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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 43rd MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 14 November 2006, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Ms. BONOAN-DANDAN

later: Ms. BARAHONA RIERA
(Vice-Chairperson)

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS:

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

Initial report of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (continued)
(E/C.12/MKD/1; E/C.12/MKD/Q/1 and Add.1; HRI/CORE/MKD/2006)

1. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to reply to Committee members' questions on articles 6 to 9 of the Covenant.
2. Ms. ALEKSOSKA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that one of the main priorities of her Government was to reduce the unemployment rate, which had been 37.2 per cent in 2004 and 38.7 per cent in the first quarter of 2005. By the first quarter of 2006, the unemployment rate had fallen to 36.2 per cent, while the employment rate had risen during the last quarter of 2005 and had continued to rise in 2006.
3. Those results had been attained through a series of legislative measures and policies introduced to actively stimulate employment, as well as projects developed by the Employment Bureau or under the European Union (EU) Community Assistance to Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization (CARDS) Programme, and in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
4. Ms. KAMBERI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said the Roma population was particularly hard hit by unemployment. As of October 2006, over 16,400 Roma had been registered as unemployed, including over 6,500 women. The reason for those large numbers was the low levels of education and skills to be found among that population. Of that total of unemployed Roma, for example, over 14,800 were unskilled, while only some 400 had completed secondary school and 26 had completed university. It was no accident that employment was one of the top three priorities of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 to 2015. In addition, employment was a priority area in the Roma Strategy and plans had been developed during 2005 to further stimulate employment among the Roma, with specific targets, time frames and budgets. The Government was cooperating closely with employment agencies. Measures to stimulate employment among the Roma included training, retraining and further training programmes, which thus far in 2006 had involved 81 Roma, 67 of them women. Counselling had been provided to over 1,500 Roma, half of them women, and a number of short skills-enhancement courses had been offered. Other measures had been taken in the areas of vocational guidance and public works, and a degree of tax exemption had also been implemented. As a result, 237 Roma, one third of them women, had found employment.
5. Ms. GROZDANOVA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the employment level for women aged 15 to 64 in 2005 had been 37.9 per cent, a very low rate compared with EU member countries. The unemployment rate among men in 2005 had been 36.5 per cent and among women 38.4 per cent. The differences in unemployment rates were greater in younger age groups (15-24).

6. The law enshrined the principle of equal pay for equal work, but in practice women earned less than equally qualified men - a difference of 12 per cent in 2005. The lower the educational level, the greater the pay differential. The sector of employment also impacted on pay differentials: in industry, where women accounted for 42 per cent of employees, their pay was 24.6 per cent lower than men's, while in education and culture, where half the employees were women, the difference was 13.3 per cent. One reason for the gap was that, regardless of educational level, even in sectors employing large numbers of women, men tended to occupy higher posts and thus earn more.

7. Ms. KAMBERI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that Roma women suffered double discrimination, firstly within the family, as women, and secondly in society at large, as Roma. The Decade of Roma Inclusion, and in particular the fourth Action Plan, focused on gender and women's position as a crosscutting issue in areas such as health and housing, and stressed education as a means of improving women's employment status. Some gratifying results had been obtained, with Roma girls accounting for half of the scholarships awarded to university students and more than half of scholarships for secondary education.

8. The majority of Roma women worked in the informal, or "grey" economy. Funds had been allocated to establish centres to provide information to Roma women on setting up small businesses in order to legalize their employment, and special funding was available for starting up a business. In addition, unsecured loans were available to Roma women.

9. Ms. GROZDANOVA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, although there was no specific law on sexual harassment, the new Law on Labour Relations contained provisions defining harassment and sexual harassment in the workplace. Additional provisions had been inserted in the Criminal Code, and the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men also contained provisions on sexual harassment. No cases had been officially registered with the Office of the Ombudsman, but NGOs operating harassment hotlines reported that victims required legal and social assistance.

10. Ms. ALEKSOSKA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said the eradication of the informal economy was one of the Government's main priorities. A multifaceted phenomenon, it not only exerted a negative impact on public revenue as a result of tax evasion, it also affected employment, obstructed fair competition and impeded development. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in cooperation with other ministries, therefore planned to introduce a special strategy, including legislative, fiscal and welfare measures, in the context of the employment strategy and the National Action Plan on Employment 2006-2008. Monitoring and inspection would also be stepped up, primarily through strengthening of the capacities of the Labour Inspectorate and closer cooperation with other services, and penalties would be imposed in cases of non-compliance.

