



# Convention on the Rights of the Child

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## Committee on the Rights of the Child Seventy-fourth session

### Summary record of the 2181st meeting\*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 26 January 2017, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Mezmur  
*later:* Ms. Winter (Vice-Chair)

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Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

*Combined second and third periodic reports of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines*

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\* No summary record was prepared for the 2180th meeting.

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

**Consideration of reports of States parties** (*continued*)

*Combined second and third periodic reports of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (CRC/C/VCT/2-3; CRC/C/VCT/Q/2-3 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Stephenson** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), introducing the combined second and third periodic reports of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, said that 30 per cent of the State party's population was under the age of 15 years, a demographic characteristic that was kept in mind by the designers of the programmes implemented by the country in pursuit of its development goals. The country was still dealing with the effects of the global recession of 2008, which had led to resource constraints that had affected the provision of services for children, and a number of natural disasters. The children of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, like those elsewhere, were growing up in a society characterized by increasing change. Children from all the country's social strata fell victim to abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect, but the problem was especially prevalent among poorer or more vulnerable population groups.

3. The National Policy Framework for Child Protection had been adopted in 2016, and the Child Development Division, an outgrowth of the Policy Framework, had been established to ensure that children in troubled environments had better access to a range of programmes that promoted their psychological and social development. The programmes were aimed at altering behavioural patterns among socially disadvantaged students; facilitating the rehabilitation and social reintegration of children and young people with a history of serious aggression, clinical behavioural problems or anti-social behaviour; sensitizing communities to issues such as child abuse; using sports activities to foster community spirit among at-risk youths; and providing guidance on parenting. There had also been a number of campaigns to raise public awareness of children's rights. It had recently been decided to take a cyclical approach to such campaigns, thereby ensuring that they were launched at approximately the same time every year. The personnel of institutions working with children had been given training in the proper procedures for the mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse.

4. Children suffered far more acutely from the effects of abuse than adults would. The damage to their development and socialization was long-lasting, and what began as a private and personal tragedy could cause problems for society at large. It was therefore important for the authorities to take responsibility for protecting children from abuse and address the incidence of child abuse through a comprehensive parenting education programme. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continued to focus on those and other tasks in its efforts to fulfil its obligations under the Convention.

5. **Mr. Cardona Llorens** (Country Rapporteur) said that the Committee welcomed the ratification by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. The State party was encouraged to submit the reports due under the protocols in timely fashion.

6. The adoption of the Child Care and Adoption Act was also a welcome development, but it would be interesting to know what steps had been taken to ensure that it was properly implemented. It would be interesting to know what progress had been made towards amending other laws relevant to the State party's obligations under the Convention.

7. He asked whether the National Child Rights Committee was responsible for the coordination of efforts to implement the Convention and which authority it answered to. He wished to know how the work of the Child Development Division, established as part of the National Policy Framework for Child Protection, related to that of the National Child Rights Committee and whether the Policy Framework, in addition to child protection, addressed the promotion of children's rights. It would also be interesting to know which law had provided for the Policy Framework's development.

8. He wondered whether the State party had any plans to set up an office to which children could submit complaints of violations of their rights. In connection with planned expenditures, he asked whether the proposed 2017 budgetary allocation for child protection services was meant to cover all activities associated with the implementation of the Convention, including those designed to facilitate the free participation of children in cultural life and the arts. In addition, he wished to know what steps had been taken to ensure that the external economic shocks to which the State party was vulnerable did not lead to cuts in spending on children and whether any plans had been made to finance children's programmes from revenue generated by the country's new international airport, whose grand opening was imminent.

9. It would be interesting to know what efforts the State party had made to act on the Committee's previous recommendation to collect data, disaggregated appropriately, on children, ensure that children's rights would not be affected by the expected growth of tourism and combat forced child labour in agriculture, and in marijuana growing in particular. It would also be interesting to know how the State party planned to ensure that everyone under the age of 18 years was afforded the protections enshrined in the Convention. In addition, the Committee would welcome news of any plans to decriminalize homosexuality, a comment on the efforts made by the State party to implement the Committee's previous recommendation to combat the racial discrimination faced by the children of some minorities, such as Amerindians and Asians, and information on whether children not legally resident in the State party had access to basic services on an equal basis with others.

