



# Convention on the Rights of the Child

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## Committee on the Rights of the Child Ninety-seventh session

### Summary record of the 2820th meeting\*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 27 August 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Skelton

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\* No summary records were issued for the 2818th and 2819th meetings.

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

### **Consideration of reports of States parties**

*Report of Bahrain on the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC/C/OPSC/BHR/1; CRC/C/OPSC/BHR/Q/1; CRC/C/OPSC/BHR/RQ/1)*

*Report of Bahrain on the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC/C/OPAC/BHR/1; CRC/C/OPAC/BHR/Q/1; CRC/C/OPAC/BHR/RQ/1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Bahrain joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Bahrain**, introducing his country's reports under the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC/C/OPSC/BHR/1) and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC/C/OPAC/BHR/1), said that Bahrain attached the utmost importance to ensuring the well-being of its children. All government departments worked tirelessly and in a coordinated manner to safeguard the rights of children and ensure their healthy development. Bahrain was fully committed to fulfilling its international obligations, including by submitting its reports in a timely manner and participating in constructive dialogues.
3. An integrated system of policies, laws and programmes had been put in place to safeguard children's rights, protect children from abuse and exploitation, provide them with the necessary care and ensure that their interests were a primary consideration in all judgments, decisions and procedures that affected them. A total of 34 goals and 163 initiatives had been set out under the National Strategy for Childhood (2023–2027), and social welfare facilities had been established to provide vulnerable children with shelter, rehabilitation services and protection from danger or ill-treatment. A resolution establishing the National Human Rights Committee, which was responsible for ensuring coordination between government agencies in all matters related to human rights and monitoring the country's fulfilment of its international human rights obligations, had been issued in 2023.
4. A special prosecution service had been established to deal with cases involving child victims or children accused of committing a criminal offence. In 2021, the Public Prosecution Service, in partnership with different government agencies and civil society organizations, had launched a social welfare initiative to identify, address and eliminate the underlying causes of the crimes committed by children. The Service had also introduced a new mechanism in 2023 intended to minimize the trauma experienced by child victims of sexual assault by ensuring that they were not subjected to repeated interrogations. Furthermore, the Ministry of the Interior had established family and child protection offices to create a safe environment for children at police stations. The offices provided children with appropriate protection and psychological support, as well as a guarantee of confidentiality. The Ministry of Social Development had recently launched a national campaign in collaboration with other government agencies and civil society to raise awareness among parents and children of the risks of online exploitation and blackmail, and the head of the Unit for the Protection of Children in Cyberspace had been made a member of the National Committee on Childhood.
5. Several pioneering legislative measures had been taken to prevent the involvement of children in armed conflict, including the adoption of Decree-Law No. 44 (2018) promulgating the International Crimes Act. A comprehensive and integrated national system to combat trafficking in persons had also been put in place, and Bahrain had been ranked in the first tier of countries for seven consecutive years in the Trafficking in Persons Report of the Department of State of the United States of America.
6. **Ms. Todorova** (Country Rapporteur) said that it would be useful to know whether the unified criminal database system contained data not only, as the State party had indicated, on the offences envisaged under article 3 of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography but also on offences involving infractions of other relevant laws, such as the Child Restorative Justice and Protection from Abuse Act, the

Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act and the Information Technology Act. She would also like to know whether the disaggregated data on the exploitation of children in prostitution and pornography presented in the replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/OPSC/BHR/RQ/1) had been taken from the unified criminal database system or from another source. Indeed, the delegation might like to clarify whether that system was the only system containing data on the offences covered under the Optional Protocol or whether such information was also stored elsewhere.

7. She wished to know how many acts constituting an offence under the Optional Protocol had been reported using the 998 child hotline and the 992 hotline for cybercrimes. It would be helpful to know whether calls to those lines were recorded, whether the information provided by callers was registered and whether any measures were taken to investigate alleged offences and prosecute the perpetrators. She would also like to know whether the special register of cases of ill-treatment of children provided for under article 39 of the Child Restorative Justice and Protection from Abuse Act was connected to the criminal database system.

8. Since a conspicuously small number of offences covered under the Optional Protocol had been registered in the State party, she would be interested to know whether the Government had considered establishing specific complaints mechanisms for children. It would be useful to know, too, whether there were any plans to introduce training on the Optional Protocol for parents and professionals who worked with children, such as teachers. The delegation might also indicate whether more cases would be registered if the State party adopted legislation explicitly criminalizing all the offences defined in the Optional Protocol.

