



**Convention on the
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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Thirty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 811th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Thursday, 19 September 2002, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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Second periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Second periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (CRC/C/83/Add.3; CRC/C/Q/UK/2; HRI/CORE/1/Add.5/Rev.2; written replies of the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the questions in the list of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland took places at the Committee table.
2. Ms. EFUNSHILE (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) said that the State party had sent a large delegation comprising senior officials, which reflected its attachment to dialogue with the Committee and the extent to which responsibilities for the rights of the child had devolved to administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. With devolution, approaches to ensuring children's rights were becoming increasingly varied in the different parts of the United Kingdom.
3. The second periodic report had been drawn up before the beginning of the devolution process, and also before the Government of the United Kingdom had established new structures for the development of policies and services in England. The State party had therefore issued a detailed update report in mid-2002.
4. The Government had recently created the post of Minister for Children and Young People and had established the Children and Young People's Unit, a new body created to coordinate policy and defend children's interests. Those steps had made it possible to review the range of different policies with a single focus on the best interests of the child. The Unit offered for the first time a dedicated government body focusing on the obligations of the State party under the Convention. Similar units had been established in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Youth forums and youth parliaments were being given increasing importance. They included the Unit's advisory forum and associations such as Young Voice in Wales and Article 12 in Scotland, all of which were represented in the delegation. Lastly, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was being enhanced in the development of strategies for children's rights.
5. Both the United Kingdom Government and the administrations of the devolved regions were developing approaches to strategic coordination of services so as to improve the lives of children and young people. The Committee's observations would be useful to them in performing that task.
6. Ms. KARP commended the State party for withdrawing its reservations to the Convention and for ratifying the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). Two legislative texts adopted by the State party, the Human Rights Act and the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, had

come into operation since the last report. In addition, the State party had established a Police Ombudsman's Office for Northern Ireland and various mechanisms to foster consultation.

7. On the other hand, the report itself was very disappointing, as it did not follow the Committee's guidelines and was therefore unduly confusing, complicated and chaotic in its presentation. It was to be hoped that the new Children and Young People's Unit would follow the guidelines more carefully in drafting the next report. The report contained much information on various Green Papers, White Papers and studies, but did not present their results. It gave no account of how compliance with the provisions of the Convention was assessed, or any information on jurisprudence related to the rights of the child. One of the main purposes of the report was to provide both the Committee and the State party with information on the impact of such efforts on the everyday life of children.

8. With the devolution process, the State party had recently undergone significant constitutional changes. Devolution had given rise to inconsistency in both the data provided in the report and the policies pursued in respect of the rights of the child; it was also unclear which issues should be addressed by devolved regions and which by the Government. In addition, the extent of devolution varied from one region to another. It was difficult to maintain a holistic view in such circumstances. In its replies to the list of issues, the State party had mentioned the need for an overarching strategy for children and young people that should be embedded in the Convention. That was a welcome approach, which had been suggested by the Committee in its previous concluding observations. It was regrettable that the Government had not adopted it earlier.

9. Regardless of how devolution might proceed, it was of the utmost importance to recognize that the responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Convention fell upon the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as State party, and not on the devolved regions.

10. The State party had done little to adopt a rights-based approach. Its culture of human rights was still based largely on a philosophy of service, welfare and interest. The tone and language of the report and written replies indicated that the Government did not perceive human rights as justiciable legal obligations to be incorporated in the legislation, but rather as a set of guidelines. Indeed, the word "rights" hardly appeared at all in the domestic legislation. Under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, every treaty was binding on the parties to it, and must be performed by them in good faith. As it had ratified the Convention, the State party was obliged to comply with it and to give it full effect in the domestic legal order. How did the Government intend to ensure that the Convention informed its approach to children's rights? In that connection, it was commendable that the United Kingdom Department for International Development had taken the rights-based approach for its foreign development assistance. The Government should do as much at home.

11. The State party had not paid sufficient attention to the concluding observations issued by the Committee. It had not changed the age of criminal responsibility. The best interests of the child were not addressed in the legislation governing the juvenile justice system. Children expelled from school had no right of appeal, and there were no mandatory hearings prior to expulsion.

