



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 1508th (Chamber A) meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 27 May 2010, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. Lee

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Second periodic report of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (CRC/C/MKD/2, CRC/C/MKD/Q/2 and Add.1)

Initial report of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC/C/OPSC/MKD/1, CRC/C/OPSC/MKD/Q/1 and Add.1)

Initial report of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC/C/OPAC/MKD/1, CRC/C/OPAC/MKD/Q/1 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Bajrami** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) expressed support for the work undertaken by the Committee to cope with the large number of reports whose consideration was still pending and said that his country supported the adoption of an additional protocol to the Convention that would address the right of appeal. Noting that two years had passed since the second periodic report had been drafted, he said that important steps had been taken to strengthen children's rights since that time. The reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols had been prepared on the basis of extensive inter-ministerial consultations and in close cooperation with the local office of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

3. The provisions of the Convention and the Optional Protocols had been incorporated into domestic law. In the past two years, the Law on the Family had been amended to address the plight of victims of trafficking and to change and update adoption procedures. The Law on Protection of Children had been amended to include a new supplementary parental benefit. In 2009, a new law on social protection had been adopted which encouraged the use of methods other than institutionalization for children requiring protection through, for example, the establishment of small group residences. That law also called for the drafting of individualized workplans for beneficiaries and for the licensing and continuous training of professionals. The Law on Primary and Secondary Education ensured that training was given in the subjects of non-violence and security in schools and strengthened the monitoring and evaluation roles of the State Educational Inspectorate. Teacher training had been upgraded to include modern teaching techniques that focused on individual needs, and conditional cash transfers had been adopted as a means of providing financial support to students from families on welfare. In certain situations, students were provided with transport or accommodation during their schooling. The Ministry of Education and Science had issued a guidebook on non-discrimination and was working to include Roma children in the education process.

4. In 2008 the Government had adopted a plan of action for the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Act, which called for the adoption of secondary legislation and specific training for judges, prosecutors and police officers, among others. Under that law, publications, analyses and teaching aids were also being prepared, and members had been named to the National Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency.

5. The Government had adopted a plan of action for the prevention and prosecution of sexual abuse of children and paedophilia. A national coordination body had been set up for the plan's implementation that included all the relevant institutions and non-governmental organizations. Research and analysis had been carried out with the help of UNICEF, a national hotline had been set up to receive reports of sexual abuse, and social workers and

reporters had received training to help them properly deal with cases involving sexual abuse and paedophilia. The Journalist's Code adopted by members of the press in 2009 provided guidance on how to address such questions, and it was hoped that, in the near future, a protocol would be adopted for all the competent ministries, institutions and NGOs dealing with cases involving sexual abuse of children and paedophilia. A prevention strategy adopted in 2008 was designed to bring police practices into line with European standards, in particular in respect of the prevention of juvenile delinquency and domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual abuse and pornography affecting children. Special facilities had been set up to accommodate child victims of sexual abuse, juvenile offenders and child victims of other crimes.

6. The Government had adopted a national strategy for preventing domestic violence and for dealing with it in a coherent and unified way. A national coordination body consisting of government ministries and NGOs had been established to monitor the strategy's implementation. A protocol for working with street children had been adopted to help ensure that such children would be identified and referred to the proper institutions for care in a timely manner. Two centres for street children had opened in Skopje, and three more were planned. Joint activities were also planned with Roma NGOs working to provide care for street children.

7. Strategy documents were currently in preparation to address the needs of families with numerous children, those living in poverty and those suffering from social exclusion. National strategies had been adopted on family assistance and on poverty reduction and social exclusion, and a national strategy for the development of social protection mechanisms was currently being drawn up by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Ministry had also opened 22 centres for children with developmental disabilities, and there were plans to open three more, in addition to a centre for autistic children. The Ministry of Health had drawn up a plan of action to promote the health of disabled children; the plan focused on ensuring equal and safe access to health services, enhancing the capacities of health professionals and developing an effective referral system using a holistic and integrated approach to disabilities.