9. She wondered what specific actions were taken by the agencies that operated under the aegis of the Ministry of the Interior to prevent high-risk crimes and transnational organized crime, including the sale of children and the transfer of children's organs for profit, particularly in relation to the risks associated with the country's growing tourism industry. She would also find it useful if the delegation could explain how the State party coordinated the activities of those agencies. In a similar vein, it would be helpful to know whether cases of child prostitution reported to the Child Protection Centre were automatically registered under the criminal database system and whether the Centre was systematically notified when the police registered cases under the system.

10. The delegation might explain why the Unit for the Protection of Children in Cyberspace focused on offences concerning children aged 15 and under. It would be useful to know whether the services of the Child Protection Centre were offered to both victims and suspected offenders, whether the staff of the Centre and the members of the Judicial Committee for Childhood received training on interviewing children, whether such interviews took place in child-friendly rooms and whether the State party had published any guidelines on interviewing children.

11. While the Committee welcomed the adoption of the Child Restorative Justice and Protection from Abuse Act, she wondered whether it was true that, as apparently established in article 12 of the Act, a child under the age of 15 who committed an act of prostitution would be considered not a victim but an offender. She would welcome information on the implementation of the provisions of the Act that prohibited the exploitation of children, including through the Internet, and the steps taken to investigate prohibited exploitation and prosecute the perpetrators. It would be helpful to hear, too, about any measures adopted to ensure that Internet service providers blocked or removed harmful online material involving children. The delegation might also comment on whether the State party would consider establishing the sale of children as a stand-alone crime by separating it from the offence of trafficking.

12. She would appreciate clarification of whether individuals could be prosecuted for offering, obtaining, procuring or providing a child for child prostitution, not simply for forcing a child into prostitution. An update on any steps taken to criminalize the sexual exploitation of children in the travel and tourism sector would also be welcome. In addition, she wondered why provisions criminalizing child pornography were contained in three different legislative texts rather than in a single piece of legislation.

13. **Ms. Aho** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would welcome information on the number of child victims of online sexual exploitation, the support provided to their families and the steps being taken to prevent other children from falling victim to that crime. She would be interested to hear, too, whether efforts were made to prosecute the perpetrators and, if so, what the outcome of the prosecutions was. It would be useful to learn what was being done to prevent children from becoming involved in sex tourism and whether hotels had procedures in place to ensure their protection.

14. She would like to know about any relevant awareness-raising campaigns organized by the State party, including how often any such campaigns were run and what groups they targeted. Information on the number of social workers and child psychiatrists in the State party and the care they provided would likewise be welcome. The delegation might explain what budget had been earmarked for activities related to the protection and promotion of children's rights under the Optional Protocol, how the funds were distributed and whether the State party's authorities worked closely with civil society organizations dealing with children's rights.

15. She wondered how many children were being treated in rehabilitation centres, what care they received and what steps were taken to ensure that they would not reoffend once they had completed their treatment. She wondered, too, how many children were housed in care homes and whether follow-up support was provided to families once the child returned to them. It would be helpful for the delegation to explain why child victims of some crimes were classed as offenders and whether the State party would consider amending its laws to rectify that situation and thus enable such children to be fully rehabilitated.

*The meeting was suspended at 3.55 p.m. and resumed at 4.15 p.m.*

16. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the unified criminal database system had been established in 2007 by the Ministry of the Interior and provided the relevant authorities with the data and statistics they required to analyse cases involving crimes committed against children. The personal information of the children concerned was kept confidential. Cybercrimes involving children could be reported through the 992 hotline, which operated around the clock. Such complaints would then be investigated and transmitted to the judiciary if necessary. Victims were provided with the necessary support through the Child Protection Centre. Sixty-four calls had been received from January to July 2024.

17. The Unit for the Protection of Children in Cyberspace had been set up to combat cybercrime against children and online child exploitation. The Unit had a service dedicated to receiving complaints, which were subsequently forwarded to the Family and Child Public Prosecution Service. It had organized several initiatives and programmes to protect children from online exploitation and worked with civil society organizations to that end. A programme intended to provide child victims and perpetrators with psychological support had been developed together with other stakeholders. The Unit had also created programmes that sought to raise awareness among children of various ages of the dangers of cyberspace and the ways to optimize online tools and resources. A national campaign on the protection of children from online exploitation had been run in July 2024.

