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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Fifty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1404th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 26 May 2009, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. LEE

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Fourth periodic report of Sweden (continued) (CRC/C/SWE/4; CRC/C/Q/4; CCPR/C/Q/Add.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Sweden took places at the Committee table.
2. Ms. K. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that the Government of Sweden had no intention of requiring municipalities to have their own children's ombudsmen; that was a voluntary decision taken at a local level. With respect to follow-up to the reports of the Children's Ombudsman, the recommendations were divided up among the various Ministries responsible for children's affairs for consideration. The process could be improved, and the Government anticipated new developments by the time of the next report.
3. Mr. STOICAN (Sweden) said that the Government had excellent relations with NGOs in the area of children. Before undertaking the preparation of the report to the Committee, it scheduled meetings with NGOs and asked them for suggestions and recommendations regarding matters to be raised in the report. Sweden had initiated the Child Rights Forum, and had begun scheduling meetings several times a year with NGOs; many that had attended had been unsatisfied with the dialogue, and the experience had not been optimal. The Government had then tried a new approach, and had planned the forum around a particular issue; the first of those, held the previous year, had dealt with the matter of violence against children, and had been a success. The Government was glad to see that many representatives of Swedish NGOs were attending the current meeting.
4. Ms. K. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that further improvement was indeed possible in the eradication of corporal punishment, although in recent decades great progress had been achieved in transforming the views of society on violence against children.
5. Ms. BJÖRKLUND (Sweden) said that the eradication of violence against children was an absolute priority. The Government had been developing a programme to coordinate efforts to combat all forms of violence against children with other questions regarding children's rights. Studies had shown that the incidence of physical punishment of children had drastically dropped since the 1960s, when laws permitting corporal punishment had been repealed in Sweden. Only 10 per cent of Swedish parents currently approved physical punishment, compared with 90 per cent in the 1960s. Furthermore, while 90 per cent of children had experienced physical punishment in the 1960s, that figure had since then fallen to 10 per cent. The Government was proud of the progress that had been made in Sweden over the last 40 years. Since some children were still exposed to that kind of violence, work of course remained to be done.
6. She agreed that it was important to disseminate information about the ban on corporal punishment, although those laws had been in effect for 40 years. Sweden was in fact the first country in the world to ban corporal punishment; in July 2009, the Government, in conjunction with Save the Children Sweden, would be publishing a booklet, in Swedish and English, on that subject.

7. Mr. STOICAN (Sweden) said that in April 2009 a conference called “Child-Friendly Europe” had been held in Prague, dealing, inter alia, with the problem of violence against children. A paper had been delivered entitled “The Impact of Abolishing Corporal Punishment in Childrearing - A European Comparison.” That study showed the effect of the Swedish ban on corporal punishment over the course of several generations; the success of the ban in Sweden was incontrovertible.
8. In addition, he said that studies currently under way on shaken-baby syndrome should show that appropriate education of health-care professionals would help future parents to understand the issue and to desist from taking actions that would endanger their children.
9. Ms. WESTMAN-CLEMENT (Sweden) said that the Committee had requested statistics on the numbers of unaccompanied minors arriving in Sweden since 2007. In 2008, 1,510 unaccompanied minors had arrived in Sweden; 122 had run away; of whom 69 were still on the run; 49 of those still missing had since turned 18. In the first quarter of 2009, 453 unaccompanied minors had reached Sweden. Fifty-nine had run away, of whom 55 were still missing.
10. In January 2008, the Government had instituted a common action plan for border patrols, migration patrols and social services for working with unaccompanied children, emphasizing cooperation between those authorities. Inter alia, it was designed to assist border patrols in determining whether unaccompanied children had been victims of trafficking.
11. Mr. KOTRANE, noting that Sweden had signed the new United Nations Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, asked whether the Government had plans for full ratification of that instrument. He would also like to know whether Sweden intended to sign and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.
12. Ms. WESTMAN-CLEMENT (Sweden) said that although Sweden was not a party to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, it nevertheless conformed to its provisions.
13. Ms. K. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that the delegation had come before the Committee to discuss the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and would prefer to discuss other international instruments on another occasion.
14. Ms. WESTMAN-CLEMENT (Sweden), turning to the question of guardians for unaccompanied children, said that Swedish law stipulated that guardians should be appointed as quickly as possible. In the view of the Government, however, it was unrealistic to enact an obligatory 24-hour time frame. In most cases, a guardian was appointed in 24 to 72 hours. Often, an interpreter had to be found before any other step could be taken. Finding a guardian who spoke the child’s language and would be otherwise suitable for the special interests and circumstances of the child also took time.
15. Mr. FILALI said that in the view of the Committee, a guardian must be appointed as a matter of urgency, and 72 hours was too long for a child to have to wait. He would like to know what the role of the guardian was, and what kind of guidance he offered.