8. The infant mortality rate had declined sharply, falling from 22.7 per 1,000 live births in 1995 to 9.7 per 1,000 in 2008. UNICEF had provided technical assistance to a national prenatal committee which had drawn up a draft strategy for safe motherhood. In addition, the Ministry of Health, the national health-care institute and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had been working on a national strategy for sexual and reproductive health which would include awareness activities, the integration of sexual and reproductive health into primary health care, the establishment of community-based counselling services and better health-care data management in that field.

9. **Ms. Al-Asmar** (Country Rapporteur) welcomed a number of positive developments in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, including the adoption of new laws and plans of action and the country's accession to the two Optional Protocols, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and international conventions addressing human trafficking, cybercrime, nationality, intercountry adoption and the worst forms of child labour. At the same time, noting that the national legislation did not fully comply with the Convention, she asked whether the Government had tried to identify those parts of the law that needed to be brought into line and whether any assistance in that connection was required. It was not clear whether the National Commission on the Rights of the Child was sufficiently active in establishing and coordinating policies on children's rights. The delegation should inform the Committee about the capacity, authority, resources and independence of the Department on Child Rights Protection and should explain why the Deputy Ombudsman who headed the Department received so few complaints. Noting that early marriage was still common in the Roma and Albanian communities, she asked how

the Government planned to address that problem and why the Criminal Code defined children as people under the age of 14, which was not in keeping with the Convention. While the country had anti-discrimination laws in place, the Committee would like to be informed as to whether the law specifically prohibited gender-based discrimination and whether there were any plans to establish a body to combat discrimination. Did the laws addressing family life and child protection uphold the best interests of the child? The Committee also wished to determine the age at which the views of the child were taken into consideration in drawing up school curricula and in taking decisions on other school-related matters. What steps were being taken to ensure that all children, including members of the Roma community and refugee children, were registered and had the proper identification documents? Lastly, the Committee had received reports that corporal punishment and solitary confinement were used at the Educational Correctional Institution. Such practices were unacceptable under both the Convention and international standards of juvenile justice. The Committee wished to know whether or not corporal punishment was still practised at schools and what sanctions were applied to teachers who used it.

10. **Mr. Kotrane** asked whether the State party was considering accession to The Hague Convention No. 23 on the Recognition and Enforcement of Decisions Relating to Maintenance Obligations, The Hague Convention No. 24 on the Law Applicable to Maintenance Obligations and The Hague Convention No. 34 on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children. Did the State party plan to accede to the Migrant Workers Convention?

11. Noting that under the Constitution international conventions were automatically incorporated into domestic law, he asked whether the State party could refer to any instances in which the provisions of the Convention had been cited in court and whether any courts had issued decisions entailing the direct application of the Convention. In respect of the age of consent for marriage, while the legal definition of a child was in keeping with the Convention, the Committee was aware that early marriage was still practised. What steps were planned by the Government to address that issue? Lastly, he asked whether children who were adopted under closed adoption procedures had access to their records so that they could learn of their origins and whether such children were automatically given the last names of their adoptive families.

12. **Mr. Gurán** said that, as a citizen of another former Communist country, he was well aware of the problems that could arise in the course of the decentralization process. Noting that the same body was often responsible at the local level for receiving, distributing and controlling budgetary resources, he asked for details on how the State budget allocation was transferred to the local level and whether the local body responsible for such matters could decide what proportion of the budget was to be allocated for the benefit of children, for their education, leisure time and so on. He asked whether clear criteria had been established for the distribution of budget allocations at the local level in order to ensure that children's rights were respected.

13. Noting that the system of social support payments was difficult to administer because it involved cash transfers to the families concerned and that the children's allowance was low and unemployment high, he asked whether the State party intended to replace the system of direct transfers with, for example, a system of family tax credits in cases where one of the parents was working, as was done in some other States, in order to encourage parents to actively seek employment rather than simply receive money from the Government.