18. Overall responsibility for investigating cybercrime lay with the General Directorate for Combating Corruption and for Economic Security and Cybersecurity. Internet service providers were required to block all websites, including pornographic websites and websites that violated public morals, that were listed in decisions issued by the Ministry of the Interior. The Telecommunications Regulatory Authority was also entitled to instruct providers to block such sites. Any providers that failed to do so within 24 hours would be fined.

19. **A representative of Bahrain** said that public officials handling data were required to comply with the Act on Personal Data Protection. The Child Restorative Justice and Protection from Abuse Act established that professionals such as doctors and teachers who failed to report cases of child sexual exploitation that had been brought to their attention were liable to investigation and punishment. Individuals working in the field of child restorative justice had been trained in interviewing children in an appropriate environment. The Ministry of Justice worked with the Institute of Judicial and Legal Studies and several other ministries to deliver regular training to experts working with child victims and perpetrators. Child restorative justice stakeholders had recently received training from an international expert,

and a course on obtaining witness statements from child victims and perpetrators had been delivered through the British Embassy in Bahrain. The Ministry had dedicated spaces in which such children and their families could meet with psychosocial experts; those spaces, which were compliant with international standards, were managed by an expert.

20. Cases involving children under 15 who were engaged in prostitution were handled by the Judicial Committee for Childhood, which took measures based on the child's age, the danger to which the child had been exposed and the child's health, social and educational situation. All elements of the crime of the sale of children were covered by the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, the Legislative Decree on Removal and Transplantation of Human Organs and other laws. Furthermore, the sale of children for profit was criminalized under article 357 of the Criminal Code, which provided for the punishment of any acts that illegally deprived an individual of his or her freedom for material gain. Such acts were punishable by up to 15 years' imprisonment or, where the child died, by death.

21. Having some conduct criminalized under more than one legislative text enabled investigators to consult the definitions contained in each text to determine what definition would best apply to a given case. All references to children as offenders had been removed from Bahraini laws. The Child Restorative Justice and Protection from Abuse Act established that those references were to be replaced by references to children who were at risk or had been subjected to abuse or exploitation.

22. **A representative of Bahrain** said that concerns regarding children at risk of mistreatment could be reported, including by children themselves, through a dedicated hotline. Those reports were transmitted to the relevant authorities and the Child Protection Centre so that social measures could be taken and the child's psychological status could be assessed. The Centre categorized the reports it received according to a set of criteria and, after taking a statement from the child in question, took appropriate measures to address the situation before referring the matter to the Judicial Committee for Childhood. Children were placed in care homes as a last resort, and several measures were taken, including the provision of psychosocial support, to ensure that they could remain in a family environment where possible. In 2023 and 2024, 22 reports of sexual abuse had been reported through the hotline. The Centre had transmitted those reports to the Public Prosecution Service and other relevant law enforcement authorities and had provided psychosocial support to facilitate the children's reintegration into their family and society.

23. The Centre had delivered 65 training sessions to its staff in cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Embassy of the United Kingdom. Members of its board of directors, who were representative of State entities and NGOs, were appointed for three-year terms. The board worked with State entities and NGOs to develop programmes and strategies to protect children from ill-treatment. In 2024, the Centre had held 90 awareness-raising and upskilling activities, including webinars and seminars, for young children, adolescents, teachers, parents and experts. A national campaign to protect children from online exploitation had been rolled out in cooperation with State entities and NGOs. Fifteen children had been placed in care homes and had undergone personal evaluations before returning to their families. Provisions on examining cases and acting in the best interests of the child could be found in several laws.

24. **A representative of Bahrain** said that investigations into three reports of child prostitution had been initiated in 2024. In the first case, one defendant had been sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment and fined 2,000 dinars and a further four defendants had been sentenced to 3 years' imprisonment. In the second case, the defendant had been sentenced to 7 years' imprisonment, fined and deported. Both rulings had been upheld on appeal. In the third case, the first defendant had been sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment and fined 2,000 dinars, the second had been sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment, a third had been sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment and a fourth had been sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment. The first and second defendants had been ordered to pay the costs of the victims' return to their home countries.

25. Seventeen cases of child pornography had been investigated in 2024, and rulings had been handed down in three of them. The defendant in the first case had been sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment. In the second and third cases, the defendants had been given sentences

of 6 months' imprisonment. In addition, the defendant in one of those cases had been fined 100 dinars and deported after he had served his prison sentence, and the mobile phone used to commit his crimes had been confiscated.