11. Mr. SAKIRI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the main activity of the Labour Inspectorate during 2005 had been enforcement of labour regulations and imposition of sanctions on employers who failed to comply. Over 21,000 inspections had been carried out by 34 inspectors; a list of persons illegally employed, i.e., in breach of labour law or collective agreements, was circulated each week to employment and welfare centres and any benefits received by those listed were stopped. As a result, a substantial number had now been engaged on proper employment contracts.

12. Mr. AVRAMOVSKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), replying to questions concerning the cost of welfare and the level of benefits paid, said it was important to bear in mind that average pay levels in many sectors were rather low. Over 64,000 families had been in receipt of benefits in August 2005 and funds in the amount of 155 million denars had been allocated to cover such payments. Benefits declined after the first year in order to encourage beneficiaries to seek work.

13. Mr. MESKOV (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), replying to a question concerning differing levels of minimum pension, said that the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance established three levels of minimum pension, which depended on the years of service accrued. The differences between the levels were very small.

14. Ms. ALEKSOSKA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the new Law on Labour Relations established nine months' maternity leave for women. Maternity leave allowances could also be used by the father or an adoptive parent.

15. Mr. SAKIRI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that new legislation on health and safety at work was about to be adopted, incorporating all international standards and the most important EU directives in that area. If its provisions were consistently applied by employers, proper information provided by the relevant State agencies, and non-compliance duly sanctioned, it would be possible to reduce the numbers of group accidents, lethal accidents and serious accidents and injuries in the workplace, and thereby curb the high rates of sick leave among workers.

16. Mr. MESKOV (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said his delegation would send a written reply to the Committee on the question of non-ratification of International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions.

17. Ms. SPASEVSKA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said special measures were in place to reduce long-term unemployment. The number of programmes had declined since the 1990s, in part as a result of a change in the method of counting the number of programmes implemented, which had previously given a somewhat distorted picture. Despite a smaller number of programmes, the numbers of unemployed participating had remained constant, at around 2,000 per year, and the number of unemployed who found jobs as a result had also remained constant, at 1,200 per year.

18. Ms. ALEKSOSKA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Government was in the final stages of preparing a national strategy on employment, which aimed to reduce the overall unemployment rate by 48 per cent by 2010, and the unemployment rate of women by 38 per cent. The strategy would focus particularly on youth and long-term unemployment, as well as unemployment of older persons.

19. Mr. MESKOV (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that funding for the implementation of the national strategy for employment would come from the national and local authority budgets and the EU and other donors.

20. Ms. ALEKSOSKA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that some 370 persons with moderate, severe and very severe mental handicaps had exercised their right to receive benefits.
21. Mr. AVRAMOVSKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance covered all employees, but that there were special categories of insured persons who had the right to special types of pensions. Those categories had previously been regulated by separate laws, such as the Law on Defence and the Law on Internal Affairs, which had contained provisions on the insurance of persons working in those sectors, but they had been consolidated in the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance. The rationale was that since workers in defence and internal affairs worked under special conditions, their pension rights should be more favourable.
22. The Law on Pension and Disability Insurance provided for three categories of minimum pension based on the number of years of service. The minimum pension must ensure a basic level of material and social security for beneficiaries. The minimum pension for insured persons with more than 35 years of service, or 30 years for women, was 5,740 denars, and 11,143 persons fell into that category. For those with more than 25 years of service, or 20 for women, the amount was 5,590 denars, and there were 18,341 such beneficiaries. Finally, 55,932 people with less than 25 years service, or 20 for women, were entitled to 5,392 denars. The 84,989 beneficiaries of the minimum pension made up 31.8 per cent of the total 267,686 pension beneficiaries. The issue of the minimum pension had been raised before the Constitutional Court, which had declared it constitutional to set a limit on the minimum pension. The average pension was in the region of 7,000 denars.
23. Ms. ALEKSOSKA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Law on Labour Relations established that the salary for full-time employees must not be lower than the minimum wage. When establishing the minimum wage, consideration must be given to the economic and social situation in the country and the cost of living. The establishment of the minimum wage was the responsibility of the social partners - the trade unions and employers - who signed the collective agreements; the Government had no influence over the minimum wage. The minimum wage must be sufficient to provide for an adequate standard of living, but it must also be feasible for employers to pay it. The social partners had failed to reach an agreement on a national minimum wage, and the minimum wage was therefore agreed at the sectoral or industry level. Under the public service agreement, a minimum wage had been established which varied slightly according to the activity, but was not lower than 5,600 denars.
24. Mr. AVRAMOVSKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, under a decision adopted in 2002, a condition for the payment of social welfare assistance, which had applied to all citizens, not only members of the Roma community, had been the submission of an electricity bill. That condition had been revoked by a decision of the Constitutional Court in May 2003. The requirement that persons must have completed elementary school in order to receive assistance had never existed.
25. Ms. KAMBERI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that all citizens, including Roma, could register with the Employment Bureau without having completed elementary education.

