



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2212th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 29 May 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Aho Assouma (Vice-Chair)

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

Consideration of reports of States parties *(continued)*

*Combined second to fourth periodic reports of Antigua and Barbuda
(CRC/C/ATG/2-4; CRC/C/ATG/Q/2-4 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Hyman** (Antigua and Barbuda), introducing her country's combined second to fourth periodic reports (CRC/C/ATG/2-4), said that the National Human Rights Institute was still in the process of being set up. In view of the size of the population and the limited resources available, the most suitable model would be a single human rights body, with subcommittees dedicated to each vulnerable group.
3. The Government intended to increase the age of criminal responsibility to 12, in line with the other members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). Discussions had been held with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in that regard. The Child Justice Act 2015 established a diversionary programme; enquiries were conducted into juvenile suspects' backgrounds and family circumstances to determine what support could be given to deter recurrent criminal behaviour before any charges were brought. Since the Domestic Violence Act 2015, police officers who had been called to a house had the power to remove the perceived aggressor, even where assistance was refused, if women or children were likely to be harmed.
4. The establishment of a family court was nearing completion, and there was a magistrate appointed to deal with family matters. The family court would be housed in a separate building and would have its own administrative staff and clerks. Furthermore, a family bill had been drafted and a committee, consisting of an attorney, social workers, probation officers and other stakeholders, had been set up to draw up the rules and regulations for family courts.
5. The Status of Children Act 2015 had abolished the concepts of legitimate and illegitimate children, thus affording all children equal rights before the law, including inheritance rights. The Child (Care and Adoption) Act 2015 and the Child Justice Act 2015 aimed to provide comprehensive assistance to children by assessing their family situation rather than just the children themselves. Minors over a certain age had the right to be heard when decisions concerning them were being made.
6. The Police Youth Intervention Unit had been set up to prevent young people from coming into conflict with the law. Children could be referred to the Unit by parents or teachers, and the Unit's officers would befriend and counsel the children to help keep them on the right path. The country was also part of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) initiative aimed at reducing violence in schools and the community.
7. Several programmes were in place to educate children about alcohol and drug abuse, including a five-week programme by Crossroads Centre Antigua, a drug rehabilitation centre, and the Drug Awareness, Resistance, Education (DARE) programme run by police officers, mainly in primary schools.
8. Laws were in place to protect young people, particularly girls, from sexual exploitation, and long custodial sentences were imposed on those found guilty of rape, incest or sexual assault. The media was prohibited from printing the name of the victims of sexual assault by law, and the perpetrator was not named unless convicted. However, in cases of incest, both victims' and perpetrators' identities were protected, given the country's small population. Judges and the police had received training in issues pertaining to women and children. A special police unit dealt with sexual offences. Social protection programmes were in place to support vulnerable and low-income families.
9. **Mr. Nelson** (Country Rapporteur) said that he wished to know when the legislation setting up a family court would be enacted and what measures were in place to train judges and support staff in that area. Would there be child advocates?

10. He welcomed the measures introduced under the Child Justice Act 2015, though he would like to know whether a Child Justice Board had been set up, and if so, how many cases had been brought before the Board. He also asked whether any assessment or secure residential facilities, as provided for in the Act, had been established in practice, and if so, how many children had been referred to such facilities.

11. In view of the fact that the State party's reply to the list of issues (CRC/C/ATG/Q/2-4/Add.1) stated that the National Child Protection Committee (NCPC) had not been in operation since 2014, he would like to know whether the committee had ever operated, and what its functions and composition were. He would also welcome an explanation as to the meaning of the phrase "legislation [...] needs to be amended so as to facilitate the implementation of the NCPC" in paragraph 10 of the reply to the list of issues (CRC/C/ATG/Q/2-4/Add.1). Did further steps need to be taken, and how much longer would they take? Noting that the National Child Protection Policy dated back to 2009, he asked whether it had since been updated and what the aims of the protection policy were. He wished to know whether the 2007 National Youth Policy, which had taken into account the views of young people, had been implemented, or if it had been discarded and whether another policy had been adopted to replace it.