26. A mechanism was in place to ensure that, in cases relating to sex crimes, children were not interviewed more than once. Interviews with children were conducted in dedicated, child-friendly rooms. A specialist team dedicated to investigating trafficking in persons was responsible for cases involving children. The team was formed of officials who were qualified to work with children on such issues. Its members received specialist training.

27. A six-month campaign to raise awareness among children of issues relating to offences under the Optional Protocol had been carried out across the country in 2024. It had involved the participation of several ministries, including the Ministry of Education, which had worked directly with schoolchildren during class time. Information had been disseminated through television programmes, the press, the Internet and social media.

28. **A representative of Bahrain** said that, with regard to the criminalization of child prostitution, the issue of sexual exploitation was covered in article 1 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, under which the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receiving of persons by means of threat or the use of force or other forms of coercion, abuse of power or of position or any other direct or indirect unlawful means was made a crime. Victims of trafficking in persons, including children, could not be prosecuted for acts they had committed as victims of crime and were informed of that principle during investigations and trials.

29. **A representative of Bahrain** said that, as part of its child protection efforts, the Government had established the National Commission for Childhood, a body composed of representatives of several ministries, civil society and academia. A cyberspace expert had recently been appointed to that body, and the national human rights institution had been granted observer status. The Commission had launched the National Strategy for Childhood (2023–2027), the objective of which was to ensure that children could exercise their rights and benefited from civil protections. The Commission worked with stakeholders and communities to monitor the implementation of the Optional Protocol and coordinated with the national human rights institution to ensure that relevant legislation was in place.

30. The Commission had also worked with national and international stakeholders to launch an initiative encouraging children to make their voices heard, so that their priorities could be identified and they could exercise their rights. Children from across the country, including children with disabilities, had participated in the initiative and had been able to express their views on issues affecting them through a range of activities, including interactive discussions and art projects. In addition, they had been informed of their right to be heard, to lodge complaints with State agencies and to advocate for the enjoyment of their rights.

31. A campaign had been launched to raise awareness among children and their families of the risks of online extortion, inform children about how to protect themselves online and help families to monitor their children's Internet activity. Software applications had been used to support online child protection efforts.

32. **A representative of Bahrain** said that children suspected of criminal activity had the same legal rights as child victims of crimes at all stages of legal proceedings. Those rights included the right to be heard and to have their requests taken into account, the right to be treated with dignity, the right to psychological, moral and physical integrity, the right to receive social and legal support and health care, the right to reintegration into society, the right to be informed of the charges brought against them, the right to have a lawyer appointed for them during investigations and the right to an interpreter.

33. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the Ministry of the Interior was responsible for preventing the sale of children and organized awareness-raising campaigns for the private sector, including the tourism industry, on unlawful activity. The Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority conducted weekly visits of businesses in coordination with other State authorities. Suspected cases of unlawful activity were referred to the competent authorities, including the Ministry of the Interior. The Authority had taken steps to strengthen its

oversight of the tourism sector in cooperation with stakeholders in order to combat the sexual exploitation of children.

34. A robust system was in place to monitor the entry of children aged under 18 into Bahrain. Unaccompanied children entering Bahrain by air must be 10 or older. A relative, who had to be present on the child's departure, was required to provide a written statement affirming that the child would be collected on arrival. At Bahrain International Airport, the child would be accompanied by a specialized airport employee, who would ensure that the child would be collected by the individual or individuals named on the written statement. The child must be accompanied by flight crew or airport staff at passport control, and border officials must confirm the contact details of the individual or individuals collecting the child before issuing or authorizing a visa. The responsibility for supervising unaccompanied children entering Bahrain to participate in official events or as members of school delegations rested with the adults designated to meet them at the airport.

35. Extradition took place in accordance with the relevant extradition agreements. In the absence of an agreement with a given country, extradition arrangements were made within the framework of the Criminal Code. All international human rights instruments to which Bahrain was a party were considered part of the domestic legal framework and took precedence over purely domestic legislation.

36. **Ms. Todorova** said that it was important to recognize that trafficking in children and the sale of children were different crimes, as the definition of the sale of children in the Optional Protocol did not require there to have been evidence of exploitation. In her view, therefore, article 357 of the Criminal Code did not criminalize the sale of children in a manner consistent with the Optional Protocol, which provided for broader protections than those currently envisaged in the Code. She wondered what protections were provided for in the Cybercrime Act and how they applied to children 15 and older.

