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COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Thirty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 28 April 2004, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BONOAN-DANDAN

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (continued)

Initial report of Greece (continued) (E/1990/5/Add.56; E/C.12/Q/GRC/1; HR/CESCR/NONE/2003/7; HRI/CORE/1/Add.121)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Diakoumakou, Mr. Garipis, Ms. Gatzopoulou, Ms. Hatzinikolaou, Ms. Hourdaki, Mr. Karayiannis, Mr. Konstantopoulos, Ms. Kyriakaki, Ms. Manganara, Ms. Moustakatou and Ms. Prokaki (Greece) took places at the Committee table.

Articles 10-12 of the Covenant (continued)

2. Ms. KYRIAKAKI (Greece) said that one of the main goals of the integrated action programme for the social integration of Greek Roma was to integrate Roma children into the education system. Under a special education programme, teachers had been trained, special teaching material issued, intensive courses organized, and efforts made to raise awareness among parents and local authorities. Although there were no special schools for Roma children, educational support services were in place.

3. In the field of health, the action programme was concerned with promoting public health and facilitating access by the Roma to the national health-care system. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare had set up two mobile medical units which provided basic and preventive medical assistance, such as blood tests and vaccinations, and which had already visited 42 Roma settlements. Other measures included hospitalization of abandoned and disabled Roma children, and consultations on family planning.

4. In the field of employment, the action programme aimed at integrating the Roma into the labour market and reducing unemployment. From 1997 to 2001, 100 training programmes for over 1,800 people had been conducted. Consultation centres offering education, employment, health, housing and other services had been established in 11 municipalities. More centres would be set up.

5. In the field of culture, the action programme was designed to protect and promote the Roma cultural heritage. A special department had been set up under the Ministry of Culture for that purpose. Under a programme conducted in several regions, music and photography workshops had been conducted. There were plans to establish cultural homes, with facilities for creative activities for children and young people, as well as centres where adults could meet to discuss various issues. The Ministry of Culture had cooperated with local museums with a view to organizing special events and programmes for the Roma.

6. Finally, the action programme was designed to promote the participation of the Roma in sports activities on equal terms with other citizens: in cooperation with local authorities, mass sports activities had been conducted and there were plans to establish an athletics centre.

7. She acknowledged that the issue of forced evictions of the Roma from some settlements in preparation for the upcoming Olympic games was a serious one. The Government was taking various steps to deal with the problem. For example, the Ministry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization, jointly with the municipality of Maroussi and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had tried to find a new settlement area for the Roma living near the Olympic stadium. The Roma families concerned had agreed to move to houses which the municipality would rent for them until permanent housing arrangements had been made. The Ministry had granted 50,000 euros to the municipality to fund the plan. In addition, the Ministry had earmarked 880,410 euros to help the municipality find permanent housing for the Roma.

8. With regard to efforts begun in 1999 to improve the quality of life of the Roma living in the municipality of Aspropyrgos and, in particular, to improve access to drinking water, the Ministry of the Interior, Public Administration and Decentralization had granted about 29,350 euros to the municipality. Although the municipality had failed to respond in the context of the action programme for the social integration of the Roma, the region of Attica had submitted a proposal to the Ministry suggesting housing interventions in two regions of the municipality of Aspropyrgos. In June 2002 the Ministry had again called for measures to improve access to drinking water and establish a settlement area. Although responsibility for improving the standard of living in the area rested with the municipal authorities, the Ministry worked in close cooperation with all authorities to ensure that measures were taken to improve the situation. In addition, in February 2004, the Ministry had granted 25,000 euros to the municipality to help deal with the consequences of a fire that had broken out among temporary houses for the Roma.

9. Mr. DIAKOUMAKOU (Greece) said that a national action plan for social inclusion had been drawn up for 2003-2005. In 2003, the Commission for Social Protection had been established under the Ministry of Labour and Social Security with a view to promoting the active involvement of the public in the implementation of the plan. The Commission consisted, inter alia, of representatives of State authorities, local government, churches, and federations of people with disabilities. The measures taken included new income guarantees for poor households in mountainous and disadvantaged regions, as well as for single-parent families with children under 18 years of age.

10. A workers' housing association provided rent subsidies, interest-free loans for house purchase and subsidies for persons taking loans from banks. Rent subsidies were provided to pensioners, employees and newly married couples whose annual net family income did not exceed 8,000 euros.

11. Under the framework law on migration, all foreigners working in the country must be insured with the Social Security Foundation on the same conditions as Greek citizens. Labour inspectors carried out regular checks to ensure compliance with the law, and employers who failed to insure their workers incurred financial penalties.

12. The main characteristic of the social security system was the existence of a large number of funds. The Government planned to reform the system, inter alia, by eliminating some of the funds. Particular attention was currently focused on older persons in receipt of a small pension, and a social solidarity pension supplement had been introduced.