14. He asked how the State party planned to make the Department on Child Rights Protection fully functional as an independent monitoring body in terms of its professional capacity and level of authority and its full acceptance within the government structure. He

also requested details on the body's national and international status; he wished to know, for example, whether it had been accredited by the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions and, if so, what status it had been awarded, whether it fully conformed to the Paris Principles and whether or not it was a member of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC).

15. **Ms. Aidoo**, in addressing the issue of the coordination of all activities dealing with children's rights, seconded the Country Rapporteur's praise of the State party on the creation of the National Commission on the Rights of the Child and asked whether the competence of that body extended to the two Optional Protocols as well as the Convention. She asked whether the two NGOs that participated in the work of the National Commission did so as members, how NGOs were selected and whether their number could be increased in view of the fact that NGOs in the State party were very active in the area of children's rights. She asked how local and regional authorities were represented on the National Commission, noting that some authorities had developed their own action plans for implementing the rights of children. She enquired whether the National Commission produced an annual report assessing the situation of children in the State party and identifying priority issues and whether it had a system for monitoring and evaluating implementation of the Convention and the Optional Protocols.

16. Noting that the National Action Plan on the Rights of the Child for 2006–2015 was to be applauded, as was the fact that over half of the country's local authorities had formulated their own action plans, she asked whether the Government had also established yearly plans to ensure that sufficient progress was being made in order to achieve all the targets of the 10-year plan by 2015. Requesting details on how the National Action Plan was funded and asking whether or not it was included in the national budget, she enquired whether the Government used the National Action Plan as a major reference document with respect to children's rights in drawing up the budget and whether the relevant government ministries earmarked funds for programmes under the National Action Plan.

17. She asked how the State party monitored expenditure on health, education and social protection, which were key sectors for children, and how it intended to address areas in which shortfalls had been identified. According to various independent public expenditure reviews, spending on health was falling and spending on education, while remaining high, went mainly to wages, while the quality of education was being undermined by a lack of investment in such areas as instructional materials, teacher training and curriculum development.

18. **Mr. Puras** (Country Rapporteur) asked about the maturity of the relationship between governmental agencies and civil society and requested the delegation to cite examples that would shed light on the extent to which the Government trusted and supported NGOs, both as advocacy organizations and as service providers. Problems had arisen in some countries in Central and Eastern Europe when vibrant and dynamic NGO sectors came to rely too heavily on international support. Such support never lasted forever and, when it was withdrawn, the sector had sometimes entered into a crisis because the Government was reluctant to trust and support NGOs.

19. He requested details on how the State party guaranteed the right of children and adolescents to access to appropriate information, both in general and in relation to health care in particular, noting that such access, as well as protection from harmful information, was essential in order for children to develop healthily. He asked what legislation existed to protect children's right to confidentiality, especially with regard to health.

20. He would like to know what measures had been taken to combat discrimination against children living in State institutions, especially children with disabilities and those who had been in conflict with the law. What body monitored respect for the rights and

views of those children to ensure that they could live in dignity? What specific measures were being taken to improve the situation of those children?

21. **The Chairperson** asked what role children had played in developing the National Action Plan on the Rights of the Child and whether they had been actively involved in preparing the periodic report. She wondered how aware children were of the Committee's concluding observations following its consideration of the State party's initial report. She asked whether the Government made information available to the public about international funding that it received which was earmarked for children and whether it systematically collected data on what proportion was actually being spent on children and what impact that funding was having.

The meeting was suspended at 11.05 a.m. and resumed at 11.30 a.m.

22. **Mr. Citarella** asked how the periodic report had been prepared and whether the process had involved NGOs or other members of civil society. With respect to article 12 of the Convention on the right of children to express their views, he said that, although legislation existed that guaranteed that right, it seemed that, in practice, it was viewed as a possibility rather than as a specific right that the authorities had a duty to protect.

23. **Mr. Uzunovski** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), drawing the Committee's attention to Security Council resolution 817 of 7 April 1993, noted that the designation "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" was a provisional term and that the State party's constitutional name was the "Republic of Macedonia".