12. It would be helpful if the delegation could comment on the specific budget allocated to promote children's rights and related issues. What proportion of the national budget would be allocated to such issues generally? How much of the budget would be allocated specifically to help children with disabilities and from poor families in "deplorable living conditions", without basic amenities such as electricity and water, as mentioned in paragraph 70 of the reply to the list of issues?

13. Regarding the idea of having a specific subcommittee for children's rights, he asked when efforts would be made in that regard, and what the plans were. Who would be on the committee?

14. He wished to know whether any specific training was given on the Convention on the Rights of the Child to professionals who worked with children, and whether the Convention was available to schoolchildren, for example in the form of pamphlets, or whether it was part of the school curriculum. He would also like the delegation to state whether the Convention was translated into the local language and was freely available to children and the general public.

15. Given that paragraph 40 of the State party's report said that the various legal definitions of the child across the country's laws had yet to be harmonized, he would like to know what steps had been taken to that end. He asked whether there had been any moves towards increasing the age at which children could marry, which was currently 15 with their parents' consent.

16. Reports received by the Committee had found that children with disabilities and those of migrant or poor families faced discrimination in terms of access to health care and education. The Committee would thus welcome information on the measures taken to address that situation and on any public awareness-raising measures in that regard.

17. He commended the initiative concerning respect for the views of the child, notably youth leadership workshops and a radio programme run by and for young people called "Youth Connect". He wished to know whether those programmes were ongoing and whether any similar initiatives had been taken.

18. Although freedom of religion was guaranteed by the Constitution, Christian prayers were held in the morning before school started. He wondered whether children had ever refused to take part in such prayers on religious grounds, what had or would have been done in such a situation, and whether there were instructions for schools to cover such an eventuality. He also asked whether there were any restrictions on school demonstrations by young people, in view of recent demonstrations concerning fees and admissibility criteria.

19. He wished to know whether there were any programmes to raise awareness among children and the general public concerning the inappropriate use of the Internet, namely access to online pornography.

20. He enquired as to when the provision permitting corporal punishment would be removed from the Education Act. He also sought confirmation that there was as yet no specific provision in the law prohibiting the mental or physical torture of children. He would appreciate information on the number and type of cases and complaints handled by the special sex offences unit of the police force. How many prosecutions had there been? Was it true that there was a low prosecution rate of offences involving children, and if so, why? He wished to know whether there were shelters for child victims of crime, and if so, who ran and financed them. Were fully trained staff available? He would appreciate clarification as to what would happen to the child in incest cases where the perpetrator was the father or other close family member. Would the child be removed from the family and if so, where would he or she be taken? Would the offender be removed?

21. Finally, he wished to know whether helplines were available, and who operated them. Were they available at any time? What happened when calls were received?

22. **Ms. Skelton** (Country Rapporteur) said that she commended the State party for its enactment of the Child (Care and Adoption) Act 2015. The previous law had never been fully implemented, since the Child Protection Agency had not been set up. She would thus like to know whether the law had been fully costed and whether it had a specific budget of its own.

23. **Ms. Aldoseri** said that she would like information on the measures taken to enforce the Status of Children Act 2015, for example by providing paternity tests free of charge to poor mothers. Such tests were subsidized, but were often still too expensive, according to paragraph 68 of the State party's report. Furthermore, if a baby's father was unknown, a dash would be entered on the birth certificate in the place of a name. Since simply having a dash in the place of a parent's name could be a source of stigma for children in school, it would be helpful to know what efforts had been made to replace the dash with a name.

24. **Ms. Todorova** said that she welcomed the projects to reduce corporal punishment in schools, namely the "Child-Friendly Schools" programme sponsored by UNICEF, and would like to know whether there were plans to extend the projects to other schools. She also wished to know whether the Government intended to tackle the issue of corporal punishment within the family. Were awareness campaigns conducted or was training available for parents? In view of recent media initiatives to shed light on stories of sexual abuse, she enquired whether similar action would be taken for corporal punishment. Lastly, regarding child victims of abuse, it would be helpful to know what services were available to such children other than shelters.