16. Ms. VARMAT inquired who was responsible for appointing the guardian, and what criteria were applied.
17. Ms. WESTMAN-CLEMENT (Sweden) said that the municipalities were responsible for the appointment of guardians. Social workers provided care during the first 24 to 72 hours, while a guardian was being sought.
18. Mr. STOICAN (Sweden) said that the guardian for an unaccompanied child had all the powers and responsibilities of the parent, and therefore care must be taken in choosing him. It should be remembered that children sometimes arrived during the night, and though social workers began to care for them right away, the search for a guardian could not begin until the following day.
19. Ms. BJÖRKLUND (Sweden) said that the social services dealt with arriving children in a child-friendly manner, in accordance with the principle of the best interests of the child. There was a long list of available guardians, but if none spoke the child's language, then someone not on the list had to be sought.
20. Ms. WESTMAN-CLEMENT (Sweden) said that the Swedish Migration Board had traditionally been responsible for choosing guardians for unaccompanied children. In 2005, a proposal had been made to transfer that responsibility to the municipalities, with a view to ensuring that children received better care and assistance, and to permit the Migration Board to deal principally with asylum cases. Currently, the Migration Board was concluding agreements with municipalities with regard to the reception of unaccompanied children, and it was hoped that more municipalities would participate.
21. Turning to the matter of family reunification, she said that the Aliens Act based the grant of a residence permit on ties to Sweden. The permit was granted in 89 per cent of all cases involving children.
22. All European member States except Sweden currently had a maintenance requirement, which was intended to insure that there were proper means to care for young persons seeking to be reunited with their families.
23. Mr. ZERMATTEN said that although it was true that all countries were free to establish their own immigration policies, in his view any conditions laid down for family reunification should above all respect the rights of the child.
24. Ms. K. JOHANNSON (Sweden) said that a recommendation had come from the Commission of Inquiry handling the matter of applying a maintenance requirement, but no steps had as yet been taken. The Swedish Government would report to the Committee in due course on any developments.
25. Mr. KOTRANE said he wanted information about the case of a young girl who had been refused entry into Sweden to join her parents, despite a court decision. That was an example of a kind of situation that arose in practice, in attempts to assert the right to family reunification.

26. Ms. WESTMAN-CLEMENT (Sweden) said that she had no information on that particular case. However, on average, 89 per cent of the applications received on grounds that a person had an established relationship with an individual living in Sweden were granted. Clearly, those grounds included cases of children being reunited with their families.

27. Ms. GRANAT (Sweden) said that specific legislation on minority languages was in force in areas where there was a long tradition of speaking Sami, Finnish or Meänkieli. In some municipalities in the north of the country, pupils were entitled to preschool education in their minority language. Children from other national minorities had the right to study their mother tongue at school. The Government's policy was to encourage mother-tongue instruction and bilingual education, as they played an important role in supporting and strengthening the use of those languages. Given that the Sami people were recognized as an indigenous community, they had the right to complete their compulsory education in Sami schools, or to be taught in Sami in elementary school if they so wished.

28. Religious education was part of the compulsory curriculum, and the syllabus covered all world religions. It aimed to encourage pupils to acquire knowledge of issues related to faith and philosophy, contribute to their understanding of traditions and cultures, and promote critical thinking about fundamental democratic values.

29. Ms. K. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that alternative or complementary medicine was not available to children under the age of 8, as people who were not qualified to work in the ordinary health-care system could not treat such young children. The Government considered it to be in the children's best interest to ensure that their treatment was evidence-based, as they were too young to express another preference.

30. Ms. S. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that the Government had announced measures to prevent suicide and suicide attempts among young people in June 2008, including a zero-tolerance approach to suicides. Education and information were considered key to suicide prevention for young people. The Government was supporting several NGOs in their work to raise awareness on relevant issues. Targets had been set to reduce the number of suicides committed during psychiatric treatment or contact within the health-care system. To that end, steps had been taken to improve education for health-care professionals and to improve the competence of all staff. The Government and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions had signed two agreements, one aimed at creating effective frameworks for front-line care for children with mental health problems and mental illnesses, and the other at reinforcing the waiting time guarantee in child and adolescent psychiatry. The agreements involved primary care, schools, maternity clinics, child health-care centres and specialist child and adolescent psychiatry.