12. Most importantly, the recommendations issued by both the Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for the prohibition of corporal punishment had gone unheeded. The State party's acceptance of the principle of reasonable chastisement was clearly a violation of its obligations under the Convention, and by leaving open the threshold of physical violence as a legally-acceptable means of punishment it put the lives of many children at risk. A large number of children died from such violence in the United Kingdom, often because of the accidental use by their parents of excessive force.

13. It had been argued that a prohibition of corporal punishment, while perhaps logical or desirable, would be unpopular and unenforceable, and would violate the rights of parents to raise their children as they saw fit. However, the Committee did not advocate legal action against parents unless there was child abuse, which was already an offence in the United Kingdom. As for public opinion, perhaps the State party should broaden its consultation to include those amenable to such a prohibition, including children.

14. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said that there were considerable shortcomings in the attitude and practice of the Government with regard to coordination at the national level. Although tentative efforts were being made to develop a common framework for dealing with child rights, local governments were frequently left with the responsibility for developing policies and practices. She asked for an explanation of the methods and structure of the new Children and Young People's Unit.

15. It was unclear from the figures provided whether the general increase in expenditure on child education and welfare corresponded to a rise in the proportion of the overall budget allocation. The delegation should provide those statistics, and explain whether greater priority was being attached to children's affairs than had previously been the case. She also required further information on the financing of the Welfare to Work programme. According to the written replies, the number of children living in households with no working adult had fallen by 300,000. Yet it was difficult to assess the significance of that figure without precise details of reduction targets or the numbers that continued to live in conditions of poverty. She asked how the Government defined the poverty line, and whether it was true that 4 million children still lived below it.

16. While she welcomed the idea of a Working Families Tax Credit, she failed to see how it would help the poorest families living on benefits. She asked who exactly the Credits were intended for. With regard to the various Funds that fell outside the scope of the normal budget, she asked how they were distributed and who in particular they benefited.

17. Privatization was affecting many sectors, including education, health and institutions for juvenile offenders. Nevertheless, the Government remained responsible for implementing the Convention, even in areas with private sector involvement. It should ensure that private actors knew about the Convention and respected it. She would be interested to learn how accessibility to services was assessed, and how the impact of government expenditure was evaluated in the context of services with private sector involvement. In particular, she asked whether the Children's Act applied to the private sector.

18. Ms. AL-THANI said she would be interested to learn whether the new strategy described in the opening statement would be based on the approach of the Convention. She expressed concern at the age of criminal responsibility, which was not only very low but also differed from one region to another. It was important to deal with violence among children by addressing root causes rather than simply attributing blame. The delegation should explain whether studies had been undertaken to address the reasons for an increase in violent acts committed by children. Similarly, the age of 13 years was too young for children to begin work, especially since they remained ineligible for the minimum wage.

19. Mr. AL-SHEDDI said that the failure to follow up the Committee's concluding observations concerning the initial report indicated the need for a coordinating body with responsibility for implementing the Convention. It was unclear whether any such body had existed prior to the establishment of the Children and Young People's Unit.

20. He failed to understand why so few efforts had been made to disseminate the Convention, given that, according to a recent study carried out in schools, only 75 per cent of children had ever heard of it. He asked what the Government had planned to remedy that situation. There was also a need for a more comprehensive system of data collection, taking into account all aspects of the child's development.

21. Ms. KHATTAB said it was regrettable that the United Kingdom had maintained its reservation with regard to article 22 of the Convention concerning the status of immigrants. It was also hard to understand that, in such a rich country, one third of the population continued to live in poverty. The impact of poverty was particularly severe on young people, and contributed to high child mortality rates, limited educational and housing opportunities, social exclusion, numerous adolescent pregnancies and cases of domestic violence. She wanted to know what new measures the Government was taking in an attempt to reach its poverty reduction targets.

22. Closely linked to the incidence of poverty was the existence of racial discrimination. Figures showed that black children were three times more likely to be expelled from schools than white children, and six times more likely to receive custodial sentences. Even though the law on illegitimacy had been reformed in Northern Ireland, it was unclear whether discrimination against illegitimate children had actually ceased to exist. She asked for a description of the steps being taken to combat all forms of discrimination, with particular reference to the rights of minorities and asylum-seekers.

