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the Elimination
of all Forms of
Racial Discrimination**

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Sixty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1591st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 8 August 2003, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. DIACONU

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS, COMMENTS AND INFORMATION SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9 OF THE CONVENTION (agenda item 4) (continued) (CERD/C/419/Add.1; CERD/C/419/Add.1/Corr.1; HRI/CORE/1/Add.71)

Fifth periodic report of the Czech Republic (continued) (CERD/C/419/Add.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, the members of the delegation of the Czech Republic resumed their places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. SHAHI paid tribute to the impressive set of legal and administrative steps taken by the Government of the Czech Republic to combat extremism, intolerance and racism, including its action against extremist parties. He felt that in such cases the Committee should focus on national human rights institutions and preventive measures taken in the State party, for example in the area of education.

3. Mr. JAŘAB (Czech Republic) explained why, in his view, so few people in the 2001 census had claimed to be Roma. The main reason was that there was no obligation to state nationality when replying to the census. Another, perhaps secondary, reason was that many Roma felt less integrated into modern Czech society. Partly owing to lower levels of education, many Roma confused the notions of nationality and citizenship. Some respondents possibly felt, understandably but unjustifiably, that claiming Roma national identity might deprive them of their Czech citizenship.

4. The reason why only Czech citizens were legally recognized as members of national minorities was that those drafting the relevant legislation had decided to adopt a narrow definition of the term. That approach was commonplace in central Europe and admissible under the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. That did not rule out the possibility that, in the future, immigrants could be awarded the status of national minorities.

5. Eleven groups within the category of national minorities, which were not specified by legislation, were represented on the Council for National Minorities: the Slovak, Polish, German, Roma, Croatian, Russian, Bulgarian, Ruthenian, Hungarian, Ukrainian and Greek communities were all regarded as traditional or historical minorities, although the Greek community had not arrived until after 1945.

6. Moravians were not recognized as a national minority because they had a regional not ethnic identity, rather like Bavarians or Lombards. Only a small percentage of the inhabitants of Moravia had declared themselves to be Moravians in the latest census.

7. The three advisory bodies - the Council for the Affairs of the Roma Community, the Human Rights Council and the Council for National Minorities - made policy and administrative proposals. The secretariat of the Human Rights Council, for example, had helped to draft the anti-discrimination bill. They did not deal with individual cases and, while they were not independent, they could be described as independently minded. The Czech Republic was proud of the perhaps unique status of those advisory bodies, one half of whose members were

representatives of civil society, working alongside high-ranking civil servants. As a result, communications between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Government had improved considerably. A consensus had been reached over a number of legislative proposals which had been successfully translated into law. The Public Protector of Rights (the Ombudsman, known as the “Protector”) was elected by Parliament and dealt independently with individual cases of complaints concerning acts of the authorities and other institutions exercising State administration.

8. The adviser for national minorities to the Ministry of the Interior dealt with the technical aspects of racial violence. Representatives of the police and the crime prevention unit cooperated with the adviser.

9. Turning to the issue of coercive sterilization, he said that no cases had been brought to the attention of the Czech authorities, nor had there even been speculation in the media. He had read the material published by the European Roma Rights Centre, which the Czech Government regarded as a reliable interlocutor. However, its claims that coercive sterilization of Romani women had been official State policy in Czechoslovakia under the Communist regime were based on myth. That regime, which he had no reason to defend, had conducted a pronatalist policy, even with regard to Roma. The cases of involuntary sterilization referred to - a phenomenon which might not have disappeared but had certainly diminished - could be attributed to medical paternalism. He gave his assurance that any cases referred, with supporting evidence, to the Protector would be properly investigated. Nevertheless, especially since no specific cases had been brought to its notice, the Czech Government could not be held responsible for what had not been official policy.

10. The drop in the number of asylum applications in the Czech Republic had been due to the amendment to Act No. 325/1999 on Asylum. It could not in any way be linked to security issues related to terrorism. There was evidence that many asylum-seekers, in particular from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, from which the largest numbers of asylum applicants had originated in previous years, had applied for asylum in order to legalize their stay in the Czech Republic and do temporary work. Under the new rules, asylum-seekers were not allowed to work. Most of those refused asylum applied elsewhere, mainly in western Europe. Others tried to legalize their stay by other means. Very few asylum-seekers were deported.