25. **Ms. Khazova** said that, in spite of the numerous pieces of legislation that had been passed recently to protect children's rights, there were many laws that had been enacted before the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been adopted by the State party and that still remained in force. She would thus like to know whether, in the event of contradictions between the Convention and those laws that had been introduced previously, the courts would be able to invoke the Convention directly, rather than apply the outdated law.

The meeting was suspended at 10.45 a.m. and resumed at 11.10 a.m.

26. **Ms. Hyman** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that it was clearly stated in the country's Childcare and Adoption Act (2015) that anyone under 18 years of age was deemed a child. In some cases, parents could be required to support their children up to the age of 25. The issue of raising the age of criminal responsibility had been discussed with the Minister of Social Transformation, who had provided assurances that it would be addressed. In any event, any child who committed a crime would be dealt with very differently from an adult who committed a similar crime. The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States was supporting the country's efforts to develop a family court, and a number of judicial and other officials had received training in areas related to family law.

27. The Childcare and Adoption Committee would be holding its first meeting in the coming days. Pending the first meeting of the Child Justice Board, the matters it would be responsible for were attended to by the magistrates who specialized in juvenile justice, with the assistance of probation officers, social workers, teachers and other relevant personnel.

Assessments of particular child protection cases were carried out by trained personnel. The draft of the National Child Protection Policy had been sent for comment to UNICEF. The Department of Youth Affairs of the Ministry of Social Transformation ran a number of programmes, including for at-risk youth. The authorities encouraged young people, some of whom participated in the youth parliament, to take an interest in governance.

28. Antigua and Barbuda did not have a separate budget for children's affairs. Instead, individual departments were allocated the funds that enabled them to fulfil their mandates. Families could apply to the Ministry of Social Transformation's Board of Guardians for a stipend, and a means-tested debit card issued as a part of a Petrocaribe scheme enabled beneficiaries to buy basics at cooperating supermarkets in both rural and urban areas. Stipends were also made available to foster parents.

29. Seventy percent of social workers and probation officers had university degrees, and while in service they continued to receive training, including from UNICEF and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. As part of the Juvenile Justice Reform Project, which had been in place for five years, young people in conflict with the law were given the support they needed to lead productive lives.

30. Radio and television programmes, including popular call-in programmes, were used to raise awareness of children's rights. All such awareness-raising efforts were made in English, which was the language of the country. There were no indigenous people who spoke any other language. There was a small group of Spanish speakers, however, whose members were assisted, as appropriate, by Spanish-speaking public servants.

31. The Marriage Act had been inherited from the country's colonial masters. Child marriages were in no way a problem in Antigua and Barbuda, although it was possible that the Government should consider repealing the provision of the Act that allowed children of 16 to marry with parental consent.

32. Migrant children could enrol in school once they had submitted health cards showing that they had been properly vaccinated, a condition that also applied to children born in the country. Public schools accepted new students twice a year. Although Antigua and Barbuda was a predominantly Christian country, the existence of persons of other faiths had never posed a problem. The children of Jehovah's Witnesses, for instance, did not participate in morning prayers in the schools. The schools were currently phasing out corporal punishment, could be administered only by a head teacher and only in specific circumstances. A complete ban on corporal punishment was likely to require an amendment to the Education Act (2008). Any such amendment would be made with the Convention in mind.

33. Although Antigua and Barbuda did not have a law establishing violence against children as an offence in its own right, people who committed such acts of violence were charged under the Offences against the Person Act and dealt with accordingly. Children who were sexually abused by a male family member were taken from their families only if the mother was complicit in the abuse. It was nearly always the abuser who was removed, and if an alleged abuser was granted bail, conditions were attached. If the conditions were not respected, bail would be revoked.