26. Ms. ALEKSOSKA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Federation of Trade Unions of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had applied for membership of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and had observer status with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Branch trade unions had also applied for membership of the ETUC.
27. Mr. SAKIRI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the right to strike was regulated by the Constitution and the Law on Labour Relations. Trade unions had the right to organize strikes to safeguard the rights of their members if their demands were economic or social in nature. Prior notice of strikes must be given to employers, and strike action could not commence before the negotiation process had concluded. The obligation to negotiate must not restrict the right to strike. Solidarity strikes could not start until two days after commencement of the strike which they were supporting. The letter announcing the strike must note the reasons for the strike, its location, duration and date and time of commencement. The strike must be organized in such a way that it did not prevent non-participating workers and managers from entering the premises or carrying out their functions. The right to strike of the armed forces, the police, the civil service, employees of public enterprises and institutions was regulated by a special law, but that did not constitute a restriction on their right to strike.
28. Ms. SPASEVSKA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that unemployment benefit for those registered with the Employment Bureau was 3,400 denars.
29. Mr. MESKOV (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the amounts of pensions, social assistance and unemployment benefit were restricted by the economic capacity of the State party. The amounts provided for minimum subsistence, but might not be sufficient to provide what was considered a “decent” standard of living.
30. Mr. AVRAMOVSKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that one of the prerequisites for receiving unemployment benefit was that the household must not own a car, as that generated additional expenses. However, an exception was made if a member of the household had a disability.
31. Mr. MARTYNOV requested information on the unemployment rates for minorities other than the Roma. He asked whether the Law on Employment of Disabled Persons was considered effective, as, since its enactment in 2000, only 1,132 people had been provided with jobs. What percentage of the total number of disabled persons eligible for employment did that constitute?
32. He asked whether the Government had any plans to amend the provision in the new Law on Labour Relations whereby employers were allowed to exclude or temporarily release up to 2 per cent of workers during a strike, thus excluding union leaders from negotiations.
33. Ms. SPASEVSKA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, as of September 2006, the total number of unemployed had been made up of 4.5 per cent Roma, 3.7 per cent Turks, 20.2 per cent Albanians and 66.2 per cent Macedonians. The relatively high unemployment rate among Albanians and Roma was attributed to their low level of education. Of the total number of Roma unemployed, 90.2 per cent were low-skilled workers, and the corresponding figure for Albanians was 75.8 per cent.