31. Ms. MAURÁS PÉREZ asked what was meant by a "zero tolerance" approach to suicides. She requested additional information on the decrease in young people's well-being reported by the Children's Ombudsman. In particular, she asked whether the Government had taken steps to create a good psychosocial study environment in schools, as recommended in that report. If so, it would be interesting to learn the results. Had any special counselling measures been introduced in schools, ensuring confidentiality and sensitivity, especially for young women? It would be

useful to know whether the government working group on preventing unwanted pregnancies had begun its work, whether it included any young people, and if it had reported any results. She asked whether the measures taken to increase young people's well-being were gender-sensitive. She wondered to what degree the analysis of well-being among young people and the design of adequate responses were intersectoral. She asked how the virtual youth clinic functioned, and whether steps would be taken to ensure that girls and boys could discuss issues in a gender-sensitive way.

32. Mr. PURAS (Country Rapporteur) asked what steps were taken to monitor conditions in alternative care homes, particularly in the light of the two recent cases of girls living in such homes who had committed suicide.

33. Mr. KOTRANE requested additional information on the apparent link between the increase in young people using moist snuff and the level of suicide among young people.

34. Ms. K. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that the Government had invested a great deal of money in improving psychiatric care for children and young people, the effects of which had not yet been seen.

35. An inquiry into abortion and unwanted pregnancy among young people would produce its findings in June 2009. The Government hoped to be able to implement its recommendations in the education and health-care systems.

36. The virtual youth clinic currently registered some 100,000 hits every month, which was an indication of its success. The staff of the centre, both male and female, took a gender-sensitive approach to the issues raised there.

37. Ms. S. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that the National Board of Health and Welfare had conducted a survey of work carried out in youth clinics and other services to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

38. A significant proportion of the 2.7 million SEK being invested in psychiatric care from 2009 to 2011 had been allocated to children and young people. Emphasis was being placed on increased access and early detection of mental illness.

39. Ms. GRANAT (Sweden) said that all pupils were entitled to school health care and social welfare services free of charge. The Government had tasked the National Agency for Education with planning and implementing measures aimed at promoting gender equality in all schools. That would include steps to improve pupils' health and to provide continued professional development on honour traditions and sex and relationship education for teachers and other staff.

40. The Government emphasized the need for schools to provide a secure and peaceful learning environment in order to prevent stress and mental health problems. Reforms had been introduced to that end, focusing on the aims of the curriculum and the testing and assessment of pupils.

41. Ms. S. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that, in 2007, the National Board of Health and Welfare had been assigned to establish a national development centre to disseminate information on the prevention and early identification of mental illness in children and young people. Statistics on the mental health of children and young people would be available once the work described in the reply to question 6 on the list of issues (CRC/C/SWE/Q/4/Add.1) had been completed.

42. Ms. K. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that there was no mandatory national breastfeeding strategy. However, all new mothers were taught how to breastfeed in hospital, and some Swedish hospitals were world-renowned for their breastfeeding strategies. Most babies were breastfed until the age of 6 months.

43. Ms. BJÖRKLUND (Sweden) said that much had been achieved over the previous 15 years to incorporate the Convention into domestic legislation on social services, and significant progress had been made in terms of results.

44. Detailed statistics were not available on the number of drug addicts under the age of 18, or the number who injected drugs. Self-reporting surveys conducted with children in their last year of primary school and the second year of secondary school indicated that between 2 and 3 per cent of young people used drugs regularly. Municipal social services were responsible for assessing the needs of young people who used drugs and providing them with appropriate services, usually at home, on a voluntary basis, and involving the whole family. In the most serious cases, children were placed in residential care units run by the National Board of Institutional Care.

45. The police informed the municipal social services about young offenders, who were by definition under the age of 15. The social services then assessed the young offenders' needs and provided them and their families with relevant assistance. There was increasing awareness of the need to take early action to prevent young offenders from reoffending.

46. Treatment in separation was permitted only in institutions run by the National Board of Institutional Care, and was regulated by the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act. The Board had issued guidelines on the use of treatment in separation, which was for extreme cases only. A case of potential misuse of that treatment had been widely reported in early 2009. The Board had followed it up and in its wake would take steps to clarify the regulations in all its institutions.