11. In the area of community housing, he accepted criticism that the housing projects mentioned in the report might seem to bring about ethnic segregation rather than integration. The Government of the Czech Republic did not claim to have found a solution to what was a complex problem but had attempted to find a realistic way to tackle it. He drew attention to the fact that the community housing development in Brno, while applying a more fundamentalist, anti-segregation principle than the Ostrava project, had been less successful in terms of improving living conditions. Integration had been attempted in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, yet communities had voluntarily congregated and social services had not improved. Undoubtedly academic discussions of the advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches to development projects would continue.

12. He explained that the reference to “disputable” provisions in paragraph 83 of the fifth periodic report was due to a mistranslation from the Czech. The word “disputed” should have been used instead, referring to political disagreement over the draft amendment in question.

13. The Committee had sought an explanation of the reference to usury in the Roma community in the periodic report. The poorest members of the Roma community, often women, were not eligible for bank loans and therefore often borrowed money at exorbitant interest rates from a variety of lenders, including members of their own community who were involved in organized crime. Some of their fellow Roma, who could be qualified as Mafia, exploited members of their own community, often brutally. Members of the Council for the Affairs of the Roma Community had courageously raised the issue, which for a long time had been taboo. They had actively asked for police action to address the situation, which had often been left to the Roma community to deal with.

14. He said that the Government's 2002 Campaign against Racism had been highly successful, despite a reduction in resources due to the growing budget deficit facing the Government. It had included a number of cultural and entertainment events, some of which had involved the Roma community.

15. Ms. ŠTĚPÁNKOVÁ (Czech Republic) outlined the salient aspects of the draft bill to ensure equal treatment and protection against discrimination. It provided for the right to equal treatment and protection against discrimination on a wide variety of grounds. It also set out the rights and obligations of both individuals and legal entities, and laid down terms and conditions for the implementation of positive action. The aim was to ensure equal treatment and protection against discrimination in all areas covered by the European Union's Race Directive. The bill defined direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and persecution, and incitement to discrimination. Exemptions from the principle of equal treatment included professional requirements, reasons of public safety and the protection of private life. If an individual's dignity, self-confidence or respectability had been significantly impaired, financial compensation could be awarded. The draft bill established an independent Centre for Equal Treatment, which would promote the principle of equal treatment by means of educational and advisory activities. It could also mediate and provide independent assistance for victims of discrimination.

16. Ms. SVECOVA (Czech Republic) said that the disproportionately high number of Roma children at special schools was the consequence of their complex social background. Roma society's attitudes differed from those of the rest of the community, regarding systems of values, and education in particular. Regrettably, Roma children tended to be educationally disadvantaged. The Government's education inspectorate had found that Roma children encountered serious language learning difficulties, many having only a rudimentary knowledge of Czech. In all education systems, but in the Czech system in particular, learning processes were closely linked to linguistic structures. The aim of new legislation was to improve the learning climate at schools. The new curricula would focus on the personal development of all children, equipping them with the knowledge and social skills and the moral and spiritual values they would need to become fully-fledged citizens of the Czech Republic.

17. The Ministry of Education believed that every child in the system needed to be cared for and that the quality of teaching staff was a vital factor in that process. The Ministry provided teacher training and supported NGOs working in the field. It also had an important role in establishing educational strategy in the Czech Republic and viewed partnership as an important principle. It worked closely with regional and municipal authorities. Schools, too, were obliged to establish joint boards bringing together teachers, students and parents.

18. Great importance was attached to care and education in the early years, perhaps the most important period in children's development, and special measures were taken to help disadvantaged children. Lastly, she said new legislation would allow students to receive religious education classes provided at least seven students expressed an interest.

19. Mr. JAŘAB (Czech Republic) said it was important to note that the special schools were not schools specifically for Roma children. They had originally been established for children with learning difficulties and dated from the nineteenth century, long before there had been a Roma group of any size in the country. The disproportionate representation of Roma children in such schools was not the Government's aim and the Government was not happy about it. He wished to emphasize, however, that disproportionate representation, while certainly a problem, was not *the* problem. The problem was Roma children's educational underachievement and, while the fact that many - though by no means all - of them were in special schools might contribute to the problem, it was not the cause of the problem. It would thus be a mistake to believe that the problem would be solved by merely moving such children to ordinary primary schools: they had objective learning difficulties that were not due to mental disabilities and therefore required individual attention under programmes such as the pre-school early care scheme.