23. Ms. SARDENBERG asked whether men were as overrepresented in government as they were in the delegation of the United Kingdom. Most of the delegation also came from departments outside the Children and Young People's Unit. She would be interested to learn whether that was a reflection of the limited scope of the mandate given to the Unit. Despite the failure of the report to show a concerted effort to respond to the concerns expressed by the Committee during consideration of the initial report, she welcomed evidence in the written replies and the opening statement that there was a renewed determination to bring about change. She urged the United Kingdom to use its influential position to raise the profile of children's

rights at the domestic and international levels. It would be interesting to discover whether the Government intended to hold a press conference concerning the current meeting when it returned home. She would welcome an indication that the new political will to promote child rights was set to continue.

24. The situation of the Roma had been mentioned during consideration of the initial report, and recommendations for the benefit of that group had also been addressed to the United Kingdom by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. She welcomed the fact that the Race Relations Act had recognized the status of the Roma as a racial group. Instances were still being reported, however, of discrimination, particularly with regard to education and health, and there was no legislation to protect freedom of movement by the Roma - for example, by requiring local authorities to provide accommodation and other facilities for travelling groups.

25. Ms. KARP asked for details about the cabinet committee mentioned by the delegation, including its terms of reference, and whether its work related to England only or to other regions of the United Kingdom.

26. Concerning the reasons given why the delegation had not withdrawn its reservations to the Convention, particularly with regard to the question of girls kept in secure locations, it seemed that most of the work undertaken to deal with the situation had already been completed. She failed to understand, therefore, why lack of resources should be a reason adduced, and asked whether the delegation could indicate when a withdrawal of its reservation could be expected. With regard to the reservation relating to nationality and immigration, many countries had legislation to control immigration but had not made reservations on that account, and she saw no reason why the United Kingdom should do so. She understood that the United Kingdom had a process of evaluating compatibility with other international instruments, and wondered whether the reservations could be reviewed in that context with a view to withdrawal.

27. The CHAIRPERSON, referring to the question of corporal punishment of children, noted the delegation's statement to the effect that the Human Rights Act made specific legislation unnecessary. In a recent case heard before the European Court of Human Rights, however, the Court had commented that United Kingdom legislation was not adequate for the physical protection of children. He asked how children were in fact protected under the Human Rights Act, and expressed surprise at the State party's apparent unwillingness to remove the concept of "reasonable chastisement" still recognized under the Act.

The meeting was suspended at 11.35 a.m. and resumed at 11.55 a.m.

28. Ms. EFUNSHILE (United Kingdom) said that the Children and Young People's Unit was a cross-government body, not part of the Department for Education and Skills, although the Secretary of State for that department was the responsible cabinet minister. The Unit, which had a separate, dedicated budget, consisted of officials from all government sectors as well as representatives of outside bodies, local authorities and the voluntary sector. It reported to a cross-cabinet subcommittee, of which the Chancellor of the Exchequer was chairman and the Home Secretary a vice-chairman. The major government departments were represented on it, largely at Secretary of State level, which reflected the importance the Government attached to

the Unit. A document on the Unit's overarching strategy, to be published shortly, would set out a collective vision on childhood and youth, also reflecting views obtained through consultation with parents, children and young persons, academics, service providers and others. It would outline the principles that should underpin services for young persons, drawing on the importance of the Convention's provisions; it would also set long-term targets in fields such as health and emotional well-being, fulfilment and protection, together with indicators for the Unit's task of monitoring and periodic reporting.

29. Ms. KARP asked whether the overarching strategy would apply throughout all regions of the United Kingdom, what legal status the policy would have and whether the reference to the Convention's provisions implied that they would be incorporated into domestic legislation. She was also concerned that, since the Unit was a part of the Department for Education and Skills, its scope might not extend to certain vulnerable groups outside the education system.

30. The CHAIRPERSON requested details about coordination with the devolved regions, because of disparities which caused the Committee some concern.

31. Ms. SARDENBERG said she had not meant to imply earlier that the Unit was involved only in matters of education; she had simply noticed that many members of the delegation were associated with the Department for Education and Skills.