37. **Ms. Aho** said that she wished to know why child victims were perceived as criminals. She would appreciate further information on the complaints on which the State party based its statistics, including the number of complaints received and the bodies that received them. She would like to find out how many social workers there were in the State party, what their responsibilities were and whether the services of child psychiatrists were available around the country. It would be helpful to know how long child victims of cybercrime remained in the care homes in which they were placed and what types of treatment they received there. She also wished to know what the available budget was for services for child victims and whether the State party intended to use the statistics it had gathered to update its policies and strategies.

38. **Ms. Correa** said that she wished to know whether article 353 of the Criminal Code, which allowed perpetrators of rape to escape prosecution if they married the victim, had been repealed.

39. **A representative of Bahrain** said that trained medical staff, child psychiatrists and paediatricians worked at the Child Protection Centre and that the Ministry of Health had child psychiatrists on staff. Facilities operated by the Centre housed both children who faced criminal charges and those who did not. Expert reports on suitable alternatives to punishment that would promote the best interests of the child were prepared and submitted to the Government. Priority was always given to keeping children with their families.

40. **A representative of Bahrain** said that article 353 of the Criminal Code had been repealed under Act No. 7 of 2023. Any forced marriage would be found to be void because the consent of both parties to the marriage contract would be lacking. Courts were empowered to investigate suspected cases of forced marriage and to annul any such marriage. The Government addressed prostitution through the justice and social welfare systems. Any suspected cases of child prostitution were investigated. Relevant data were published monthly by the National Communication Centre and through the justice system. Any children involved in cases of prostitution were treated as victims, and measures to protect them were taken automatically. Perpetrators would be punished, particularly in cases involving pimping or exploitation. Offences involving exploitation were punishable. If any shortcomings were found in the relevant criminal provisions, the State party would address them.

41. **A representative of Bahrain** said that child victims of sexual exploitation were required to undergo psychological and social rehabilitation and participate in programmes that addressed the causes of their victimization, including their family environments.

42. **Ms. Todorova** said that the State party's report under the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict had shown that, in general, the State party complied with the spirit and requirements of the Optional Protocol. It would, however, be helpful for the delegation to clarify whether any minimum age had been set for voluntary enlistment in the military, including in reserve forces. She would appreciate information on the applicability of the provisions of the International Crimes Act of 2018, including those on statutes of limitation and criminal penalties, to the recruitment of children into the military. She would like to know, too, whether children could, by law, join the police, national guard or coast guard, whether the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Interior could grant exemptions to any minimum age requirements for joining those bodies and whether minimum age requirements could be waived in times of war or on the grounds of national security.

43. She wished to find out whether the Royal Police Academy and Isa Royal Military College accepted children, whether any form of military education was included in the curriculum of mainstream schools and, if so, whether that education included weapons training. It would also be helpful to know whether the human rights curriculum incorporated peace education, in line with article 29 of the Convention. She wondered whether the State party had any voluntary youth organizations, such as cadet forces, that prepared children for military careers.

44. In the light of the power granted to courts under the International Crimes Act to exercise extraterritorial jurisdiction, she wished to know whether courts could use the existence of any foreign element to exercise jurisdiction in cases involving the recruitment of children into military or security forces or the use of children in hostilities. She would appreciate updated information on the results of any investigations conducted into the killing or maiming of 43 children attributed to the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen in the 2023 report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict. She would also be grateful for further information regarding the work of the child protection unit established by the Coalition and any joint action taken under the memorandum of understanding between the Coalition and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Lastly, she wished to know whether the State party planned to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

45. **Ms. Aho** said that she would like to know what steps the State party had taken in response to reports that children were being abducted off the streets of Shiite villages by armed groups and what types of care had been given to any children who had been rescued. She wondered whether the State party used the media and marketing tools to generate interest in military careers. She wondered, too, whether there were any military schools in the State party and, if so, how many students attended them, what their age range was, whether they were trained in the use of weapons and whether any complaint mechanisms were in place at those schools. It would be helpful to know whether the Convention was addressed in the curriculum of Isa Royal Military College, what steps the College took to verify the age of applicants, what type of training was given to cadets with teaching duties and what types of courses they taught.

*The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.*