or well-being of the child concerned;
- Every child should have the right to make requests or complaints, without censorship as to the substance, to the central administration, the judicial authority or other proper independent authority, and to be informed of the response without delay; children need to know about and have easy access to these mechanisms;
- Independent and qualified inspectors should be empowered to conduct inspections on a regular basis and to undertake unannounced inspections on their own initiative; they should place special emphasis on holding conversations with children in the facilities, in a confidential setting.

V. THE ORGANIZATION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE

90. In order to ensure the full implementation of the principles and rights elaborated in the previous paragraphs, it is necessary to establish an effective organization for the administration of juvenile justice, and a comprehensive juvenile justice system. As stated in article 40 (3) of CRC, States parties shall seek to promote the establishment of laws, procedures, authorities and institutions specifically applicable to children in conflict with the penal law.

91. What the basic provisions of these laws and procedures are required to be, has been presented in the present general comment. More and other provisions are left to the discretion of States parties. This also applies to the form of these laws and procedures. They can be laid down in special chapters of the general criminal and procedural law, or be brought together in a separate act or law on juvenile justice.

92. A comprehensive juvenile justice system further requires the establishment of specialized units within the police, the judiciary, the court system, the prosecutor's office, as well as specialized defenders or other representatives who provide legal or other appropriate assistance to the child.

93. The Committee recommends that the States parties establish juvenile courts either as separate units or as part of existing regional/district courts. Where that is not immediately feasible for practical reasons, the States parties should ensure the appointment of specialized judges or magistrates for dealing with cases of juvenile justice.

94. In addition, specialized services such as probation, counselling or supervision should be established together with specialized facilities including for example day treatment centres and, where necessary, facilities for residential care and treatment of child offenders. In this juvenile justice system, an effective coordination of the activities of all these specialized units, services and facilities should be promoted in an ongoing manner.

95. It is clear from many States parties' reports that non-governmental organizations can and do play an important role not only in the prevention of juvenile delinquency as such, but also in the administration of juvenile justice. The Committee therefore recommends that States parties seek the active involvement of these organizations in the development and implementation of their comprehensive juvenile justice policy and provide them with the necessary resources for this involvement.

VI. AWARENESS-RAISING AND TRAINING

96. Children who commit offences are often subject to negative publicity in the media, which contributes to a discriminatory and negative stereotyping of these children and often of children in general. This negative presentation or criminalization of child offenders is often based on misrepresentation and/or misunderstanding of the causes of juvenile delinquency, and results regularly in a call for a tougher approach (e.g. zero-tolerance, three strikes and you are out, mandatory sentences, trial in adult courts and other primarily punitive measures). To create a positive environment for a better understanding of the root causes of juvenile delinquency and a rights-based approach to this social problem, the States parties should conduct, promote and/or support educational and other campaigns to raise awareness of the need and the obligation to deal with children alleged of violating the penal law in accordance with the spirit and the letter of CRC. In this regard, the States parties should seek the active and positive involvement of members of parliament, NGOs and the media, and support their efforts in the improvement of the understanding of a rights-based approach to children who have been or are in conflict with the penal law. It is crucial for children, in particular those who have experience with the juvenile justice system, to be involved in these awareness-raising efforts.

97. It is essential for the quality of the administration of juvenile justice that all the professionals involved, inter alia, in law enforcement and the judiciary receive appropriate training on the content and meaning of the provisions of CRC in general, particularly those directly relevant to their daily practice. This training should be organized in a systematic and ongoing manner and should not be limited to information on the relevant national and international legal provisions. It should include information on, inter alia, the social and other causes of juvenile delinquency, psychological and other aspects of the development of children, with special attention to girls and children belonging to minorities or indigenous peoples, the culture and the trends in the world of young people, the dynamics of group activities, and the available measures dealing with children in conflict with the penal law, in particular measures without resorting to judicial proceedings (see chapter IV, section B, above).

VII. DATA COLLECTION, EVALUATION AND RESEARCH

98. The Committee is deeply concerned about the lack of even basic and disaggregated data on, inter alia, the number and nature of offences committed by children, the use and the average duration of pretrial detention, the number of children dealt with by resorting to measures other

than judicial proceedings (diversion), the number of convicted children and the nature of the sanctions imposed on them. The Committee urges the States parties to systematically collect disaggregated data relevant to the information on the practice of the administration of juvenile justice, and necessary for the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and programmes aiming at the prevention and effective responses to juvenile delinquency in full accordance with the principles and provisions of CRC.

99. The Committee recommends that States parties conduct regular evaluations of their practice of juvenile justice, in particular of the effectiveness of the measures taken, including those concerning discrimination, reintegration and recidivism, preferably carried out by independent academic institutions. Research, as for example on the disparities in the administration of juvenile justice which may amount to discrimination, and developments in the field of juvenile delinquency, such as effective diversion programmes or newly emerging juvenile delinquency activities, will indicate critical points of success and concern. It is important that children are involved in this evaluation and research, in particular those who have been in contact with parts of the juvenile justice system. The privacy of these children and the confidentiality of their cooperation should be fully respected and protected. In this regard, the Committee refers the States parties to the existing international guidelines on the involvement of children in research.

Note

¹ Note that the rights of a child deprived of his/her liberty, as recognized in CRC, apply with respect to children in conflict with the law, and to children placed in institutions for the purposes of care, protection or treatment, including mental health, educational, drug treatment, child protection or immigration institutions.