32. Ms. EFUNSHILE (United Kingdom) said that although the Unit was located in that department for administrative purposes, its purview extended to all sectors and its tasks were reflected in the overarching strategy. With regard to regional coordination, the important point about devolution was that different policy developments would reflect different legal, traditional and cultural systems; the ability of each administration to take its own decisions on how to implement the principles of the Convention was fundamental to the democratic process. As had been seen, responses differed, but the Unit monitored them all, and the Government felt that the various approaches were all appropriate to the Convention's implementation. The Unit coordinated a quarterly inter-administration meeting to consider matters relating to the Convention, European Union business and other questions; it also held regular bilateral meetings with the individual administrations. The ministers of the four administrations also met whenever it was thought beneficial; during the current week such a meeting had been held on child poverty questions. Matters were reviewed as they developed.

33. Mr. MACLEAN (United Kingdom) said that measures in Scotland were similar to those in England. The departmental structure was purely administrative. There was a parliamentary committee, whose mandate included children's and young persons' issues, which scrutinized and took evidence from young persons, NGOs and other relevant bodies. The First Minister chaired a cabinet committee on the subject, thus showing the importance he attached to youth issues. There was also a quarterly meeting of ministers to ensure that all matters relating to children and young persons were addressed. He himself headed the group of divisions on children's and young persons' issues. In 1991, a report, For Scotland's Children, had been published identifying a clear agenda for action and a strategy that included consultation with NGOs, local authorities and other public sector elements. It was realized, however, that much more could be done, including more involvement of young persons and children in decision-making. Local authorities were required to have schemes for children's services; for that purpose his services

worked closely with local authorities, the police and other public bodies, and an increasing fund was being earmarked for children's services, especially for the needs of vulnerable children and families.

34. Mr. BURDETT (United Kingdom) said that the system in Wales was similar to those already described. There was a cabinet subcommittee, attended by the First Minister and other Ministers, on cross-cutting issues. In addition, the Minister for Children and Minister for Young Persons held monthly bilateral meetings. A document, Framework for Partnership in 2000 had been published, setting out core principles which clearly mentioned the Convention's provisions as well as proposals for participation of children and for local partnership between statutory and voluntary bodies. Guidelines had been issued for plans, which the Assembly had formally adopted. The first set of plans, which stressed the importance of the Convention's provisions, would shortly be available; provision was made for a system of annual updating in each local authority's area.

35. Mr. STEWART (United Kingdom) said that similar arrangements existed in Northern Ireland, although not yet as advanced as in the other regions. Overall responsibility for children's and young persons' affairs lay with the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister. There was a unit similar to the one based in London; it coordinated the development of policy and legislation and the delivery of services, and its mandate cut across all departments. It also had links with a forum of NGOs; an advisory forum for children and young persons was to be established the following month. The unit's responsibility included the development of proposals for an overarching 10-year strategy, similar in many respects to that already described, and firmly based on rights.

36. Replying to observations by Ms. Karp, he said that the United Kingdom Government intended to devolve provincial responsibility for police and criminal justice matters to the Northern Ireland administration; the timing would depend, however, on political developments. The mandate of the Commissioner for Children would, in most respects, be the same as in the other devolved regions, although some approaches would differ in accordance with local conditions. It had been made plain, in the proposals, that the Commission's priority would be the best interests of children and young persons, but that legislation would necessarily depend on the wider interests of society.

37. Ms. EFUNSHILE (United Kingdom) said that two important principles would be observed: coordination throughout the regions and respect for the rights of a democratically elected body. She agreed that the report had been rather difficult to read; the Unit had not existed at the time of its preparation, which meant that a central focus for coordination of measures to implement the Convention had been lacking. The overarching strategy would not be a piece of legislation; according to article 4, however, States parties could take not only legislative but administrative and other measures for implementation of the rights recognized in the Convention. While recognizing the importance of the Convention's provisions, for example those contained in article 24, the United Kingdom did not view them as rights appropriately implemented by legislation or administrative procedures; what mattered was their true impact. Therefore, although not intending to incorporate the Convention's provisions into domestic law,

the United Kingdom did agree on the importance of implementing them and saw the overarching strategy as a particularly important means of doing so. As indicated in the information provided from the various devolved regions, all measures would be firmly linked to commitments undertaken pursuant to the Convention.