24. The role of the National Commission on the Rights of the Child within the government structure was to monitor implementation of legislation on children's rights and to coordinate activities in that area, as well as to perform those duties outlined in the written reply to the first question in the list of issues. The State party had followed the Committee's recommendations and had created the National Commission in 2005. The Commission had then been elevated to the level coordinated by the Secretary-General of the Government in 2007 in order to involve members in most decisions taken by the Government.

25. The National Commission had discussed the role of NGOs and civil society in its work at its previous two sessions. At its next session, it would be making changes in its statute that would give the two NGO members the same rights as the other members. It would also consider the possibility of enlarging the National Commission with the addition of two further NGOs. The National Commission would consider further the issue of duly taking account of children's views in its work, and several ideas were in the pipeline as to how to give greater weight to the voice of the child.

26. **The Chairperson** asked what criteria were used in deciding which NGOs could join the National Commission.

27. **Mr. Uzunovski** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the National Commission had consulted with UNICEF in 2007 and had determined that NGOs working in the area of children's rights should have a prominent role in the work of the National Commission. Further discussion on how the Commission should go about expanding the participation of NGOs and civil society was required.

28. **Ms. Kikerekova** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that efforts continued to bring national legislation further into line with the Convention, the Optional Protocols and other international instruments. One of the basic objectives of the Juvenile Justice Act was to provide assistance and care to children in conflict with the law and to ensure their representation in court in order to guarantee their rights under the Constitution and the Convention. That law was the first to refer to the Convention as a basis for its provisions. It stipulated that the proper development and education of young people must be guaranteed throughout all proceedings. The law permitted the restriction of some rights

to an extent appropriate to the level of development of the young person's personality and as necessary with respect to the offence committed, but priority was given to preventive and educational measures. Deprivation of liberty was permitted on an exceptional basis and only as a last resort when all other measures had failed to produce the desired effect.

29. Legislation pertaining to the family, social protection and protection of children had been amended the previous year to prohibit all forms of discrimination against children, sexual abuse of children, sale and trafficking of children, physical and psychological violence against children, inhuman treatment of children and use of children for commercial purposes. Those legislative efforts demonstrated the State party's commitment to continuing to harmonize national legislation with the Convention.

30. **Ms. Kikerekova** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, within the framework of the close cooperation existing between her Government and UNICEF, a project had been undertaken in 2009 to analyse the compatibility of domestic legislation with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All legislation that dealt with matters covered by the Convention had been examined. The project was currently in its final stages, and the results of the analysis would be announced shortly and would be widely disseminated among the legislative branch of government, NGOs and civil society. Recommendations would then be made concerning ways to improve existing legislation. Once they had been endorsed by the Government, those recommendations would be implemented by the relevant ministries, thus increasing the alignment between domestic legislation and the Convention.

31. **Ms. Al-Asmar** (Country Rapporteur) asked what measures were in place to ensure that the Government adopted the recommendations.

32. **Ms. Kikerekova** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that a determined effort had been made to harmonize the country's legislation with the Convention and that all necessary steps would be taken to ensure that the recommendations were adopted; in her view, the involvement of all the relevant ministries and institutions was one way to ensure a desirable outcome. Moreover, practical indicators, established by NGOs, were used to identify legislative areas in need of reform. The authorities also worked with the Ombudsman in that connection. In order for the Assembly to adopt legislation, the exact situation that was being targeted by the measures under consideration had to be outlined, and their role in providing a solution for that situation had to be explained. The procedure for harmonizing legislation with the Convention was very transparent, and the views of professionals in the field and of all the relevant institutions in the field of children's rights were taken into account.

33. **Mr. Citarella** said that difficulties in implementing legislation were often encountered in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, particularly because a decree had to be signed before a law could enter into force. Consequently, the Juvenile Justice Act had not yet been fully implemented. He understood that the Convention was part of the law of the land, although he wondered what judges would do in cases in which an offence was criminalized under domestic legislation but the law in question was not in line with the Convention.