47. Responsibility for monitoring the provision of social services would be shifted from the county administrative boards to the National Board of Health and Welfare in January 2010. That should harmonize the process and make it more efficient and independent. The new legislation had introduced a child rights perspective, enabling officers of the Board to talk to children without their parents being present, and to take written note of their views. The officers would be trained to speak to children in an appropriate manner. All institutions would be visited twice a year, one visit being unannounced.

48. Ms. HERCZOG asked whether the monitoring and supervision system the State party planned to introduce would be integrated and intersectoral.

49. Ms. BJÖRKLUND (Sweden) said that it was forbidden under Swedish law to collect statistics on the basis of ethnicity, and therefore none existed. Information was available regarding whether children had been born abroad. However, children of foreign backgrounds did tend to need assistance from social services. That was mostly because of difficult socio-economic and psychological circumstances, and parents out of work or parents who were substance abusers. But if foreign children needing care were compared to Swedish children in similar family situations, there was not much difference: the problem did not seem to be related to national origin.

50. The Government was attempting to identify and care for children in families with alcohol and drug problems that had a need for social services. Many municipalities ran groups for children whose parents were substance abusers. On the other hand, some municipalities were small, and it was difficult to create groups. Efforts were being made to encourage municipalities to cooperate with each other in that respect.

51. A Commission of Inquiry was currently studying the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act and the Social Services Act to see whether they could be merged into one child protection act.

52. Mr. KOOMPAPHANT inquired whether Sweden had national legislation implementing the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and whether it had initiated bilateral or multilateral cooperation with other countries with respect to its implementation of articles 34 and 35 of the Convention.

53. Mr. CITARELLA, noting that there were very high rates of alcohol and tobacco consumption among minors in Sweden, inquired whether any information was available on the implementation of relevant laws banning their use by children.

54. He would also like to know what was the usual time for an asylum request by a child to be processed, and whether children were at liberty or kept in centres while awaiting a decision.

55. Although the Swedish juvenile justice system was exemplary, the Committee was concerned about the practice of holding children in isolation while detained, in order to prevent violence against others. It would like to know, in particular, who made the decision to isolate a child, the police, the judge or the prison establishment, and whether there were specific limits on the amount of time that a child could be so detained.

56. Ms. VILAR, noting that there were increasing numbers of children of non-Swedish origin in single-parent families suffering from poverty in Sweden, said she would like to know the result of measures taken to reduce poverty and inequality in that country.

57. In addition, although the report contained many mentions of violence against children, it did not take a focused approach to that phenomenon. It would be interesting to see a child-rights approach to the prevention of violence against children and to care for child victims of violence, paying attention to the factors that contributed to the various types of violence. She would like to know, in particular, what plans existed to protect girl victims of violence.

58. More information would be welcome on female genital mutilation, the prenatal impact of violence against women, and children who had witnessed violence in the family.

59. It was clear that discrimination, including gender discrimination, fostered violence; in that regard, she would like to know what measures were being taken to combat all forms of discrimination, including heterosexual and homosexual stereotypes.

60. Ms. ORTIZ, observing that the report pointed out that children who had been adopted internationally often manifested psychological problems in adolescence, inquired what recommendations and insights Sweden might be able to offer other countries dealing with similar situations.

61. The report stated that the Intercountry Adoption Intermediation Act required that if an organization involved in intercountry adoptions wished to carry out other activities, they must be kept separate; clarifications would be welcome. She had visited, in Colombia, a Swedish shelter for pregnant girls and in the same location, an adoption facility: what measures were being taken to eliminate such situations?

62. Mr. FILALI said he would like to know what the results were of new legislation banning forced marriage and early marriage in Sweden. He would also like to know whether there were educational measures available for minors who had committed serious crimes, as an alternative to punishment.

The meeting was suspended at 4.50 and resumed at 5.10 p.m.

63. Ms. K. JOHANSSON said that much of the information sought regarding violence against children could be found in the report of Sweden concerning the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In addition, the fourth periodic report under consideration discussed the National action plan against sexual exploitation of children, a summary of which had been provided to the Committee. The full plan could be provided, if the Committee so wished.