20. He also wished to make it quite clear that Roma children's linguistic problems were not mere problems of translation, as some Committee members appeared to believe. The majority of Roma children in fact spoke Czech at home: those with problems were the ones whose vocabulary and conceptual framework were poorly developed, regardless of language.

21. Turning to the difference between special programmes and special schools, he said that while the law allowed for differences there was not necessarily any difference in practice. The law made provision for special programmes to be established for mentally disabled children, as well as for children with learning difficulties that could be dealt with in ordinary classes, through individual attention.

22. He said there was no guarantee that the Government's approach would result in changed attitudes. It was the first step on a long road. Roma families had a different culture, although it could not be said to be traditional, since they had lost probably 90 per cent of their rich oral folklore. They had been assimilated into the lowest social strata of society, so their problems were similar to those faced by others from a similar background.

23. Ms. STEINICHOVÁ (Czech Republic), responding to questions concerning employment and special youth programmes, said there were many problems with the Roma in the area of employment. As a group, their priorities tended to differ from those of the majority society. There were also sufficient resources available to them to avoid them having to work for wages. Others, lacking qualifications, opted to work for relatively higher wages in the informal sector while they were registered as unemployed. A low level of education was clearly a problem, but that applied also to many members of the majority population. Under current legislation, special resources should be made available to certain groups, including young people and those who had been unemployed for more than six months, the disabled and those in poor health. Some workers fell into more than one category, such as young people who were disabled, while women faced particular difficulties. Employers were less likely to be interested in individuals with such problems.

24. Roma's problems with regard to employment were increasingly considered on a case-by-case basis, through discussion of the individual's situation and preparation of a personal plan. In addition, the Ministry of Labour had supported the creation of new jobs, open to Roma applicants.

25. Structural adjustment had led to particularly serious unemployment problems in certain areas, which affected the Rom population in particular. All Roma were eligible for special retraining programmes and projects in areas where Rom unemployment was high. Under the special programmes, young people were helped to understand the need to obtain work in order to become autonomous members of the labour market. Retraining and motivation were provided for those who had attained mid-level educational qualifications. The first step, however, was to orient young people, by helping them to understand what opportunities there were and how their lives might change, and by presenting them with different occupations to consider, so that they could decide which might suit them best.

26. Under another special programme, Roma were assisted in obtaining work in municipalities or municipal institutions. They were also eligible for a cooperation project aimed at enabling less-motivated people of all backgrounds and ages to familiarize themselves with a range of development opportunities.

27. With regard to discrimination against Roma women, she said the situation in the Czech Republic was perhaps better than in many other countries, but there were still many ways for employers to reject applications without referring to sex or ethnicity. The Ministry had recently issued guidelines for women on how to set about re-entering the job market following a period of childcare.

28. Mr. JAŘAB (Czech Republic) said Roma unemployment rates were also affected by the number of migrant workers in the labour market. Roma men had been virtually driven out of the construction sector, for example, by Ukrainians willing to work for wages that were below welfare payments.

29. Mr. BUREŠ (Czech Republic), replying to Committee members' questions concerning extremism, said the term was not a legal one but was understood to cover any activities that had a clear ideological context deviating markedly from the rule of law and constitutional law, explicitly displaying intolerance or attacking democratic, constitutional principles as defined in the Czech constitutional order. Right-wing extremism was expressed predominantly as national, racial and ethnic hatred and showed sympathy with historical fascism and Nazism; left-wing extremism was associated with anti-globalization and violent anarchist groups. Extremism also included hate crimes.

30. The Government was determined to use all legal means to dissolve extremist racist or xenophobic organizations. In challenges in the Supreme Court, some of the Ministry of the Interior's decisions had been upheld, others struck down. Another means that was used was to publicize the extremist nature of certain organizations in reports.

31. The competent bodies referred to in paragraph 47 of the report (CERD/C/419/Add.1) were the public authorities and the Security Intelligence Service, which were required to cooperate closely in gathering all the information needed to break up extremist organizations.

32. By way of clarification of paragraph 51 of the report, he said all citizens had the right to apply to register an organization. If the application was rejected on the grounds that the association's statutes or aims ran counter to the legal order, a new application could be made on the basis of a new version of the statutes or aims, which could be rejected again. There was a right of appeal.