34. Mr. AVRAMOVSKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Law on Employment of Disabled Persons provided for the employment of people with disabilities in the civil service, public enterprises and agencies and on a self-employed basis. Until the adoption of the law, there had been only 29 sheltered workshops which employed disabled persons; now there were more than 650 companies employing the disabled, and the total number of disabled persons in employment was 7,900.
35. Mr. SAKIRI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Government would soon be drafting amendments to the Law on Labour Relations. However, no comments had been submitted by trade unions regarding the provision concerning the exclusion of 2 per cent of workers during a strike. That provision applied only to workers who incited violence or prevented negotiations between unions and employers. Trade union leaders who acted violently were covered by those sanctions and also subject to criminal law.
36. Mr. SADI, noting that the high rate of unemployment among the Roma and Albanians was due to their poor education levels, said that the remedy was to improve their education level by making secondary education compulsory and reducing the dropout rate.
37. Mr. KOLEKESKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the Government was currently drafting constitutional amendments aimed at introducing compulsory secondary education. The highest number of dropouts occurred during the transition from primary to secondary school. A temporary measure to improve the situation until secondary education became compulsory was the establishment of a State committee for the enrolment of students in secondary education.
38. Ms. KAMBERI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the education of the Roma was a priority. The duration of elementary schooling had recently been increased to nine years, which included preschool education. The Ministry of Education, together with the Roma Educational Fund, had provided funding to include Roma children in two years of preschool education. Scholarships were granted to approximately 950 Roma secondary school students, out of a total of 1,300.
39. The CHAIRPERSON asked if, in its next periodic report, the State party could provide a clearer picture of the problem of unemployment, which was alarmingly high, and indicate the measures undertaken to create more jobs.
40. Mr. ATANGANA requested more information on domestic violence in the country. He further asked what the State party had done to ensure the proper registering of births of Roma children. Finally, he would like to have more information on corporal punishment in schools.
41. Ms. BARAHONA RIERA asked whether the laws, mentioned in paragraph 59 of the State party's written replies to the list of issues (E/C.12/MKD/Q/1/Add.1), said to "envisage measures for protection of victims of domestic violence", were effective in combating domestic violence and whether the State party's Criminal Code allowed for its characterization as a specific type of offence. Moreover, she recommended that the State party, in its next periodic report, should provide a nationwide analysis of domestic and gender violence, as the figures provided in the initial report did not seem to reflect reality.

42. She further enquired whether the legislation pertaining to trafficking in persons was up to date and effective. She would also like to know whether there were measures to combat child labour in the country and whether they had been successful.

43. She asked the State party to clarify whether it planned to privatize its health-care system, whether its principle of universal access to health care also applied to women of childbearing age and whether it had adopted measures to prevent the use of abortion as a means of contraception.

44. Ms. GHOSE wondered whether the State party had set up programmes to raise awareness on domestic violence among prosecutors, police personnel, judges and the general public, and to encourage women to report acts of domestic violence.

45. Mr. PILLAY requested information on the measures the State party had adopted to improve the living conditions of the 30 per cent of its population which lived below the poverty line. He invited the delegation to elaborate on any poverty reduction strategy the country might have established.

46. He also would like to know whether the State party's National Action Plan for Housing had indeed improved the Roma people's living conditions. Noting that the State party had failed to answer question 27 of the list of issues (E/C.12/MKD/Q/1) and recalling that paragraph 21 of the Committee's general comment No. 7 on the right to adequate housing and forced evictions requested such vital information, he urged the State party to provide in its next periodic report statistical data and other social and demographic information concerning the homeless and people subjected to forced evictions.

47. Finally, he would like the State party to describe the steps it had taken to ensure that poor hygienic conditions and low-quality housing did not drive children away from their homes and on to the streets.

48. Ms. Barahona Riera (Vice-Chairperson) took the Chair.

49. Mr. MALINVERNI requested a description of the specific measures the State party had taken to combat child labour, which, according to information the Committee had received, involved between 500 and 1,000 children.

50. He asked what plans existed to relocate the 70 per cent of Roma who lived in illegal settlements, at risk of being evicted, and to help the 2,000 persons internally displaced as a consequence of the war to return to their original homes.

51. Finally, he asked how the State party planned to improve detention conditions which, according to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, were insufficient in most prisons and custodial facilities of the country.

52. Mr. RIEDEL asked the delegation to explain what the first category mentioned in Chart 16 of its initial report (E/C.12/MKD/1) referred to.

53. Furthermore, he asked why infant mortality rates in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had risen between 2002 and 2003, what measures the State party had taken to remedy the situation and whether the rates had dropped since 2003.

54. He encouraged the State party to describe, in its next report, the specific measures it had taken to ensure the implementation of good practice in health, environment and safety management in enterprises, providing disaggregated data, on a yearly basis, and explanations for any year-on-year changes.

55. He asked what specific plans and benchmarks the State party had formulated to improve primary health-care facilities.

56. Since, according to paragraph 647 of the report, hospitals directly charged patients who did not have a health insurance, he would like to know what happened to those who could not afford to pay for health-care services.

57. Ms. BRAS GOMES asked whether the State party had taken any measures to combat child marriages within the Roma community, as they contributed to high school dropout rates, sexual and reproductive health problems and a faster ageing process among Roma women. She cited a survey of 960 Roma women by an NGO called Daja which found that 54 per cent had given birth by the age of 18, and 3 per cent had given birth between the ages of 12 and 14.