34. The media were warned not to release the names of children involved in court cases concerning sexual offences. In such cases, video statements could be taken from victims or witnesses, and only the parties to the proceedings were allowed in the courtroom. The police were sometimes criticized for moving too slowly in cases of alleged sexual abuse, but it should be borne in mind that victims and witnesses were sometimes under pressure by their families not to provide statements. In general, however, such cases were prosecuted, and the sentences handed down were harsh.

35. The judges who heard cases involving minors were highly qualified. They had received a considerable amount of training, including from international agencies. They did their utmost to make children feel comfortable in what was a most uncomfortable situation, even for adults. The courts could appoint an advocate to represent the interests of children involved in legal proceedings. In dealing with children, the country's judges followed the principles of the Convention.

36. A domestic violence hotline was operated by the Directorate of Gender Affairs. Another hotline was operated by the Family and Social Services Division. Users of the latter line were often advised to visit the Division's offices, where a decision regarding any additional assistance necessary could be made.

37. Paternity tests were expensive, so the Government was unlikely to offer them free of charge. Although having a dash in place of one's father's name on one's birth certificate carried a stigma, the State could not determine who a child's father was without the assistance of the mother. Information on the number of prosecutions of cases of sexual offences against children would be provided in writing.

38. **The Chair** said that the delegation should indicate whether the State party had any programmes to combat alcohol and drug abuse by minors.

39. **Mr. Nelson** said that the statistics on sexual abuse cases from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions would be welcome. It would also be interesting to have figures for cases involving non-sexual domestic violence and neglect. Following up to the head of delegation's remarks on the State party's budgeting practices, he asked whether any allocations were made specifically for projects or programmes for children. In addition, he wished to know whether non-Christian children were explicitly told that they were not required to participate in, for example, morning Christian services.

40. **Ms. Hyman** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that the decision to attend morning assembly should be made by children and their parents. The schools honoured any request not to attend. The percentage of the budget devoted specifically to children's affairs could not be clearly identified. Efforts were nonetheless made to ensure that sufficient funds were available for public projects or programmes relating to children.

41. The country ran programmes to educate young people and adults on the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. One such programme, administered by police officers, was conducted in primary schools. Magistrates could order young people charged with offences involving drugs or alcohol into rehabilitation programmes run by a substance abuse prevention officer.

42. **The Chair** said that she wished to know what steps the State party took to attend to children who were victims of violence, who were often forgotten.

43. **Ms. Byers** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that a number of agencies sought to assist young victims of violence. The Family and Social Services Division, which had a robust counselling unit and provided counselling not only for victims but also for their parents and siblings, was one such agency. The Division's counsellors worked closely with school counsellors, and in the community support services were often provided by non-governmental organizations, many of them faith-based. In the past, child victims of violence had often been ignored, as the focus had been on the perpetrators. There had been a change, however, and the reports the Division's social workers and other personnel submitted to judges hearing cases involving violence against children currently emphasized the impact on the victim.

44. **Ms. Hyman** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that once the perpetrators had been identified by schools, neighbours or other sources, they were invariably prosecuted. Incest was not a highly prevalent phenomenon. Where instances were reported and confirmed, harsh penalties of up to 20 years' imprisonment were imposed on the offenders.

45. **Ms. Todorova**, noting that the reporting of domestic violence was mandatory, asked whether the obligation was applicable only to the general public or also to members of specific professions such as doctors and lawyers. She wished to know whether any programmes or campaigns had been launched to target domestic violence, to change parents' attitudes and to promote positive methods of discipline. Noting that child advocates were to be appointed to represent children's rights in court, she asked whether judges were willing to hear children's views in person or through other means.

46. **Mr. Nelson** enquired about the prospective timetable for setting up a subcommittee of the national human rights institution to focus on children's rights. A subcommittee

would, in his view, be somewhat problematic. A more traditional approach would be to appoint a children's ombudsman with support staff.

47. He asked whether copies of the Convention were freely available and widely disseminated. UNICEF, for instance, would be willing to dispatch a large quantity of child-friendly versions for distribution in schools.

48. **The Chair** enquired about the supply of drinking water.