33. The proposed amendments to the law on the right to freedom of assembly, referred to in paragraph 83 of the report, had been modified by Parliament and the Government's Human Rights Commissioner and a final version had been adopted by Parliament.

34. The draft law on associations, referred to in paragraph 82 of the report as the "bill on clubs", had been rejected by Parliament as a result of a dispute over the proper way to regulate the right of association within trade unions. A new bill was being drafted.

35. Police brutality was rare, with only two incidents having been reported each year in 2001 and 2002. There could at times also be problems at the local level involving lack of sensitivity to minorities and the disadvantaged with regard to the investigation of racially motivated crimes or domestic violence. A special inspectorate of the Ministry of the Interior, which was independent of the police hierarchy and whose head reported directly to the Minister of the Interior, was responsible for investigating crimes perpetrated by police officers. The Code of Criminal Procedure had been amended in January 2002 to make the Public Prosecutor's Office directly responsible for investigating crimes committed by police officers. The fact that the Public Prosecutor's Office was a branch of the Ministry of Justice ensured that investigations of police wrongdoing were undertaken by an independent authority.

36. Efforts were continuing to make the police more aware of human rights issues. Copies of the Penal Code and the Convention were distributed to police officers and training was provided for dealing with minorities and investigating racially motivated crimes. Both human rights NGOs and ethnic-based organizations were invited to hold discussions in police training academies and schools. Senior officers were provided with training in minority and racism-related issues, including through cooperative programmes with the Governments of Canada and the United Kingdom. The Ministry of the Interior had also undertaken research on the relations between the police and minorities and was developing new criteria for screening applicants to the police force. It was official policy to encourage members of the Roma minority to join the police force; there were special courses to train Roma applicants and, to date, out of 91 participants, 21 Roma police officers had been hired.

37. Mr. SCHORM (Czech Republic) said that, according to article 10 of the Constitution, international treaties took precedence over domestic law; both the international instrument in the original language and a Czech translation had to be made public. With regard to protection against discrimination, he said that the Civil Code had at first dealt with discrimination only on the basis of sex in the area of labour rights. However, since January 2003, discrimination on the basis of race or ethnic origin had been added and the areas covered had been extended to include access to medical care and education, services, trade unions, etc.

38. In case of a complaint, it was up to the defendant to prove that his actions had not been motivated by a desire to discriminate. Non-governmental organizations were very active in promoting awareness of those new provisions and in assisting those who wished to make

complaints. Although it would take time for the new provisions to make their effect felt in the courts and in public attitudes, there had already been favourable decisions by the courts, with regard for example to refusal of service in restaurants. The Penal Code as well had been amended to include provisions relating to ethnically or racially motivated crimes.

39. Anyone who was a member of a group which advocated discrimination or violence or ethnic or racial hatred and who in addition actively promoted those ideas could be punished under recent amendments to the law, although to date there had been little application of the law in practice. The authorities were legally required to prosecute racially motivated crimes, although in some cases the victim had to agree to prosecution in order for a case to proceed. Private proceedings were not possible for criminal offences, although an individual could claim damages. The victim had the right to participate in criminal proceedings, to be represented, to receive legal aid if necessary and to receive compensation for violation of his rights. The Government was currently reviewing the framework for legal assistance in order to clarify the situation. Finally, with regard to crimes against humanity, he said that the Penal Code made it punishable to deny or justify genocide and/or crimes against humanity which had occurred in Czech territory under the Nazi or communist regimes.

40. Mr. MACHOŇ (Czech Republic) explained that the Misdemeanours Act punished discriminatory acts which were not serious enough to be dealt with by the Penal Code. It had been amended by the Act on the Rights of Members of National Minorities with a view to ensuring full protection of all human rights as guaranteed by the Constitution. Rights violations dealt with under the Misdemeanours Act resulted in sanctions of an administrative nature only; if however the victim had suffered material loss, he could undertake civil proceedings to claim damages against the guilty party.