13. The Government had ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. On the basis of the conclusions of a special committee, composed of doctors, employers and workers, the Ministry had defined activities which could harm the health, safety or moral status of under-age persons. Labour inspectors were responsible for monitoring the application of the labour legislation relating to the protection of the under-aged.

14. Mr. GARIPIS (Greece) said that, since 2002, the concept of family, as defined under the Civil Code, had changed. The Civil Code now provided for new alternative family units, such as a man and a woman who were not married, as well as single women and unmarried mothers. Artificial insemination, provided that written consent was given, including insemination by anonymous donors and post-mortem insemination, was permitted in all cases.

15. Mr. KONSTANTOPOULOS (Greece) said that deportation of children to their country of origin was carried out in a safe manner, in accordance with the law, and in close cooperation with all the relevant authorities and national and international NGOs. If deportation had to be postponed because the child concerned was a victim of trafficking, the child was placed in a special protection unit until the court took a final decision regarding the trafficker. The Ministry of Public Order and the Hellenic police headquarters had set up special police services for minors which worked in close cooperation with the competent ministries and organizations. The anti-drug and juvenile delinquency department collected, analysed and disseminated relevant information to all regional police services. A subdivision on the protection of minors had also been established under the Athens police security division. All police stations were involved in the protection of minors.

16. The problem of trafficking of Albanian children into Greece was of great concern. The Government had concluded a police cooperation agreement with Albania and established close cooperation with the relevant Albanian authorities. Until their return to Albania, the children concerned were placed in special institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. The measures taken to deal with the problem had led to the collapse of trafficking networks.

17. The Greek police and juvenile judicial authorities worked in close cooperation with the Albanian authorities and the Federation Terre des Hommes International. At the instigation of the juvenile prosecutor in Thessaloniki, the centre for assistance to children, Filoxenia, and Albanian and Greek non-governmental organizations, 12 children had been repatriated since July 2001.

18. Coordination between the juvenile prosecutor in Thessaloniki, the Albanian Ministry of Public Order, the child protection section of the Thessaloniki police and the competent Greek and Albanian social services allowed for efficiency and expeditious processing of cases.

19. The Greek Government was firmly committed to further strengthening cooperation with the Albanian authorities in combating child exploitation. The flow of trafficked children had been reduced in recent years, mainly through the tightening of border controls and the regularization of Albanian immigrants to Greece.

20. The Ministry of Public Order was planning a special Internet site for missing children, and the Greek data protection authority had given its general consent to the project.
21. Responding to a question on drug abuse and drug-related problems, he said that, owing to its geographical location, Greece was a transit as well as final destination country. In 2002 the Prime Minister had assigned the elaboration of a national action plan to an inter-ministerial committee consisting of representatives from 10 relevant ministries, and the Greek police had drafted a five-year programme to implement its provisions.
22. The plan was based on the principles set out during the United Nations General Assembly special session on the world drug problem with a view to overcoming the drug problem through strategies aimed at reducing both the illicit supply of and demand for drugs. It also drew on the provisions of the European Union action plan on drugs (2000-2004).
23. During its presidency of the European Union, Greece had presented an action plan to the Horizontal Drugs Group for cooperation between the European Union, the countries of the Western Balkans and Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. The plan envisaged an integrated approach to combating drugs through initiatives aimed at reducing demand and supply, reintegrating former drug addicts into society and combating money laundering. Implementation in cooperation with the European Commission and member States of the European Union was currently under way.
24. Corruption involving organized crime systematically undermined the work of public officials; often the police force was specifically targeted. In order to tackle corruption, an internal affairs service had been established to carry out preliminary investigations under the supervision of the public prosecutor of the Athens and Thessaloniki courts of appeal. The Ministry of Public Order submitted annual reports on the service's findings to the Institutions and Transparency Committee of the Greek Parliament.
25. In addition, all law enforcement officials were bound to submit separate income declarations to the prosecutor of the Supreme Court; in cases of identified corruption legal action was taken and penalties were imposed accordingly.
26. Mr. GARIPIS (Greece) said that the Greek Organization Against Drugs had collected extensive data on drug consumption; the number of drug-treatment units for long-term rehabilitation had increased from 21 to 65 in the past year. In addition, new rehabilitation programmes had been launched in smaller cities, and specialized units for young users had been created. The number of drug-related deaths had decreased from 304 in 2000 to 116 in 2003.
27. Ms. MOUSTAKATO (Greece), with regard to questions related to health and social security, drew the Committee's attention to the initial report (E/1990/5/Add.56), the written reply to question 17 in the list of issues (E/C.12/Q/GRC/1), and the fourth and fifth periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

28. With a view to promoting women's reproductive health, family planning had been integrated in primary health-care provision to encourage women to make a conscious choice regarding pregnancy. Family planning had also proved useful in the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, the alleviation of the undesired consequences of premature or undesired pregnancies, and in addressing other health-related matters such as cancer in women.