38. Ms. KARP said that while it was true that the impact of the provisions of the Convention was paramount, she did not agree that there was no need for the rights of the child to be enshrined in domestic law. The Committee's general principles - namely non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development and respect for the views of the child - should be considered key guidelines for all government action, and their application should not depend on goodwill alone.

39. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said she would like to know whether the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health was justiciable.

40. Ms. EFUNSHILE (United Kingdom) said that incorporating the provisions of the Convention into domestic law did not necessarily lead to their realization. While not considering such a right to be justiciable, the Government endeavoured to pursue policies that aspired towards guaranteeing it. With regard to the fundamental principle of the best interests of the child, it was difficult to take a "one size fits all" approach. In a broad range of crucial areas relating to the obligations of public bodies, the principle did have a legal underpinning. However, in other areas the Government attached more importance to pursuing its objectives through the implementation and evaluation of standards and principles. Policy makers and service providers adhered to those standards and principles not just out of goodwill, but because they were closely monitored. In its work to develop the overarching strategy, her Government would set the best interests of the child as a guiding principle.

41. Mr. CLARK (United Kingdom) said that the Children Act applicable to England and Wales was based on the fundamental principle that the child's best interest was the paramount consideration in all court cases involving children, whether in private or public law matters. A parallel version of the principle was contained in the Northern Ireland Children Order. Part III of the Children Act made it the general duty of local authorities to assess the needs of children and families living in their area and to provide services in terms of family support. They were responsible for addressing the needs of the individual child with a view to safeguarding the child's welfare, primarily within the context of the child's own family and with minimal State intervention.

42. In reply to a question on the applicability of the Children Act to the private sector, he said that when the Act had first come into force, health, education and social care services had been provided by local governments, the voluntary sector and the private sector with a patchwork of different standards and regulations. Various child abuse scandals in the 1970s and 1980s had highlighted the inconsistencies in the system and efforts had been made since then to create a more consistent and fair system for service providers and users. The Care Standards Act 2000 had been developed (and was awaiting full implementation) to create a level playing field for service providers. It had created an independent National Care Standards Commission

to apply regulations without fear or favour in the various sectors covered by the law, including adoption services, boarding schools and private health services for children. Commission inspectors routinely inspected all such services.

43. Ms. KARP requested further details about the High Court challenge that the Government was currently facing by the Howard League for Penal Reform for refusing to apply the Children Act to prisons. As far as most local authorities were concerned, once a child went into custody, they had no further obligation towards him or her until the child was released, and as a result many children were being denied the special support and education they needed. She would be interested to hear the Government's view on the matter, especially considering that the best interests of the child were supposed to be a primary consideration.

44. Mr. HICKSON (United Kingdom) said that the substance of the argument was whether or not the Children Act applied by law to juvenile justice establishments; the Government's opinion was that it did not, but it was for the Court to decide. However, juvenile justice establishments did aim to apply the general principles of the Children Act.

45. Mr. CLARK (United Kingdom) said it was important to bear in mind that the Children Act made the best interests of the child a paramount consideration, not just a primary one. The Children Act placed responsibilities on local authorities regarding children in need whether or not the child happened to be in custody. The responsibilities applied in particular to children awaiting release into the community. It was true, however, that the provision of aid within the home to a disabled child could not continue to have practical effect during the period that the child might spend in prison.

46. Ms. KARP said she failed to understand why the placement of children took priority over the need to provide them with special education and support. Children leaving detention centres faced many difficulties because they had been deprived of education and support during their period of detention.

47. Mr. HICKSON (United Kingdom) said that while his Government had an obligation to provide as high a level of education as possible to all children in custody, he recognized that there was still a long way to go before the Government reached its target of providing all children with 30 hours of high quality education and occupation per week by 2004. Departmental responsibility for the provision of education in custody was currently being shifted; the Department for Education and Skills had taken over the budget for custodial provision and was considering how the resources and quality of local education authorities could be applied to custodial education and how the transition between custody and education in the community could be better managed.

48. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ asked whether the planning of community services was based on local affordability rather than need, as was the case in many other European countries.