10. He asked whether plans had been made to repeal the law that allowed children over the age of 16 years to be sentenced to death, whether an early childhood development policy had been adopted and whether consideration was being given to banning corporal punishment of children in all spheres of life. He also wished to know whether the Family Services Division provided for in the Child Care and Adoption Act had been established and, if so, whether it had been given the resources it needed; whether the protocol for reporting the ill-treatment of children had finally been adopted; whether the number of cases of child abuse, and physical abuse in particular, had risen in recent years; how the awareness campaigns referred to in the replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/VCT/Q/2-3/Add.1, para. 10) were organized; whether the members of staff of the Child Protection Unit were being given proper training; and what specific training was being given to judges to help them understand the best interests of the children whose cases they dealt with.

11. He wished to know what efforts had been made to combat rampant sexual abuse, including incest, and whether the State party's courts intended to put an end to the practice of acquitting defendants in cases of sexual abuse or statutory rape of a girl less than 15 years of age when, as evidence of their innocence, they offered nothing but their mistaken belief that their victim was above the age of consent. He also wished to know how many cases of pregnancy in girls below the age of consent had led to the arrest of the rapist, whether a pregnant girl's father had ever been found guilty of incest, whether the causes of the sexual exploitation of children had been studied and whether the State party had a law specifically prohibiting the use of children in pornography.

12. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** (Country Rapporteur) said that the Committee welcomed the progress made towards achieving universal birth registration in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. He asked whether birth registration services were now provided free of charge or whether a small fee was still levied for issuing a birth certificate. He also asked how the State party facilitated the registration of children born in the Grenadines as opposed to Saint Vincent, where the main hospital was located. Did mobile registration units operate in the Grenadines or were parents required to travel to Saint Vincent at their own expense in order to register their children? He also wished to know more about the procedure for registering children born at home and whether there was a deadline for registering their birth. The State party should also indicate whether it had registered any unaccompanied migrant children.

13. He asked whether children had the opportunity to express their views and opinions in the media; what role the media played in promoting and protecting children's rights; and whether the media was involved in conducting campaigns to raise public awareness of children's issues. In addition, it would be useful to know whether there were youth organizations in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and, if so, whether those organizations were able to provide input into public policy. He would also like to hear more about how the right of adolescents of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities to express themselves was guaranteed in practice and whether children belonging to religious minorities were free to express their faith in schools and within their communities.

14. **Ms. Oviedo Fierro** said that it would be helpful if the delegation could outline the steps taken to act upon the recommendations made by the Committee in its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/15/Add.184) calling upon the State party to step up its efforts to disseminate the principles and provisions of the Convention and to provide systematic training on the provisions of the Convention to all professionals working for and with children. It would also be helpful to receive more information on the campaigns undertaken to raise public awareness of children's rights. She asked whether the State party worked in partnership with NGOs to promote children's rights and what role the latter played in that connection. She enquired as to how the right of children to have their views taken into account in all matters concerning them, which was recognized in the law of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, was enforced in practice. Lastly, she asked whether children had the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes affecting them in schools and, if so, by what means.

15. **Ms. Sandberg** said that it was her understanding that the law of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines provided that only the welfare and not the best interests of the child in the wider sense should be a primary consideration in actions concerning children. She asked whether that oversight had been corrected in the recently adopted Child Care and Adoption Act and, if so, whether there were plans to do likewise in all other laws concerning children and family affairs. If the principle of the best interests of the child had been incorporated into the Child Care and Adoption Act, was it used to guide all decisions affecting children's rights in all sectors? Were judges and public officials provided with training on how to determine a child's best interests? She drew the delegation's attention to the Committee's general comment No. 14 on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration (CRC/C/GC/14) for guidance.