49. **Ms. Hyman** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that water standpipes had been installed in all villages and access to the water was free of charge.

50. She was unable to provide a timetable for the establishment of a subcommittee or other body to support children's rights, but she assumed that a period of 12 months would be sufficient. An Ombudsman's Office already existed, but the authorities could look into the possibility of establishing an ombudsman specifically for children's rights, or perhaps for both children's and women's rights. She welcomed the recommendation to request child-friendly versions of the Convention from UNICEF and would pass on the idea to the relevant authorities.

51. All medical staff, nurses and teachers were required to report cases of domestic violence. Professionals such as social workers, probation officers, police and magistrates participated in parenting programmes designed to assist parents in dealing with their children without resorting to violence. The efficacy of child advocates depended on the merits of the case and on children's ability to express themselves and to highlight relevant issues. Some children might feel less confident, but in any case judges were willing to listen to their views.

52. **Ms. Byers** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that the Family and Social Services Division had been restructured and modernized in the light of the Convention. Children's best interests were now always given priority. In August 2017 the Division would launch a countrywide campaign to encourage stakeholders to address issues relating to mandatory reporting of domestic violence. The very first case involving a newly appointed child advocate was taking place that day.

53. UNICEF, the Organisation of East Caribbean States (OECS) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) had supported many projects aimed at empowering children and families, and rehabilitating children in conflict with the law. They included the Aggression Replacement Training (ART) programme, the psycho-educational programme DARE to be Different, and programmes on restorative practices and mentoring. In addition, a media programme to curb violence was run by the Directorate of Gender Affairs.

54. **Ms. Sandberg** asked whether there was a child-friendly hotline through which cases of violence could be reported on a 24-hour and seven-day basis.

55. **Ms. Byers** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that the Family and Social Services Division hotline existed and was easy to use.

56. **Ms. Sandberg** asked whether children were aware of its existence and, if so, how frequently they used it. When an incident was reported, was it referred to the police or to child support services?

57. **Ms. Byers** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that even if children were unaware of the existence of the hotline, they knew where the relevant office was located. The radio and television stations had been requested to publicize the hotline number.

58. **The Chair** asked whether there was a body tasked with coordinating the diverse programmes and projects that were currently being implemented.

59. **Mr. Madi** noted that although judges would hear children's views if they expressed the wish to speak, they should actually solicit children's views rather than wait for them to come forward.

60. **Ms. Hyman** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that if children were aged between 6 and 8 years, a judge would not solicit their views but the child advocate would speak on their behalf.

61. **Ms. Byers** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that the Probation Unit of the Ministry of Health, Social Transformation and Consumer Affairs contained a Diversion Section, which coordinated most of the programmes currently being implemented. An Assessment Unit referred vulnerable young people to the Diversion Section, which sent them to agencies such as the Gilbert Agricultural and Rural Development Centre or the Antigua and Barbuda Institute of Continuing Education. Young people were diverted for rehabilitation in order to acquire skills in areas such as plumbing, construction, sewing or hairdressing.

62. **Mr. Nelson** said that children required a tremendous amount of courage to speak out and file a complaint, especially concerning family violence. They should, however, be encouraged to do so, and their confidence should be enhanced by publicizing the hotline and by reassuring them that they would be treated with respect and that the information would remain confidential. He reiterated his question regarding children's online access to inappropriate pornographic and other material.

63. **Ms. Aldoseri** requested further information regarding birth certificates for children whose father was unknown. For instance, could a certificate be issued with a dash in the slot for the father's name?

64. **Ms. Hyman** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that paternity tests could not be conducted if the mother refused to identify the father, and it was difficult to compel women to cooperate. On one occasion, a paternity test had demonstrated that the man identified by the mother was not the father. The slot could, however, be left empty. If the mother's relationship with the father was later resolved, an affidavit could be filed and a birth certificate issued.

65. Online abuse was criminalized in the Electronic Crimes Act 2013. The issue of pornographic images, for instance on mobile phones, had been raised among young people in secondary schools and elsewhere, and they had been alerted to the risks stemming from the propagation of such images.