64. Ms. BJÖRKLUND said that it was the responsibility of the social services to care for children who had been victims of trafficking. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Sweden and the National Board of Health and Welfare had produced a guide for the social services, the police and the migration authorities, with the title, "Can This Be Trafficking?" Representatives of UNICEF Sweden and the National Board of Health and Welfare were currently travelling around the country introducing the bulletin, with a view to raising awareness about child victims of trafficking and sexual abuse.

65. Turning to bilateral and multilateral cooperation, she said that the Council of the Baltic Sea States had established an expert group on children at risk, which included, among its members, some children who had been trafficked. The Baltic countries, along with Moldavia, Belarus and Ukraine, had set up a system of national contact points and had drafted an agreement regarding protection of such children and safe return to their home countries.

66. The Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act contained a detailed paragraph on the matter of children kept separately from others in places of detention, which had much in common with the Committee's general comment No. 10 on Children's rights in juvenile justice. It stipulated that the separate care measure should be used only in cases in which a child was a danger to others, that the decision should be made by persons in charge of the facility in which the child was held, that the child must be looked after on a regular basis, and that the procedure should not be used as a punishment.

67. The Government was working hard on the problem of drugs; among its measures were the National Alcohol and Drug Action Plans and a bulletin entitled "Free from Abuse". Sweden also had a programme for substance-use self-reports by students, and was participating in the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and other Drugs (ESPAD). Alcohol use among Swedish children had initially risen and then declined, and had currently levelled off. The trend among young people was not to drink, since there were several role models who were abstemious. Sweden had a low rate of alcohol use among minors in comparison with other European countries. Moreover, drug use was declining, and in general drugs were not used intravenously. Finally, she said that a Secretariat was responsible for handling all matters related to the abuse of alcohol, tobacco and narcotics.

68. Mr. STOICAN (Sweden) said that the national action plan to combat sexual exploitation of children included many different measures. The website of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs provided information to travellers on the appropriate action to take if they became aware that children were being sexually exploited. A liaison officer from the Swedish police was working in Bangkok, supporting the embassies of the Nordic countries and coordinating information on the commercial sexual abuse of children. Sweden was also cooperating with the International Criminal Police Organization - Interpol in a three-year project combating the sexual exploitation of children, assisting the police forces of Thailand, Viet Nam and Cambodia. The Government had assisted Brazil's 2008 hosting of the III World Congress against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, and had provided funds for hundreds of children to travel to Rio to attend the Congress.

69. At the domestic level, the Government had initiated dialogue with the tourism sector. The representatives of some private companies were already assisting by disseminating information and urging their staff to remain vigilant. However, the majority felt that it was not their responsibility. Much therefore remained to be done to raise awareness, but the Government was determined to continue its efforts to combat the sexual exploitation of children at home and abroad. The updated version of the national action plan to combat sexual exploitation of children would reflect the outcome of the III World Congress against Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents.

70. Ms. WESTMAN-CLEMENT (Sweden) said that the Migration Board's target for deciding on applications for unaccompanied minors was three months. In 2008, such decisions had taken an average of 174 days to be handed down. The Board was therefore continuing its efforts to meet the target.

71. From 1 July 2006, the municipal authorities had been responsible for providing unaccompanied minors with accommodation, under the agreements they had concluded with the Migration Board. On arrival, the children were placed in group housing; more permanent solutions were sought thereafter if necessary.

72. Mr. OMARSSON (Sweden) said that, while it was widely recognized that it was difficult to define poverty, access to employment was the most important factor for social inclusion. The Government had therefore implemented a series of measures aimed at increasing employment opportunities, several of which targeted young people and immigrants. Tax and income tax reforms had been successful in alleviating the financial needs of low and middle-income groups. The Government had introduced further measures to boost employment in 2008, in an attempt to combat the growing unemployment resulting from the financial and economic crisis. It had also significantly increased its budget allocations to local authorities' welfare systems and social services in 2008 and 2009, and had undertaken to extend that extra assistance if necessary.

73. Reliable statistics on the situation of children were already available, including annual reports and a report submitted every three years to the Children's Ombudsman. The Government had identified areas for improvement, including statistics to monitor and compare children's well-being in different municipalities. As described in the written reply to question 6 on the list of issues (CRC/C/SWE/Q/4/Add.1), a working group had submitted a report containing proposals for a follow-up system using a set of objectives based on the Convention. The proposals were being further developed, and by 2010 indicators should be available to significantly facilitate monitoring and evaluation of the Convention at the local and national level.