16. **Mr. Nogueira Neto** said that, in its previous concluding observations, the Committee had expressed concern that children were sometimes forced by the police to confess to criminal offences while in custody, and were sometimes subjected to ill-treatment. He asked what measures the State party had taken to put a stop to those practices and whether they had proven effective. The delegation should also report on the outcome of the complaints of police brutality against children lodged to date, indicating whether inquiries had been conducted, how many prosecutions had been brought and whether the victims had been provided with redress.

*The meeting was suspended at 3.55 p.m. and resumed at 4.20 p.m.*

17. *Ms. Winter (Vice-Chair) took the Chair.*

18. **Ms. Finch-Burke** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the Child Care and Adoption Act had been developed and implemented in accordance with the comprehensive National Child Protection Policy Framework (2015-2020). The Child Development Division, or more specifically the Child Protection Unit, was the body responsible for overseeing the implementation of the aforementioned Act. In broader terms, the Child Protection Unit was responsible for managing child protection cases and coordinating child protection services. The National Child Rights Committee had been established to monitor and provide guidance to the Child Protection Unit. In November 2016, Cabinet had authorized the transformation of the National Child Rights Committee into a regulatory body. The management subcommittee of the National Child Rights Committee was responsible for, inter alia, the independent reporting and monitoring of child protection cases, which helped to compensate for the absence of a national human rights institution. The management subcommittee was empowered to take up child protection cases and to launch an investigation when appropriate.

19. The Adoption Board handled both domestic and intercountry adoptions. Due to resource constraints, the Government was obliged to promote children's rights as part of awareness-raising initiatives focused on child protection issues, such as child abuse. Recent national youth conferences had also provided a platform for the promotion of children's rights and had allowed children to have a say in decisions concerning the implementation of programmes in 2017. A minimum percentage of the national budget was allocated to child protection, which included a child rights advocacy component. The decision to subsume child rights advocacy under child protection could be explained by the current dearth of financial resources.

20. In terms of disaggregated data, one child marriage had taken place in 2014, four in 2015 and one in 2016. The Government planned to conduct a country poverty assessment the following year, to obtain up-to-date information on the number of children living in poverty. The country poverty assessment for 2007-2008 had revealed that some 30 per cent of the population was living below the poverty line and that young people aged 19 years or under accounted for almost half of those living in poverty. The delegation would in due course provide disaggregated data on convictions for violence against children; children with HIV and AIDS; children performing forced labour or hazardous work; children charged with drug-related offences; and children with disabilities in the education system. Over the period 2012-2015, between 41 and 72 children per year had been charged with an offence. Over the period 2012-2016, between one child and five children per year had been incarcerated. On average, 151 children were placed in foster care each year. Over the period 2012-2015, between 1 child and 15 children per year had been adopted either domestically or internationally. Over the same period, between 125 and 196 children per year had been removed from their parents' custody on account of alleged child abuse.

21. The question of whether to harmonize the different legal ages that applied to children, including the minimum legal age of marriage for girls and boys, had been placed on the legislative agenda for 2017 and was the subject of discussion in Cabinet. The National Child Rights Committee was strongly in favour of raising the minimum legal age of marriage and the minimum legal age for employment to 18 years for both boys and girls. Public opinion, however, was divided on the matter, as some segments of society were in favour of keeping the status quo.

22. There were currently no plans to amend or repeal the legal provisions criminalizing same-sex relations in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. In the past, children who had suffered discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation had come forward and

reported it to the authorities without negative consequences. In such cases, the authorities, pursuant to the principle of the best interests of the child, listened to the child in question and made the necessary therapeutic interventions.