66. **Ms. Byers** (Antigua and Barbuda) said that the young people concerned were referred to the Diversion Section for counselling.

67. **Mr. Nelson** encouraged the State party to promote preventive awareness-raising campaigns regarding the risks involved in propagating inappropriate images rather than merely reacting to cases that came to light.

68. **Ms. Hyman** (Antigua and Barbuda) concurred with the proposal, citing the principle that prevention was better than cure.

69. **Ms. Skelton** asked whether the costs of the Child Care and Adoption Act had been assessed before it entered into effect and whether the budget for social services had been increased to support its implementation, for instance in the areas of foster care and adoption services. The Act required the Director of the Family and Social Services Division to undertake most of the functions. As many of the tasks would presumably be delegated to social workers, she asked whether the State party had sufficient social workers to fulfil those tasks and, if not, whether it was taking steps to increase their number.

70. Given that foster care was formalized under the Act, she asked whether all cases would go through court proceedings, whether placements would be subsidized and whether there were sufficient funds to meet the costs of childcare.

71. Noting that all of the children's homes mentioned in the report were private organizations and for girls only, she asked whether those organizations were subsidized by the State; whether there were facilities of that kind throughout the country, including in Barbuda; whether boys were placed anywhere other than the Boys' Training School; and whether boys from the care system continued to be housed with boys from the juvenile justice system at the Boy's Training School.

72. Commending the Government on its comprehensive Child (Care and Adoption) Act, she enquired whether any awareness campaigns had been conducted to promote domestic adoption and whether the Government had considered ratifying the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, given that it had already completed much of the groundwork that was required for ratification.

73. Noting that the State party was a party to the Inter-American Convention on the International Return of Children, she asked whether it planned to ratify the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, which could be invoked in cases involving countries that were not covered by the Inter-American Convention. She pointed out that the country's existing legal framework could easily be adapted for that purpose.

74. Since the majority of cases of child abuse and neglect that had been reported to the Citizens' Welfare Division between 2010 and 2012 had been cases of neglect, she asked whether the Government had investigated the causes of child neglect to determine, for example, whether poverty was a contributing factor, and what preventive measures had been taken in that regard.

75. Welcoming the State party's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in January 2016, she said that it was unclear whether there was any specific legislation on the services available to children with disabilities and the accessibility of buildings and public services. She would like to know whether there was a strategy on children with disabilities and a policy on inclusive education, what data were available on children with disabilities and what efforts would be made to gather more data in that regard.

76. She asked whether there was a limit on the amount of time that a child with mental health problems could stay in the children's ward of a general hospital, whether there were outpatient services for children and adolescents with mental health problems and, if so, whether those services were available countrywide.

77. She enquired whether the goal of achieving universal secondary education by the academic year 2013/14 had been reached and whether adequate State funding had been provided for early childhood development programmes, so as to reduce reliance on the private sector. With regard to child labour, she asked whether the State party had taken steps to adopt a comprehensive list of hazardous occupations and to prohibit the employment of children aged between 14 and 18 years in such occupations. She also asked whether the Government had considered improving its regulations on asylum procedures and the rights of refugees, and whether it planned to ratify the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

78. Commending the State party on its progressive Child Justice Act of 2015, she nevertheless noted with concern that the age of criminal responsibility remained one of the lowest in the world, at 8 years old. She said that, although children aged between 8 and 14 years were afforded some protection under the Act, which stipulated that the State had to prove their criminal responsibility through an assessment by a suitable person, it was unclear who would be considered a suitable person in that context and on what basis the assessment would be made.

79. She would like to know whether the Government had considered including a provision in the Act stipulating that the age of criminal responsibility should be reviewed within a given time period, whether the issue had been debated in Parliament and what steps were being taken to collect evidence with a view to persuading Parliament and the general public of the need to raise the age of criminal responsibility.