41. The Czech Republic had made the declaration under article 14 of the Convention in October 2000 and that decision had been made public, for example through documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its web pages. NGOs had also been informed. Official publication of the declaration under article 14 had, however, been delayed until March 2002 as a result of errors in the original translation of the article. The Czech Republic was a signatory to International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 111 concerning Discrimination in respect of Employment and Occupation and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education since January 1993. Since it had no indigenous peoples, it was not a party to ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. It had been a party to the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid since 1989. It was also a party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

42. Ms. ŠKOPOVÁ (Czech Republic) said that as part of the follow-up to the Durban World Conference against Racism and in order to ensure that the outcomes of that Conference were being met, a working group had been created in April 2002 to define a national plan of action for the elimination of racism. The first phase would review the existing policies and legal framework for the prevention of discrimination; the second phase would identify current issues

and concerns and a third phase would define measures and responsibilities for addressing those concerns, which would include concrete deadlines and tasks, including keeping the Human Rights Commissioner informed of the status of anti-discrimination efforts. A draft of the plan of action would be ready for inter-ministerial discussion in August 2003 and review by the Government in September 2003. It would be discussed at the regional seminar on implementation of the Durban outcomes to be held in Prague from 23 to 26 September 2003.

43. Mr. LINDGREN ALVES welcomed the State party's efforts to improve the education and housing situation of minorities and said it was wise not to consider the Moravian minority to be a national minority, for the sake of safeguarding the unity of the State. He was concerned, however, about the status of religious education in State schools; in a secular society teaching religion in State schools was equivalent to trying to impose a religion on everyone. Finally, he cautioned against using the label of extremist to refuse to grant visas to individuals wishing to enter the country, for example to demonstrate against the recent International Monetary Fund meeting; the right to demonstrate peacefully must be protected.

44. Mr. BOSSUYT said that the State party's realistic policies towards the Roma were evidence of its awareness of that community's problems and of its political will to deal with them. He was surprised that the fifth report stated that national minorities which had been living for a long time in the Czech Republic enjoyed special language rights (para. 19) and wondered how many minorities enjoyed such rights and the scope of those rights in practice; granting special linguistic rights to help a minority preserve its identity did not seem compatible with a policy of integrating minorities into civil society.

45. Noting that the delegation had stated that the Czech Republic was somewhat lax in the repatriation of asylum-seekers, he wondered whether the latter, if unsuccessful, stayed on illegally in a precarious and discrimination-prone situation or whether they went to other countries, thereby simply exporting the problem. He stressed that the law must be applied: valid refugees must be afforded protection whereas rejected asylum-seekers should be repatriated.

46. The CHAIRMAN, speaking in his personal capacity, said States were faced with difficult choices when dealing with minorities; special treatment such as special schools or housing could aggravate, for example, segregation. Efforts to assist minorities must balance that assistance with the need to promote their integration into civil society. While he noted that new measures were planned to protect economic, social and cultural rights, he wondered whether any measures were being planned for the protection of political and civil rights and whether any thought had been given to the use of special measures or affirmative action to protect the interests of minorities and the disadvantaged. A special office or ombudsman for discrimination-related issues could, for example, play an important role in such efforts.

47. Mr. YUTZIS cited a number of examples from his personal experience to illustrate the need to use flexible criteria in measuring human creativity and intelligence. He recalled in particular the case of a disruptive student who claimed to be bored in class and spent his time drawing caricatures. When evaluated, the student's drawings were found to be extraordinary and

the young man was currently one of the most accomplished caricaturists in Argentina. Careful thought should therefore be given to the methodology used for measuring the intelligence of Roma in the Czech Republic. Instead of painting the entire community with a broad brush, it should be borne in mind that all cultures were hybrids and contained a number of subcultures, each with its own codes and attitudes.

48. While he did not subscribe to the thesis of the noble savage and recognized that the State had a legitimate concern when members of minority groups engaged in criminal activities, he did not think it was a good idea to include in the report the reference to the problem of usury in the Roma community, since it tended to feed into an image that criminalized the entire community.

49. Mr. THIAM cited the example of the colonial period in Africa, when students attending schools run by the colonial administration refused to learn the language of their colonizers, whom they believed to be devils. There was a danger that the existence of special schools and programmes for the Roma population would perpetuate their exclusion from the mainstream. It was important to dialogue with the minority community and involve them in the search for solutions that would promote their integration into society rather than seek to impose ready-made solutions to the problem of discrimination. The Roma minority was not the problem; they were faced with a problem.