23. **Mr. Cardona Llorens** said that, regardless of public feeling, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines was obliged to raise the minimum legal age of marriage to 18 years for both boys and girls, as stipulated in the Convention. The delegation should also confirm which body bore overall responsibility for the coordination, implementation and monitoring of the different policies for children, and for the implementation of the Convention. Lastly, he asked what proportion of the budgetary resources allocated to child protection was subsequently allocated to child rights advocacy. It would be useful to receive disaggregated data on those budgetary allocations.

24. **Ms. Sandberg** asked whether the numbers of child marriages recorded during the period 2014-2016 referred to girls who were under 15 and boys who were under 16 years of age upon marriage, or to girls and boys who were both under 18 years of age at that time.

25. **The Chair** asked what the therapeutic interventions made by the authorities in respect of children who were victims of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation entailed.

26. **Ms. Finch-Burke** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the National Child Rights Committee had advocated raising the minimum legal age that applied to children to 18 in all circumstances, not just for the purposes of marriage and employment, and harmonizing the relevant legal provisions. The National Child Rights Committee bore overall responsibility for the coordination, implementation and monitoring of policies promoting children's rights and was answerable to Cabinet. Children's rights were promoted as part of awareness-raising initiatives focused on child protection; no separate budgetary allocation was made specifically for children's rights, as child rights advocacy was funded from the share of the national budget allocated to child protection. All the disaggregated data provided related to persons under 18 years of age. The nature of the therapeutic interventions made by the authorities in respect of children who were victims of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation was determined on a case-by-case basis following an assessment. Although the interventions often involved psychosocial support, other treatments could be prescribed if necessary. Children in that situation had access to exactly the same services as other children.

27. **Mr. Cardona Llorens** asked whether he had understood correctly that two 17-year-olds who had consensual homosexual relations would not be subject to the State party's criminal penalties for homosexual behaviour.

28. **Ms. Finch-Burke** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that if a case involving homosexual relations was not already a criminal matter, the only action the authorities could take was to offer psychosocial therapy to the minors involved. In criminal matters, penalties applied in accordance with the law.

29. **Ms. Sandberg** asked whether the therapy was intended to change homosexual minors' sexual orientation.

30. **Ms. Finch-Burke** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that every case was different. However, the children who had had homosexual relations and were receiving therapy were often dealing with behavioural issues other than their involvement in homosexual relations alone.

31. The country's children had been encouraged to make contributions to the combined periodic reports that had been submitted to the Committee, and national conferences held by and for children informed the development of public policy. Students from more than 85 schools had been involved in such conferences.

32. The number of reported cases of physical abuse of children had remained stable at around 125 a year since 2003. A specific model that took a bottom-up approach and encouraged the participation of all interested parties, schools and communities in particular, was used to develop and roll out the country's awareness-raising programmes. Since 2015, the Government, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), had organized training in children's rights for judges and for other persons who were mandatory reporters of suspected cases of abuse of the children in their care.

33. She could not be certain that the sexual abuse of children was as rampant as Mr. Cardona Llorens had suggested, but she knew for a fact that all reports of such violence were investigated. Underreporting had been a problem in the past. New legislation, including the Child Care and Adoption Act, would make it harder for defendants in sexual misconduct cases to avoid being found guilty by claiming that they thought their victim had reached the age of consent. In cases of incest, children often recanted, making it difficult to secure convictions. Information on the number of convictions would be provided in due course, as would a comment on the results of a study that had shed light on the causes of the sexual exploitation of children.

34. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** asked whether the authorities had considered putting in place a thoroughly child-friendly system of allowing child victims of such crimes as incest to make statements against the people who had victimized them.

35. **Ms. Aho Assouma** wondered why there were so many cases of incest in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. She asked whether a medical examination would provide relevant evidence in the event a child victim of sexual misconduct retracted his or her statement. She wished to know what was done when such retractions appeared to be the result of the child's fear of retribution. In addition, she wished to know why sex was such an overwhelming presence in the lives of the State party's children.

36. **Ms. Finch-Burke** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that counsellors worked with the child victims of abuse in their dealings with the police and the courts. All child victims of sexual or other abuse were thoroughly assessed, including medically. Efforts were made to determine whether such victims, who, in addition, were taken into care pending the resolution of their cases, were intimidated into retracting their statements.