80. She asked why there was an upper age limit for the diversion of cases away from the formal court procedure and why that limit had been established at 12 years old, even though children up to the age of 14 years were presumed to lack criminal responsibility until the State had proven otherwise. She enquired what training on the Child Justice Act had been provided for police, probation officers, prosecutors and magistrates; whether anyone had been trained to conduct the family group conferences that were mentioned in the Act; and whether there were enough programmes in place throughout the country to enable children

to serve community-based sentences. She asked whether the secure residential facility mentioned in the Act was the Boys' Training School and if so, what steps had been taken to address the concerns that had been raised about that institution.

81. Lastly, with regard to the video evidence that was obtained from child victims of sexual offences, she asked whether recordings were made prior to the trial or whether children testified via closed circuit television during the trial itself.

82. **Mr. Nelson**, noting the lack of specific facilities for children with mental health problems, asked what treatment was available for such children in general hospitals, who provided that treatment, how such children were monitored following their release, whether they were periodically assessed and whether counselling facilities were available to them. He further enquired whether any studies had been undertaken to evaluate the extent of mental health problems within the child population.

83. With regard to the survey on substance abuse that had been conducted in 2013, he said that he would like further information on the results of the survey and the measures that had been taken on the basis of those results. It was unclear why the Government's efforts to tackle substance abuse had been targeted at primary schools rather than secondary schools. He would also like to know whether any programmes on marijuana use had been implemented, whether the Government had identified links between substance abuse and juvenile offending and whether it had taken any specific measures targeting dealers.

84. Noting that the number of girls infected with HIV/AIDS remained high, he asked what steps had been taken to address that problem and whether any awareness campaigns had been conducted in schools. Lastly, he asked whether the State party had made progress in drawing up its initial report under the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which was long overdue, and whether it had considered ratifying the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure.

85. **Mr. Lumina** said that he wished to know whether the Government planned to raise the age of majority to 18 years to enable children up to that age to benefit from free medical care under the Medical Benefits Scheme.

86. The adoption of a new policy on information and communications technology (ICT) in schools was a welcome development. However, studies had shown that it was important to adapt technological solutions to the local context and that the introduction of new technology in schools was more likely to benefit privileged children who were already familiar with technology. He would therefore like to know what efforts had been made to tailor the ICT policy to the local context and to ensure that it benefited all children, irrespective of their social background.

87. He asked whether the impact of ICT on the quality of teaching and learning had been assessed and, if so, what the findings of that assessment had been. Lastly, he enquired what measures were being taken, in addition to the codes of conduct mentioned in the ICT policy, to protect children from online predators.

88. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked what steps had been taken to tackle the health risks associated with environmental pollution and to provide decent housing, equipped with safe cooking facilities, for example, and whether the environmental impact of business activities, including tourism, posed a risk to maternal and child health. He further enquired whether the Government had conducted surveys on family nutrition and on vitamin and micronutrient intake, especially among newborn infants and children under 5 years old, and what was being done to ensure that children had access to a healthy diet. Finally, he asked what measures were being taken to enhance access to basic services such as electricity and water, and what proportion of the population had access to those services.

89. **The Chair**, noting the prevalence of sexual abuse and incest in the State party and the high rates of pregnancy and abortion among girls, said that the Committee would like to know what sexual and reproductive health programmes had been implemented to tackle those issues and whether children were adequately informed about access to contraception. It would also like to know what programmes were in place to support HIV/AIDS orphans and children infected by HIV/AIDS, which partners assisted the State party in the

implementation of those programmes and whether antiretroviral therapy was available free of charge.

90. In Antigua and Barbuda, it was widely believed that girls as young as 12 years old should be considered women as soon as they started menstruating. The Committee would like to know what was being done to change that mentality, in order to protect child rights. It would also appreciate more information on obesity prevention measures and any awareness campaigns that had been conducted to discourage adults from sending children to purchase alcohol and tobacco. Lastly, it would like to know what the immunization coverage rate was, whether immunization campaigns covered the whole population, including migrants, and whether vitamin A supplements were universally available.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.