34. **Ms. Kikerekova** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Juvenile Justice Act had come into force on 30 June 2009 and had brought with it new standards for juvenile justice. It had introduced the concept of restorative justice, and it provided for the establishment of social work centres and reformed judicial procedures. The social work centres undertook crime prevention activities that focused on eliminating the factors which led juveniles to commit crimes.

35. The Convention and domestic laws were given equal weight under the Constitution, so judges could apply the provisions of the Convention in their judgements in the same way

that they could apply domestic legislation. The application of the Juvenile Justice Act was being monitored, and the obstacles that had been encountered were being dealt with. The most pressing problems were the need to build the human resource capacity of the social work centres, to provide more training for judges and public prosecutors, and to develop measures to prevent delinquency. As part of the Government's efforts in the latter area, the National Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency had been established.

36. **Mr. Bajrami** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), in reply to the question on the establishment of an anti-discrimination body, said that a bill which envisaged the creation of such a body had been adopted in April 2010 following nationwide public discussions with NGOs. That body, which would take the form of a commission, should be in place by the time that the law entered into force on 1 January 2011. The commission would be independent of the executive and would be comprised of human rights experts selected by the Assembly, in accordance with the recommendations of the European Union.

37. **Mr. Gurán** asked whether the new law was in line with European anti-discrimination directives or whether it contained exceptions and whether the new commission would be part of the European Network of Equality Bodies.

38. **The Chairperson** said that she would like to know whether a case involving discrimination against a child would be dealt with through an administrative procedure or would be heard by a court.

39. **Mr. Bajrami** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the new anti-discrimination commission would submit all complaints of discrimination to the courts. In reply to Mr. Gurán's question, he said that the grounds for a finding of discrimination given in the European directive had been incorporated into the new law, but that it also included additional protection measures. It was expected that the commission would take steps to join all relevant international networks.

40. **The Chairperson** asked whether specific provisions had been made in the new law to cover discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation.

41. **Mr. Bajrami** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation was not referred to specifically in the new law, but that there was a general provision covering "all other grounds for discrimination", which would be considered to include discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation.

42. **Ms. Todorova** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Law on the Family prohibited persons under the age of 18 from entering into marriage. However, provisions did exist to allow those aged 16 and over to marry, with the authorization of the courts and the consent of their parent or legal guardian, provided that an independent assessment, carried out by the social work centres, had determined that the persons in question had attained a sufficient level of physical and mental maturity.

43. **Ms. Janeva** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) informed the Committee that the Institute for Mother and Child Health Care monitored the public health aspects of early marriage, in particular the number of teenage pregnancies, in order to develop strategies to meet the needs of young women. According to the data available from 2008, the average age at which women gave birth to their first child in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was 26.3 years in urban areas and 24.5 years in rural areas, which was almost in line with the European Union average. Efforts had been made to improve access to information on sexual and reproductive health for adolescents, particularly at the primary health-care level. Workshops and seminars had also been held for primary health-care workers and doctors.

44. **Ms. Al-Asmar** (Country Rapporteur) said that early marriage, especially among minorities such as Roma or ethnic Albanians, was often due to cultural factors but could

also be motivated by financial concerns. She recommended that the Government should introduce measures to prevent early marriage and to raise awareness of that issue.

45. **The Chairperson** asked what percentage of the Roma and ethnic Albanian population had been forced into early marriage.

46. **Ms. Janeva** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the health sector monitored the rate of teenage pregnancies as an indicator of social trends. Counselling prior to marriage was available and, since secondary education was now compulsory in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, she believed that rates of early marriage would continue to decrease as young women were encouraged to further their education.

47. **Mr. Citarella** asked what was meant by early marriage. Did the term refer specifically to marriages registered with the civil authorities? If not, then it was simply a matter of the union of a girl and a boy.

48. **Ms. Janeva** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that official data showed that the number of registered early marriages had decreased, but it was true that many unions were not registered.