37. **Mr. Stephenson** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that under the Domestic Violence Act of 2015 such persons as dentists, social workers, psychologists and teachers were required to report suspected ill-treatment of a child in their care to a police officer. Intimidation and threats were considered to be forms of violence under the Act.

38. It was true that the sexual abuse of children was a problem in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, as it was in other developing countries in the region. Efforts to combat it had included numerous awareness-raising campaigns, as well as attempts to discover the root causes of the phenomenon.

39. **Ms. Finch-Burke** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that according to the victims and the members of their families, poverty was the reason that sex, including sexual abuse, was such a major part of children's lives in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Poverty, however, was sometimes used as an excuse for complacency, and people seemed to want instant cash, which could be earned more readily by prostitution than by working at an ordinary job.

40. There was not a specific law prohibiting the use of children in the production of pornography. However, minimum standards for child protection, defined by UNICEF, had been adopted.

41. **Mr. Cardona Llorens** said that as minimum standards did not have the force of law, it was unclear whether, for example, making a pornographic film featuring a child and

posting it on the Internet was penalized by law in the State party. Which law penalized those activities, if in fact they were penalized?

42. **Ms. Finch-Burke** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that although there was no law specifically penalizing the use of children in pornography, anyone responsible for any form of sexual or other abuse of children would be prosecuted. The implementation of a cybercrimes law, which could address such issues as the use of children in pornography posted online, was pending.

43. The authorities did not currently have a separate policy on combating the sexual abuse of children. Instead, efforts to combat such abuse were made in the context of broader child protection policy. In 2016, programmes designed to prevent sexual and emotional abuse had been implemented in 15 communities and 28 schools.

44. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** asked whether it might not be a good idea for the State party to consider developing a programme or policy designed specifically to combat the sexual abuse of children.

45. **Ms. Finch-Burke** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that the State party already had programmes that were designed to combat sexual and emotional abuse. Those programmes had involved a number of activities, some designed to address the problem of underreporting, and considerable outreach efforts. For example, instead of holding organized meetings or town hall meetings, officials involved with the programme had sought community residents out on their own ground — namely, local bars, corner shops and beaches.

46. Parents who could not afford the small fee for birth certificates could apply to have it paid by the State. The State would cover the charge for those parents whether they lived in the country or abroad.

47. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked how much time usually elapsed between parents submitting a request for financial assistance to cover the cost of their child's birth certificate and the necessary funds being disbursed.

48. **Ms. Finch-Burke** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that, once a request for financial assistance had been submitted, the funds were usually disbursed to the relevant public institution and a birth certificate issued to parents within 24 hours. Children born in the Grenadines could be registered by one of the local offices providing administrative services; there was no need for the child's parents to travel to Saint Vincent to complete the procedure. Children born in hospitals were now registered by means of a compulsory bedside registration procedure, which had to be completed before a birth certificate could be obtained. Children born at home in rural areas were registered by their local polyclinic or 24-hour health-care centre. If the parents of the newborn were unable to travel to register the child's birth, their local polyclinic or health-care centre could send a nurse to conduct a home visit.

49. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked whether the State party had taken in any unaccompanied migrant children without identification documents and, if so, how it dealt with children in that situation.

50. **Ms. Finch-Burke** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) said that, in the past, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines had taken in children fleeing natural disasters in neighbouring territories. Those children enjoyed access to all services on an equal footing with children from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines under the policy for the movement of children within the Caribbean Community, regardless of whether they possessed the necessary documents. However, the entry into the country of children from outside the Caribbean Community remained a matter of national security and was dealt with separately. Migrant children who were granted entry into Saint Vincent and the Grenadines were also granted



access to social services. In conducting preliminary interviews, social service agencies sought to ascertain the circumstances that had brought the children in question to the country, their residency status and their immigration history for the purpose of monitoring access to social services and ensuring that they did not face discrimination in that connection.

51. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked whether, in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, mothers could apply to the courts for child maintenance for a child of any age and whether the courts, in issuing child maintenance orders, drew a distinction between children born in and out of wedlock. He also asked whether an adolescent aged 16 or 17 years was entitled to receive child support on an equal footing with an adolescent aged 15 years or under. Did the State party plan to ratify the Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance? If not, did it intend to conclude bilateral agreements with those countries employing migrant workers from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to prevent parents living abroad from reneging on their obligation to pay child maintenance? Had the State party conducted a study to assess the impact of a parent migrating abroad on his or her children?

52. He would also be interested to know whether the early childhood and parenting programmes designed to assist young mothers responded to the needs of the diverse family structures within the State party. The delegation should indicate whether toll-free helplines for children were in operation and, if so, whether they were manned by trained staff and what had been done to promote their use.

53. Turning to the issue of health care, he asked whether persons living in both Saint Vincent and the Grenadines could access specialized health-care services through local polyclinics and health-care centres. It would be helpful to receive statistical information on the prevalence of breastfeeding in the State party and to know whether its main hospital and health-care centres had been accredited as “baby-friendly” by UNICEF. The delegation should also outline the measures taken to reduce the high rate of teenage pregnancy in the State party, indicating whether adolescents could readily access information on contraceptive use and whether school curricula included a sex education component for both boys and girls.

54. **Mr. Cardona Llorens**, noting that the Education Act called for non-discrimination against children with physical disabilities, asked whether the State party planned to extend the scope of that provision to cover children with sensory, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities. He also wished to know whether there was a special school for children with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities and, if not, where those children were educated. It appeared that, despite having accepted a recommendation during its 2011 universal periodic review to introduce inclusive education for children with disabilities in the mainstream education system, the State party had not taken any steps to act upon it. He asked whether the State party intended to introduce inclusive education in the education sector in the near future. Moreover, the Education Act provided that, if it was determined that a student was in need of an individual education plan, the cost of developing, providing and maintaining the plan should be divided between the parents and the Ministry of Education. He would be interested to know whether students whose parents could not afford to pay for such a plan were automatically deprived of the support set out in the plan.

55. He would welcome clarification on whether the Immigration Restriction Act prevented children with disabilities who were foreign nationals from entering the State party on account of their disability, even when they were seeking to enter for the purpose of family reunification.

56. While the Committee welcomed the progress made in improving the quality of primary education, it remained concerned that secondary education was lagging behind, as

many students were not properly equipped to join the labour market after completing their studies. He understood that situation to be attributable to the low quality and rigidity of the current education system, which had a knock-on effect on the tertiary education enrolment rate. Furthermore, the hidden costs of textbooks and specialized services precluded many children from poor backgrounds from accessing education. He asked what measures the State party envisaged taking to remedy that situation.

57. The Committee had received reports that, despite the legal requirement for teenage mothers to be readmitted to school after they had given birth, those girls were often not readmitted in practice. Perhaps the delegation could comment on those reports.

58. On the subject of juvenile justice, he asked whether the State party intended to completely abolish the death penalty for minors; whether juvenile offenders aged 17 or 18 years were typically tried as adults; whether the State party planned to repeal the legal provisions authorizing the use of corporal punishment; and whether juvenile offenders aged 16 years could be sentenced to life imprisonment. It would also be helpful to know whether there was a legal provision stipulating that juvenile offenders should only be deprived of their liberty as a last resort; whether minors with behavioural problems could receive a prison sentence without having committed a crime; whether restorative justice measures were available for juvenile offenders; and whether children who were in conflict with the law and who lived outside Saint Vincent could access a juvenile court.