58. Mr. SADI asked the delegation if it could describe the causes of domestic violence in the State party, and whether the rate of domestic violence was higher among the Roma than among other communities.

59. He would like to know the age of consent to sexual relations in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

60. He requested information on the extent of prostitution in the State party and on how it was regulated.

61. He would also like to know if the State party's social housing projects, as in many countries, tended to become hubs for crime, drug abuse and propagation of HIV/AIDS.

62. Finally, he wondered what priority the State party attributed to the environment.

63. Ms. GROZDANOVA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the legislation for the protection of children and the prevention of violence against them included the Criminal Code, as well as the Law on Social Protection, the Law on the Family, and the Law on Child Protection. Legal proceedings were instituted where appropriate.

64. Though there was no official record of cases of child labour, information from NGOs indicated that child labour did take place in the country. When such cases were detected in the field, the relevant social services could recommend withdrawing parental rights, in accordance with the legislation. Considering the economic situation of the country, it was very difficult to prevent child labour. The national action plan on child protection, however, envisaged long-term measures to ultimately eliminate the practice.

65. To date, domestic violence in the country had not been regulated under a separate law. However, there was a national plan to combat violence against women, which included domestic violence. All cases of domestic violence had been dealt with by the provisions of the Criminal Code. In March 2004, the Government had adopted a law amending the Criminal Code which added provisions regulating crimes against life and physical integrity, covering crimes such as murder or rape.

66. According to data available to the Ministry of the Interior, in 2004, there had been 2,436 reports of domestic violence. In 2005, there had been 12 recorded murders, mostly of spouses - only in two cases had the husband been killed by the wife - as a consequence of domestic violence. In the first months of 2006, 1,376 cases of domestic violence had been reported, involving 875 female victims.

67. In 2004, the Law on Family had been amended to include measures to combat domestic violence, such as the creation of seven shelters and of a 24-hour hotline to assist victims of domestic violence, which received 120 phone calls per month.

68. Among the measures taken to raise awareness among the general public, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in 2004 had held seminars on violence within the family for professionals from various sectors, including the police, health-care workers and members of NGOs.

69. There were many deep-rooted negative attitudes towards women in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; however, thanks to such campaigns, women felt safe asking the State to help them. The State provided not only help but also social support for victims of domestic violence.

70. Cooperation with NGOs was an important aspect of the various projects to combat domestic violence. The Government had also participated actively in the Council of Europe's Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, as part of which regional conferences would be held in the State party.

71. In 2005, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto, which covered trafficking in women and children. The offence of trafficking in persons had been added to the country's Criminal Code in article 418 (a) when that Convention had been adopted.

72. The Ministry of the Interior had cooperated with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to open a transit centre for the victims of trafficking in persons, which provided temporary accommodation for foreign nationals. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy worked to provide the children in those centres with comprehensive social support until a permanent solution to their situation could be found.

73. According to data from NGOs, prostitution of minors and trafficking in children were increasing. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy had organized training days in association with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Spillover Monitor

Mission to Skopje to raise awareness among judges and prosecutors of such problems. In conjunction with the NGO "Open Gate", the Ministry had set up a counselling service for victims of trafficking in persons, as part of its resocialization and rehabilitation programmes.

74. In conjunction with NGOs operating within the country, an analysis had been carried out of the reasons for domestic violence, which had indicated that such violence was linked closely to the country's economic situation. Economic difficulties led to problems of unemployment and tensions within the family.

75. Ms. JANEVA (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, like other countries in Europe, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia faced a huge demand for health care, yet only had limited resources for its provision. The Government was reforming the health-care system, during which process it would emphasize prevention in order to make the best use of its resources.

76. Regarding the number of births registered, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia had one of the best records of the countries in the region: 98 per cent of all births took place in a medical institution. Research carried out with the help of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had shown that non-registration of births was not a major problem; that meant that one of the main reasons for exclusion from the health-care system was virtually eliminated.

77. Concerning provisions within the health-care system for preventing domestic violence, the Ministry of Health had appointed a coordinator on domestic violence and drawn up a programme to tackle the problem.

78. While privatization of the country's primary health-care system had begun, the Ministry of Health was determined that prevention would remain the cornerstone of health care in the country. Certain aspects of primary health care, such as the protection of women and children, would also remain public services.