29. Free hospital treatment and medical care were available to unmarried mothers who experienced financial difficulties and did not have health insurance. In addition, the Government provided social and counselling services for single parent families, as well as other support services for unmarried mothers.

30. Ms. MANGANARA (Greece), replying to a question on the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, said that Greece had signed the Protocol in 2000 and was currently considering its ratification.

31. Mr. KOLOSOV said that the report revealed considerable regional differences in the child mortality rate. He asked whether a study had been carried out to identify the causes of such variations, and whether children in remote areas possibly lacked the necessary vaccinations. It would also be useful to learn whether the children of immigrants and refugees had access to vaccination programmes.

32. In connection with the delegation's remark that Greek Roma children practised sports under the same conditions as other Greek children, he asked whether any Roma athletes were on the 2004 Greek Olympic team.

33. Mr. KARAYIANNIS (Greece) said that any Roma person with the required athletic profile would certainly be welcomed as a member of the Greek Olympic team.

34. Mr. GARIPIS (Greece) said that, to his knowledge, no study on the causes of the regional variations in the child mortality rate had been carried out thus far.

35. He said that universal access to vaccination was guaranteed through mobile medical services that reached even remote areas, and vaccination was available to all children without distinction. Detailed figures on vaccinations could be made available to the Committee on request.

Articles 13-15 of the Covenant

36. Mr. GRISSA said that the report was rich in statistics on education, and frequent comparisons were drawn with other European countries. Unfortunately, the data were not very clear.

37. It was regrettable that the figures on school dropout rates did not distinguish between rural and urban areas. Furthermore, the figures on students who had completed compulsory schooling (E/1990/5/Add.56, para. 154) suggested that the dropout rate stood at 25 per cent. He asked how the Government addressed the problem of children who dropped out of school. Did the children potentially end up in the streets, or take up employment, which would raise questions about the minimum working age?

38. Mr. KERDOUN said that the written reply to question 36 in the list of issues (E/C.12/Q/GRC/1) was not entirely satisfactory. The measures to extend the protection of Greek Roma in cultural matters fell within the framework of the national action programme for Roma integration. Planning at the national level often involved predominantly medium or long-term solutions whereas the urgency of the problems faced by the Roma community called for swift action. He would therefore like to learn about any measures that would take immediate effect. Regarding the frequently cited cultural particularity of the Roma people, he would welcome clarification as to the exact nature of that particularity in comparison with Greek culture.

39. Mr. CEAUSU said that the reply to question 35 in the list of issues (E/C.12/Q/GRC/1) appeared to be based on a misunderstanding. The Committee had requested information on the teaching of minority languages spoken by Greek citizens who were members of national minorities. The reply, however, referred to the teaching of foreign languages. He had also been surprised at the statement that the teaching of the mother tongue was not a priority, since it did not facilitate the children's social integration.

40. The delegation had pointed out that minority languages did not exist in Greece, and that only a small number of regional dialects were spoken. He wondered whether a census had been taken to establish the exact number of speakers of those dialects. He stressed that, according to language theory, a dialect was a variation of a specific language, and the Roma language could thus not be classified as a dialect.

41. He hoped that the State party would show greater recognition of those minority groups that spoke regional dialects in the future. Greece was a stable democracy with a strong cultural tradition. Recognition of minority languages present on its territory would thus not endanger, but instead strengthen, national cohesion.

42. Mr. MARCHÁN ROMERO said that it was important to assess the real chances of minorities that were not officially recognized to participate in cultural life and express their cultural particularity.

43. In relation to Act No. 2121/1993 (E/1990/5/Add.56, para. 675) stipulating the adaptation of existing contracts to the provisions of recent legislation on intellectual property rights, he asked what impact the implementation of those norms had had in practice. He wondered whether there had been any claims based on the new legislation and whether it applied to all categories of creative works and to holders of related rights.

44. Ms. IYER said that although education in Greece was compulsory and free of charge for nine years, according to a recent reply by the delegation, 47.7 per cent of Greek students 16 years or older had not completed compulsory education. Some reports suggested that compulsory schooling was not systematically enforced. She asked whether the situation had been reviewed and whether any concrete action had been taken.

45. It had also been brought to the Committee's attention that a number of schools in rural areas had closed down, which effectively meant denying children in those areas access to education. She would welcome information as to the reasons for the closures and whether any alternatives had been contemplated to guarantee those children's right to education.