49. **The Chairperson** queried the reliability of the official statistics, as many Roma did not have official birth certificates.

50. **Ms. Janeva** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) reiterated that the average age for first-time mothers had increased, which indicated a change in women's attitudes. However, a small number of early marriages did continue to take place within certain population groups.

51. **Mr. Gurán** said that the situation was similar to that of other Central and Eastern European countries with significant Roma communities. Two issues were being confused: the question of registered early marriages, and that of informal marriages within the Roma population. He asked whether the Government had implemented any specific training or education programmes for the sections of the population concerned. Disaggregated data, based on ethnicity, for the entire region were needed.

52. **Ms. Janeva** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that data disaggregated by ethnicity were not currently available because that type of breakdown would conflict with the policy to provide a health system based on equality and universal accessibility. Future legislation would, however, reflect the need for disaggregated data.

53. **Mr. Polozhani** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had inherited the issue of early marriage, and the consequent problem of teenage pregnancies, owing to the presence of Roma and other ethnic communities which tended to have a lower level of education and a cultural tradition of early marriage and births. He firmly believed that education was the key to addressing the issue and could confirm that a special education programme on reproductive health was being delivered to the sections of the population involved.

54. **Ms. Aidoo** expressed concern that the amended legislation on child allowances might give rise to structural discrimination that could cause some children to be left out of an otherwise improving social security system. She sought clarification on whether the child benefit was granted on the basis of school attendance, the employment status of parents or parental coverage under a social protection scheme. Was the new system of granting the child benefit to the third child limited to regions with low birth rates and therefore linked to an apparent demographic development strategy?

55. **Mr. Bajrami** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that in 2008 the Government had amended the Law on Protection of Children to grant the child benefit to

the third child in families in regions with a low birth rate in order to encourage families to have more children. It had become clear, however, that the amended provision could be viewed as being unfair in that citizens were not receiving allowances on equal terms, and the Government had therefore amended the law further to apply to all regions in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

56. **Mr. Ginovski** (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), responding further to Mr. Gurán's question on education programmes for the Roma dealing with issues relating to early marriage, said that the National Action Plan on the Rights of the Child in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia for 2006–2015 and other action plans provided for such programmes. The Ministry of Education and Science had also established a directorate that was responsible for improving education in the languages of minority communities. That directorate included several members from those communities who advised it on the particular problems they faced. Furthermore, the Ministry had sent expert teams to schools in areas with large Roma and other minority communities to offer training programmes on early marriage issues for parents and pupils.

57. Many of the questions raised by Ms. Al-Asmar had been addressed in the National Action Plan for 2006–2015. One example of ways in which the views of children regarding curricula and other school-related matters were taken into account was provided by recent Government-sponsored legislation on textbooks and curricula drafted by the Ministry of Education and Science. The text of that bill had been posted on the Ministry's website along with an invitation to parents, teachers and children to give their opinions in the form of an anonymous survey.

58. As for the question of corporal punishment in schools, any such practice contravened the Constitution and laws on education. The State Educational Inspectorate monitored the situation nationally, and local authorities were required to inform the Ministry should corporal punishment occur, with immediate action being taken in such an event.

59. Regarding school funding, he said that the Ministry had full control of funds and transferred monthly amounts to local authorities for onward allocation to schools. If schools failed to fulfil their obligations, the Ministry would take back any funds that it had allocated.

60. As for the question on measures to address the harmful influence on children exerted by information and images published on the Internet, he said that he was currently working in partnership with several ministries, in particular the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Interior, to draft an action plan to protect children. That plan should be ready for implementation in the near future.

61. In response to Mr. Citarella's question on a child's right to express his or her opinion, he said that children in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia enjoyed, and would continue to enjoy, the right to become involved in certain matters and to express their views.