74. Ms. GRANAT (Sweden) said that human rights education was an integral part of the civics syllabus in schools. The aim was to ensure that by the end of their compulsory schooling, all pupils were familiar with fundamental democratic values and human rights. The Delegation for Human Rights in Sweden produced learning materials on different aspects of human rights, which were frequently used by teachers and pupils, as was the Delegation's website.

75. The Government had allocated 45 million SEK to evaluating different school anti-bullying programmes and providing in-service training for school staff, based on the most successful programmes.

76. Several measures were taken to protect children and young people from harmful materials available through the media. The Media Council was responsible for working with children and young people to reduce the risk of them encountering such content on the Internet. The Council had also run a campaign with school authorities promoting safe Internet use among young people. The Swedish Data Inspection Board had produced a factsheet indicating the action individuals should take if defamatory or degrading material concerning them was published on the Internet. The Board also took steps to raise awareness of the risks associated with exposing private information on the Internet.

77. Pupils who dropped out of the school system could be educated later in life within the adult education system.

78. Mr. OMARSSON (Sweden) added that, in 2008, the Government had initiated a dialogue with Internet providers and other interested parties from civil society on improving protection for children in new media, such as the Internet and mobile telephones. A meeting in April 2009 had resulted in a joint initiative to establish an Internet portal giving access to all the existing measures and knowledge concerning the protection of children in the new media.

79. Mr. STOICAN (Sweden) said that the current national action plan for human rights covered the period from 2006 to 2009. While there was no specific action plan for children's rights, many of the measures included in the national action plan for human rights focused on the rights of the child. Children's rights would be at the forefront of the third national action plan for human rights, which would be developed in 2010.

80. Many people volunteered to assist with sports clubs for children and young people, and an NGO cooperated with youth clubs to combat bullying in sports. There were numerous parks and playgrounds in Stockholm, and the Government was working with local authorities and NGOs to build more playgrounds and recreational facilities in other parts of the country.

81. Ms. AIDOO asked whether the measures the Government had taken, such as introducing tax reforms, really focused on the inequalities that existed between different communities and between urban and rural areas. The written reply to question 3 on the list of issues made no reference to poverty or inequality. Would the national strategy for quality development through open comparisons in health and social services help combat poverty and inequality? She asked if there were any safety nets in place for families who were already struggling to meet the needs of their children.

82. Ms. K. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that the recent tax reform had benefited low-income taxpayers most. The open comparisons in health and social services were available to the public to enable them to make decisions on which care providers to use. The comparisons were also useful for benchmarking, which would be done in cooperation with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, as they provided most health and social services. There should be less variation in quality of care in future.

83. Ms. BJÖRKLUND (Sweden) said that, under the Social Services Act, people were guaranteed a minimum standard of living. They were therefore eligible for financial support, in accordance with individual means-testing and the national norm decided by the Government each year. Decisions on eligibility took into consideration the best interests of the child.

84. Ms. VARMAH asked whether the sale of tobacco and alcohol to minors was prohibited under domestic legislation.

85. Ms. BJÖRKLUND (Sweden) said that such a law did exist.

86. Mr. KOTRANE asked whether the State party could provide statistics on poverty disaggregated by ethnic or other groups, as it would be useful to learn which groups were most affected by poverty. He would also welcome information on the measures the State party took to prevent child obesity and to assist children who were overweight.

87. Ms. K. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that most child obesity measures had focused on prevention and encouraging a healthy lifestyle. New research had provided the possibility of surgery, which was likely to become more widely used in treating obesity.
88. Mr. STOICAN (Sweden) said that legislation had been introduced prohibiting Swedish organizations that dealt with intercountry adoption from being involved in other cooperation projects. That had been necessary because some countries had offered increased numbers of children for adoption if the organizations contributed more funds for cooperation projects, which amounted to offering children for sale.
89. Ms. K. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that the Government had not renewed its agreement on intercountry adoption with the Government of Viet Nam in 2008. Challenges in Viet Nam had prevented the Swedish authorities from ensuring a safe environment for all the children who were offered for adoption.
90. Mr. PURAS (Country Rapporteur) said that the dialogue with the delegation had been informative and fruitful. The delegation's replies had confirmed Sweden's commitment to human rights and given the Committee a better understanding of the situation of children in Sweden.
91. Ms. K. JOHANSSON (Sweden) said that the Government would study the Committee's recommendations and take them into account in its efforts to improve the situation of all children in Sweden.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.