49. Mr. CLARK (United Kingdom) said that the assessment of children's needs at local authority level was inevitably constrained by the finite nature of financial resources. Two thirds of the local expenditure on children's social care was provided by the central Government. Each local authority was responsible for raising the remaining third and for setting its own priorities

with regard to the allocation of funds. However, local activities were closely monitored by a comprehensive performance assessment process based on public service agreement targets and rolling programmes of inspections by a range of statutory inspectorates.

50. With regard to the connection made by one Committee member between corporal punishment and the frequency of child deaths in the home, he said that although the two issues were not synonymous, they might be linked in certain cases. While it was difficult to provide precise figures, it was generally agreed that between 50 and 100 children died each year at the hands of their parents or carers. However, according to some reports, the number of such deaths in the United Kingdom had decreased more swiftly over the previous 30 years than in any other country in Europe, and the severity and frequency of the physical punishment and abuse of children was in decline.

51. The CHAIRPERSON said he would be interested to learn whether the State party had considered introducing child death review teams, such as those in the United States of America, to investigate suspicious cases of child death within the family. He invited the members of the Committee to ask questions about civil rights and freedoms and family environment and alternative care.

52. Ms. KARP expressed concern that a significant number of children had been killed or injured by the plastic bullets fired by the police in Northern Ireland. There seemed to be a severe lack of knowledge about the guidelines for using such bullets. It would be interesting to learn whether the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission had made any recommendations to control the use of plastic bullets and whether the Government had drawn any conclusions from the fact that it had been forced to pay out huge sums of money in settlements of claims for injury by such bullets.

53. She also expressed concern about the failure of the authorities to strike a balance between the best interests of the child and the right to demonstrate during the violent protests that had taken place at the Holy Cross school in Belfast in September 2001, when Catholic schoolchildren had been attacked by Protestants as they made their way to school. She expressed disappointment that the primary concern of the police had been to respect the right of the protestors to demonstrate and that the right of the children to go to school had taken second place. Further information should be provided about the State party's position on the subject.

54. She welcomed the fact that legislation had been changed to make racist attacks and the harassment of minority groups a more serious offence. It would be useful to know whether the police in all regions - and in particular the new Northern Ireland police force - received training with regard to children's rights. Lastly, concerns had been raised by various groups about the fact that in some parts of the United Kingdom, legislation existed that prevented local authorities from providing support and information to young homosexuals, lesbians and transsexuals. It would be interesting to know whether the Government intended to introduce any policies that would help young people to express their true identity.

55. Ms. KHATTAB said that although some positive steps had been taken to improve the family environment, the State party continued to take an excessively conservative approach towards children. It was essential for the Government to look more closely at the symptoms of

domestic violence and at the levels of violence in schools and institutions. Violence among children also needed to be addressed. The Government had been promising for a long time to address the issue of teenage pregnancies, which should be considered a by-product of the family environment and the failure of parents to instil in their children a feeling of self-esteem and dignity; more specific details should be provided of what the Government planned to do, especially in terms of education.

56. Education did not enjoy the status it deserved, which was a major shortcoming given that it was the key to addressing all of the problems mentioned in the course of the discussion. Education should be compatible with the environment of the child. For example, children in institutions needed to be provided with the education and care that would allow them to lead a normal life after they had been released. Further attention should be paid to providing follow-up care to children who had been released from State institutions. Such children were overrepresented among the homeless and rough sleepers, and although the Government was taking action to address the problem, attention should be given to prevention rather than to cure. She was particularly concerned that the rights of minors aged between 16 and 18 years old were not being respected. Parental education was equally important and needed greater attention.

57. On the issue of adoption, she said that the child's right of consent in adoption hearings needed greater protection. The question of drug abuse had not been adequately addressed, even though it was closely linked to the issues of education and family environment. She expressed concern that crimes committed against children under the age of 16 years had not been recorded in the British Crime Survey, as children needed to be informed about their rights. The Family Law Act 1996 of England and Wales was a positive step forward. She would be interested to know whether the Act would lead to the establishment of a family court system. Further clarification was needed of the Act's provision that required the court to consider whether to use its powers under the Children Act to delay divorce proceedings in cases where children's welfare would be affected. It would be interesting to learn on what criteria the court based its decision.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.