62. **Ms. Aidoo**, referring to her earlier concern about the quality of education, asked whether the Government was allocating sufficient budgetary funds to teacher training at all levels, from early childhood through secondary school, in addition to the financial assistance received from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and UNICEF. She requested clarification on reports that there was a growing tendency for different ethnic groups to be educated in separate schools. What efforts were being made to enhance intercultural cooperation and integration through the education system? She asked if peace education, tolerance education and respect for other cultures were being taught in schools and what steps were being taken to address the problem of inter-ethnic violence among students. She also asked whether the Government, apart from supplying textbooks,

was providing assistance to families for other educational costs, such as classroom supplies, equipment, clothing and food, so as to ensure inclusive education for all children.

63. **Ms. Al-Asmar** (Country Rapporteur), referring to Mr. Kotrane's earlier question on closed adoptions, asked whether or not the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia kept records on the biological parents of adopted children and whether children were able to access such information once they had reached the appropriate age and level of development. She asked for further information on steps taken to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream schools. What standards were applied to judge whether or not that was feasible? She also wished to know if school curricula included peace education or a similar type of instruction to teach children how to live together in harmony. Finally, she requested information on the education of minority children. Did they attend separate schools or the same schools but at different times? How did they learn their own language and who prepared their curricula?

64. **Mr. Puras** (Country Rapporteur) asked what measures were planned in order to guarantee a high-quality, well-resourced and properly staffed network of community-based social work centres to protect children in families at risk. Turning to health issues, he asked how the State party intended to ensure that its adolescent-friendly health services would reach all communities and adolescents. How well balanced was its policy on specialized mental health care at the primary health-care level, especially in terms of prevention and promotion programmes, and how did the State party address problems of suicide and bullying in the community and schools? He asked for clarification on the reasons for the sharp decline in exclusive breastfeeding rates over the last decade. He also wished to know how the State party addressed the problem of drug and alcohol use among children and adolescents. What measures were in place for prevention and provision of non-stigmatizing services for children and adolescents requiring treatment for drug and alcohol addictions, recovery assistance and rehabilitation services?

65. **Mr. Gurán** requested further information on institutional care for all children in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. What steps had been taken to ensure a smooth transition from institutional care to a system of family-based care or other forms of alternative care? What support programmes were in place for children living in institutions once they had reached 18 years of age? How long could they stay in institutions and what support did they receive for, for example, their further education? Turning to budget allocations, he asked for more information on funds allocated for leisure activities for children at the local level, especially in areas outside of large cities, where little provision was made for leisure facilities for children. Finally, he requested further information on programmes to help children involved in informal child labour, such as begging or selling cigarettes on the streets. Were such forms of child labour declining or on the increase?

66. **Mr. Kotrane** sought clarification on whether the 2004 Law on the Family granted increased powers to social work centres to remove children from parents who were failing in their duties and whether or not parents were given little opportunity for appeal. Concerning education, he asked for clarification on the prohibition of religious symbols in schools. In that connection, how did the State party ensure that the best interests of the child were taken into account? He asked for further information on how the State party ensured that children leaving school continued to benefit from protection from all forms of violence, especially with respect to vulnerable children such as street children, rural children and Roma girls, who tended to drop out of school at an early age. He also asked for further information on steps taken to reduce differences in the living standards of children. As previously mentioned, the child benefit was limited to the third child in a family and was paid only if the parents worked, which meant that many children did not receive child benefits, including the first two children. What measures were envisaged to ensure that all

children received the support of social welfare services and child benefits and to improve the standard of living of children from poor families?

67. **Mr. Citarella** expressed concern that the prevalence of a number of languages in use in different parts of the country and in large towns and cities was proving to be an additional obstacle to the integration of minorities into schools and that children of different ethnic origins suffered from discrimination as a result. He welcomed the new Juvenile Justice Act but regretted that it was not being effectively implemented. He asked for clarification on whether cases of children in conflict with the law were dealt with in juvenile courts or in specialized sections of ordinary courts and asked how long it would be before juvenile courts were established throughout the country. He expressed concern that judges were not being provided with training and urged the State party to make every effort to organize specialized courses for judges on children's rights as soon as possible.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.