59. **Ms. Sandberg** asked whether there were any residential care institutions in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and, if so, how many children were living in them. The Committee would appreciate more information on the criteria and procedures for placing children in care. Which body took the final decision on alternative care arrangements? Were the views of the child routinely solicited before he or she was placed in care? Were there minimum care standards that had to be met in alternative care settings? She also wished to know whether children in care had contact with their parents, which body monitored the living conditions of children in care institutions and whether children had access to a complaints mechanism in the event of mistreatment. Lastly, she asked whether the decision to place a child in care was subject to regular review and whether it was common for children to be returned to their parents.

60. **Ms. Khazova** asked for additional information on the adoption procedure in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, including on whether a judge was involved and whether the opinion of the child in question was sought and taken into account. Noting that the Child Care and Adoption Act permitted “direct adoption” if child abuse had been identified or if the child had been placed in foster care, she enquired as to the specific factors that could justify a “direct adoption” and as to how prospective adoptive parents were vetted. How did the State party ensure that intercountry adoption took place only as a last resort? What safeguards were in place to prevent the sale and exploitation of children during the adoption process?

61. She would like the delegation to explain how the offence of the unlawful taking of a girl under 15 years of age from her parents, referred to in article 203 of the Criminal Code, differed from the offence of stealing a child under 14 years of age from his or her parents, described in article 204 of the Criminal Code, and why the prison term imposed for the former offence was shorter than that imposed for the latter. Were children who fell outside that age bracket not protected against those offences?

62. **Ms. Aldoseri** said she had been dismayed to learn that, under the Education Act, the right of children to an education was contingent upon the availability of resources and would be interested to know of the circumstances in which a lack of resources had denied children access to an education. The delegation should also confirm whether education was

free for all children, including young people between 16 and 18 years of age who had completed their compulsory education.

63. It was highly regrettable that the Education Act made provision for corporal punishment as part of the school disciplinary regime and that the forms of corporal punishment approved by the Chief Education Officer could be administered by several members of the teaching staff if the need arose. She asked whether the State party intended to outlaw the use of corporal punishment in schools in the near future.

64. There was a clear link between the high teenage pregnancy rate and the high dropout rate in schools in the State party. She asked what measures had been taken to encourage girls to return to school after pregnancy. She would also appreciate an update on the results yielded by the “Teen Mothers Returning to School” programme, which enabled teenage mothers to pursue their education by providing day-care services and covering the cost of their school fees and transportation.

65. The Committee was deeply concerned by the large number of students who left school without any qualifications and who later became involved in criminal activity as a result of their inability to find a job. As that situation was largely attributable to the poor quality of education in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, she would be interested to know whether the State party intended to review the education system in the near future. It would also be useful to hear more about the vocational training offered by secondary schools. Did school curricula reflect the cultural diversity of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines? Did they include a human rights component? Were teachers provided with training on human rights? She would also appreciate additional information on the content of the sex education programme run in schools, the opportunities for children to express their views and to participate in school decision-making processes, and the extracurricular activities and cultural programmes available to children.

66. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that the inconsistent implementation of the Palermo Protocol and anti-trafficking legislation by the State party exposed trafficked children to greater risks and let traffickers go unpunished. She asked what measures the State party had taken or intended to take to combat trafficking in children, to identify trafficked children more efficiently, to prosecute traffickers to the full extent of the law and to monitor the activities of private companies suspected of involvement in human trafficking. She recalled the need to avoid deporting foreign victims of trafficking, as they could suffer reprisals in their country of origin.

67. It would also be useful to know whether the State party planned to introduce a comprehensive procedure for dealing with refugees and asylum seekers which addressed the specific needs of children. The delegation should also describe the measures taken to prevent impoverished children from ending up on the street and to assist children engaged in hazardous work.

68. **The Chair** asked whether there were special procedures in place to protect children required to testify as a victim or witness in court.

69. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked whether adolescents had access to confidential sexual and reproductive health services, counselling and HIV and AIDS testing, and whether the State party had considered launching information campaigns to promote the use of contraceptives among that population group and to combat discrimination against persons with HIV and AIDS.

*The meeting rose at 6 p.m.*