50. Mr. THORNBERRY said that the special schools for the Roma community were a reflection of past failures to deal with the problem of social exclusion. He had no illusions about the difficulty of the problem. In the United Kingdom, school exclusion was also high among certain groups which, even though they shared the same language, exhibited differences in attitudes, culture and even body language.

51. It was important to deal with the situation as it existed instead of seeking artificially to recreate lost traditions. The Government should seek to promote a form of accommodation between the two groups by developing educational programmes that fostered a positive attitude among the mainstream population towards the Roma community, while encouraging the latter to develop its communal self-esteem. He noted with satisfaction that the authorities were now considering alternatives to the system of special schools.

52. Mr. ABOUL-NASR said that it would be useful to have the actual texts of the national legislation concerning punishment for mass killings. He also sought clarification of the statement that some asylum-seekers were returned to their countries of origin. He wondered, in particular, whether the wishes of the asylum-seekers were taken into account.

53. While he recognized that the Czech Republic had a problem with its Roma minority, he cautioned that the Committee should resist the temptation to impose its standard norms for dealing with the problem without taking into account the economic, geographical and historical conditions and limitations of the Czech Republic and that State's own choices and priorities.

54. Mr. de GOUTTES noted the pessimistic tone in which the social exclusion of members of the Roma community had been framed, including references to their lack of motivation to work and preference for operating in the parallel economy. While that description might indeed reflect a certain reality, there was perhaps a need for a more nuanced evaluation of a culture that was very different from that of the mainstream. There were many examples of Roma who had

overcome their stigmatization and achieved integration. He would welcome information on the percentages of Roma employed in the police force, judicial service, civil service and private sector and on the measures being taken by the Government to promote their integration.

55. Mr. VALENCIA RODRIGUEZ said that he would welcome more information on the reform of the laws prohibiting racial discrimination, particularly with regard to the elements of proof that discrimination had occurred. He would also welcome clarification of the new system of “pre-entry checks” for Czech citizens, particularly Roma, travelling to the United Kingdom and information as to why such large numbers of Roma applied to enter the United Kingdom or requested asylum there.

56. Mr. PILLAI welcomed the authorities’ increased vigilance in investigating and punishing police officers who were accused of racial discrimination. It would be helpful to know in that connection whether the police oversight body was able independently to investigate and punish cases of negligence or abuse by the police. He recalled that a recent European Union report contained criticisms of the police and criminal justice system in the Czech Republic and asked how the State Party proposed to address the problem of oversight.

57. Mr. JAŘAB (Czech Republic), responding to the questions and comments of the experts, said that the Czech Republic had no official State religion. The teachings of the various religions were all allowed and persons were free to take classes in religious education.

58. With reference to denying entry to leftist extremists, he noted that only known violent rioters of the anti-globalization movement had been denied entry into the country. That decision was an intrinsic aspect of State sovereignty.

59. On the subject of special language rights, what was really being sought by the minority groups, in particular the Polish minority, was the right to receive instruction in the minority language. If there was a heavy enough concentration of a particular minority in a given area to justify classes in the language of that minority, the law provided for such classes to be made available. Because of the high concentration of Poles in certain areas, for example, schools in those areas conducted classes in the Polish language.

60. The concept of affirmative action was implicit in the cultural sensitivity training given to service providers and in the Government’s reliance on advisers from the Roma community. Because Czech society was largely homogeneous, however, such policies and programmes were difficult to implement. He nevertheless agreed that the majority population bore a greater share of the responsibility for addressing the problem. It was also true that a contributing factor was the rigidity of the school system, a relic of the authoritarian Austro-Hungarian tradition, which was incapable of recognizing other forms of creativity. Teachers must therefore be given appropriate training. Unfortunately, even though the Ministry of Education had the will to provide such training, in practice schools were run by local municipalities.

61. He disagreed that the reference to the problem of usury criminalized the entire Roma community. It was important to be realistic and not to romanticize the minority. To do otherwise would be counterproductive. Residents experiencing problems with their Roma neighbours were not easily convinced of the need to adopt a more intellectual approach that recognized the historical antecedents of the problem. While the intention was by no means to blame the minority Roma, it should be noted that the latter were preoccupied with their own survivalist strategies and distrusted even their own leaders, who in turn despaired of ever being able to make an impact on the situation. The number of minority success stories was small and confined mostly to the business sector. Relatively few members of the Roma community became professionals or members of the civil service.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.