46. Ms. HOURDAKI (Greece) said that it was difficult to obtain data on the enrolment of Roma schoolchildren in Greece because the Roma were Greek citizens and statistics were not broken down by ethnic group. However, the Ministry of Education had estimated that in 2002/2003 approximately 6,290 Roma children had been enrolled in school and 3,319 had completed compulsory education.

47. The general dropout rate in Greece was approximately 25 per cent. Although no data were available on the dropout rate for Roma children in particular, upon her return to Greece she would recommend that a study should be conducted to obtain such data. In reply to a comment that the national projects to protect the Roma in cultural matters needed to be more immediately applicable, she said that projects such as the one being conducted by the University of Yanina were not long-term projects, but rather short-term projects that could be extended following a positive evaluation. The most significant achievement in that programme had been the establishment of the student transit card, which enabled Roma children to move with their families while keeping track of their school records and transcripts, thereby encouraging Roma students to continue their schooling.

48. The main religious minority in Greece was the Muslim minority. It was also the only minority in Greece that benefited from bilingual school instruction. At the compulsory level of education, Muslim students were taught approximately 45 per cent of their subjects in Greek and 55 per cent in Turkish. After completing compulsory education, such students attended either Greek senior high schools or Muslim religious schools. Providing bilingual instruction for the many linguistic groups in Greece would be too costly given their large number. However, in keeping with its bilateral agreements, the Greek educational system did provide foreign language courses in the mother tongue of various groups.

49. Schools had been closed down in rural areas not because of a high dropout rate but because of the general population shift from rural areas to cities. Pupils from schools that were closed down were transported by bus or taxi to the next closest school.

50. Ms. GATZOPOULOU (Greece) said that the new copyright legislation had been based on relevant international standards, such as the World Intellectual Property (WIPO) Copyright Treaty and the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty, both of which Greece had ratified in 2002. The new legislation protected various categories of authors, composers, photographers and audio-visual producers and extended to holders of related rights as well. Generally speaking, creators had responded favourably to the changes in their contracts to bring them into conformity with the new legislation because they realized that such changes were for their own protection. The new law also provided guidelines for collective management organizations, which administered the financial rights of the creators. There had been numerous court cases involving copyright infringement and the levels of compensation awarded had ranged from 900 to 3,000 euros. Penalties for copyright infringement were severe and ranged from one to five years' imprisonment and/or fines of up to 14,000 euros.

51. Ms. HATZINIKOLAOU (Greece) said that the Roma were Greek citizens who spoke Greek, but constituted a distinct ethnic group that maintained its own language and traditions. The Greek Roma had traditionally displayed strong musical talent and the Government recognized their rich contribution to Greek music.

52. The programme for the protection of Greek Roma culture in other parts of the country besides Attica called for activities to be implemented in the very near term. Those included educational projects, cultural workshops, and the promotion of theatrical performances and museum tours. The Ministry of Culture had plans to develop a database on the Roma and had developed an educational kit for Greek schoolchildren aged 8 to 11 that contained texts, photos and games that related to the Greek Roma culture and was aimed at increasing intercultural understanding among children.

53. Ms. PROKAKI (Greece), replying to a question concerning the acceptance of cultural diversity in Greece, said that the public radio network, ERA, had developed a multicultural radio station that provided news, music and cultural programming in 12 languages other than Greek. Some programmes were produced in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, which provided public service announcements, and others were produced and presented directly by members of the immigrant community. The multicultural station used both an AM and an FM frequency in order to guarantee its accessibility to all members of the population.

54. Ms. DIAKOUMAKOU (Greece) said that under Greek legislation, children under age 15 were permitted to engage only in occasional, light work in family agricultural undertakings, provided that such work did not affect their regular school attendance. Young persons between the ages of 15 and 18 who attended general secondary, technical or vocational schools could not work more than six hours per day.

55. Mr. SADI said that the school system in Greece appeared to segregate Muslims and non-Muslims. He wondered whether the Government had envisaged the implementation of a new policy that would integrate the education of the two groups. In his opinion, and in the experience of other countries with minorities, such a policy would be an effective means of promoting ethnic understanding and harmony among the population.

56. Ms. HOURDAKI (Greece) said that bilingual minority schools in Greece functioned according to the Treaty of Lausanne; it was therefore not government policy to segregate schoolchildren. Upon completion of compulsory education, all Greek students were given the choice of whether to attend senior secondary schools or Muslim religious schools.

57. Mr. KARAYIANNIS (Greece) thanked the Committee for its part in the frank and constructive dialogue that had taken place. Careful consideration would be given to the Committee's concluding observations in drafting Greece's second periodic report. All relevant documents would be made available on the web site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

58. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the delegation for its detailed replies to the Committee's questions. The Committee stood ready to assist all State parties in giving effect to the provisions of the Covenant, and its concluding observations would be formulated in that same spirit of assistance and cooperation.

The meeting rose at 4.50 p.m.