79. Regarding women's access to reproductive health care, a programme dealing with maternal and perinatal care was adopted annually. Measures taken under that programme were aimed at improving the health of pregnant women and babies.

80. To promote sexual and reproductive health among adolescents, initiatives to provide "youth-friendly" services had been taken in 2005, with outside financial assistance. One centre, established among the largest gypsy community in the country, had been operating for several months, offering young people access to many different specialists, such as psychologists, education experts and gynaecologists. An approach that encouraged a healthy lifestyle was crucial, as it was during adolescence that habits which would continue into adult life were formed.

81. In response to a question on training on issues related to domestic violence, the Ministry of Health was considering training health-care workers in early detection of domestic violence.

82. Continuous health care was available in the country's prisons, and medical facilities existed in the majority of penitentiary units. Local emergency teams were also able to intervene when necessary.

83. With regard to the mortality rates shown in chart 15 of the initial report, she wished to clarify that the chart referred to causes of mortality in infants under 12 months, whereas the phrase “Mortality rate for children between one and four years of age” referred to the text that followed, and not the chart. The recorded increase in congenital defects had been the result not of a decline in health, but rather of an improvement in diagnosis. The rise in the number of cases of congenital defects was therefore a sign of progress, allowing the future health problems of the rising generation to be foreseen.

84. Health care in mountainous regions of the country was provided by a comprehensive network of primary care facilities. As hospitals were found only in the larger cities, patients in mountainous regions were transported to hospital in special medical vehicles. Although there was not always a sufficient number of such vehicles available, the Ministry of Health had recently distributed 20 additional medical vehicles throughout the country to alleviate the problem.

85. On the issue of health insurance, inevitably there were segments of the population not covered by the social insurance scheme; however, such people were covered under a programme providing basic health care for uninsured persons. The programme also covered hospital costs for such persons, focusing particularly on diseases that placed a heavy financial burden on the families of the uninsured.

86. Mr. MESKOV (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that a National Strategy for Poverty Reduction had been adopted in 1999; however, because of the country’s unfavourable economic circumstances, it had not yielded substantial results. The strategy would be revised by the Government as part of the conditions for entry to the EU. Although his delegation could not say precisely what form that revision would take, the best social policy for the country was to raise the level of employment. Programmes were therefore being set up to encourage self-employment, particularly in less developed parts of the country. Over 1,000 families had been granted start-up loans. The State was also intending to subsidize employers who created new jobs, on condition that they would continue to provide employment after the subsidy had ceased. It was hoped to provide more information on the revisions to the National Strategy for Poverty Reduction in the next periodic report.

87. Ms. KAMBERI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that the issue of housing for gypsies was a great challenge because of the country’s economic situation; however, a national action plan had been adopted to enable the Government to meet that challenge.

88. The Ministry of Transport and Communications had drafted a strategy on housing for the period 2006 to 2011 and had adopted a law on construction, which established that any building constructed before 1968 could be considered to have been built legally. That law would allow gypsies to acquire legal status for their homes. The Government had also required the legalization of all gypsy settlements in the country.

89. A further aim of the national action plan was to improve the quality of life, which included resolving the problem of gypsy housing. Government programmes were being set up to provide rented accommodation for low-income families in 2007-2008 and to help build and

improve water and sewage systems. The State had allocated 5 million denars to the implementation of the national action plan on housing, 2 million denars of which had gone to the gypsy housing problem. Local self-government units were expected to compete for such funds to provide housing services for their area.

90. Mr. AVRAMOVSKI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that efforts to help the homeless were organized in conjunction with the police and the social services. In 2005, a shelter for the homeless had been opened which received up to 70 people a day in summer and 160 people in winter. Those taken in by the centre received three meals a day, visits from a doctor and financial assistance. The centre also provided psychological support and assistance and endeavoured to return children to school.

91. Ms. KAMBERI (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that in a 2005 operation conducted over a period of one month, a mobile team had registered over 450 street children in Skopje. Each day, nearly 300 children had been involved with the day-care centre in Skopje. Teams of specialists provided assistance to the children; however, facilities and financial and human resources were inadequate to cater to the children's needs. There was also a lack of cooperation from children's parents. In future, the centre also needed to focus on taking measures to prevent child abuse.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.