



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child Ninety-seventh session

Summary record (partial)* of the 2821st meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 28 August 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Skelton

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* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (continued)

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 (continued)
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1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Bahrain joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Bahrain** said that there was no forced or compulsory recruitment of civilians in Bahrain. Military service, entirely voluntary, was regulated by the law, notably the Reserve Force Act, which categorically stated that recruits had to be at least 18 years of age. Conditions regulating recruitment, including the age limit, were clearly advertised via the media and on the official website of the Bahrain Defence Force, and any prospective recruit who did not meet those conditions was rejected. Legislative Decree No. 23 of 1979 regulating enlistment by individuals in the Bahrain Defence Force, which had envisaged the recruitment of persons as young as 15, had been abrogated under the 2002 Bahrain Defence Force Act.
3. Under the 2018 International Crimes Act, the courts in Bahrain could try cases involving some crimes committed outside the country, including war crimes such as the forced or voluntary recruitment of children under 18 to participate in armed hostilities. The Act was thus consistent with article 1 of the Optional Protocol, and persons who violated it were liable to severe penalties. None of the crimes envisaged under the Act, including war crimes, was subject to the statute of limitations. Under the Code of Military Justice, the recruitment of children under 18 in peacetime was also penalized. Prospective recruits were required to provide proof of their age in the form of a birth certificate, passport or identity card. Bahrain was firmly committed to respecting the minimum recruitment age of 18, without exception, even during times of crisis or national emergencies.
4. The jurisdiction of national courts extended to offences committed outside Bahrain if the victim or perpetrator was Bahraini or a stateless person habitually resident in Bahrain, if the perpetrator was a foreigner who was on Bahraini territory or if the offence took place in a location under the effective control of the Bahrain Defence Force, including on ships or aircraft. Furthermore, persons who were subject to the provisions of the Code of Military Justice and who violated those provisions outside Bahrain, including by recruiting children under the age of 18, were liable to punishment under the Code even if their actions did not constitute an offence in the country in which they occurred.
5. There were no military schools at the secondary level or below in Bahrain. All applicants to the Isa Royal Military College or the Royal Police Academy had to have completed their secondary education and be over 18. Consequently, weapons training was not given to anyone under the age of 18. Modules on international humanitarian law and human rights had been integrated into the curriculum in both the College and the Academy, so all graduates were familiar with human rights principles, including those enshrined in the Optional Protocol. There were no voluntary organizations in Bahrain that sought to encourage people to pursue military careers.
6. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the State acted to protect children from all forms of violence and extremism. In fact, the well-being of children was a key component of the vision for Bahrain developed by His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, which sought to consolidate national values and to encourage a sense of citizenship and identity. A programme known as “Our Bahrain”, which involved both public- and private-sector media campaigns designed to promote a sense of belonging, had been launched in that connection. The programme included a set of indicators to evaluate its impact.
7. The Ministry of the Interior had developed a course, which had been rolled out in the country’s schools, to promote peaceful coexistence and counteract extremism. The positive effect of the course on student behaviour had been confirmed in a field study conducted by a United States education programme. Policies and programme documents had been drafted to promote the health, education and security of children in general, while specific programmes had been developed to nurture preschool children from birth up to the age of 8, to improve

the quality of basic and secondary education and to protect children at risk of dropping out of school. A system of global education was being adopted that sought to increase students' capacity to think for themselves, analyse challenges and solve problems.

8. The Maan ("Together") programme, which had been implemented in 210 State schools, was to be extended to 79 private educational establishments. It sought to define intolerance and extremism and to help students identify and avoid it. One component of the programme was aimed at children between the ages of 13 and 15 and focused specifically on the issue of extremism in video games and on social media. A second component, directed at students between 16 and 18, concentrated on religious and political extremism. The General Directorate of Media and Security Culture published a monthly magazine, *Watani*, that sought to raise risk awareness among children, familiarize them with the role of the security forces, provide them with advice and guidance, give them a sense of the link between the past and the present of Bahrain and instil in them a love of the nation and an understanding of its culture and customs. The magazine, meant for children between 6 and 12, as well as their parents and teachers, was distributed in schools and in other institutions, in addition to being available online.

9. **A representative of Bahrain** said that all the operations of the Coalition to Support Legitimacy in Yemen had been conducted in full compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law. Any alleged violations in that regard were promptly addressed and investigated by the Coalition's Joint Incident Assessment Team, whose work had been recognized in the Secretary-General's 2020 report on children and armed conflict. In his most recent report, the Secretary-General had made no reference to any violations by the Coalition; in fact, he had welcomed its continued engagement with his Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict.

10. The Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior and the Commission for Children's Rights were among the institutions responsible for gathering data relating to the implementation of the Optional Protocol, and they coordinated closely in the analysis and exchange of information in that regard. In addition, an independent commission was responsible for developing strategies and proposing legislation to monitor the enforcement of international humanitarian law. There had been no recorded cases of violations of the Protocol in Bahrain.

11. The Government cooperated with experts and academic figures from abroad – most recently from Sheffield Hallam University – to run workshops and training courses for officials in State institutions to raise awareness of the Convention and the Optional Protocols. Civil society organizations, including the Bahrain Red Crescent Society, also played a role by raising awareness among the public at large. The possibility of acceding to and ratifying a number of international treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, was currently being assessed in the light of issues related to national sovereignty and national legislation.

12. **Ms. Aho** (Country Rapporteur) said that it was still not clear who was responsible for training military cadets, what kind of training they received or what complaint mechanisms had been established for cadets whose rights had been violated. It was also unclear whether children who entered a military academy could subsequently serve as soldiers in armed conflicts, whether children were ever required to leave school to enter a military academy or whether they or members of their families would face reprisals if they decided to leave. It would be interesting to know what measures were taken to socially reintegrate children who had been forcibly recruited by a security agency and whether any sentences had been handed down to persons who recruited children for such groups.

13. **Ms. Todorova** (Country Rapporteur), noting that the military courts were empowered to try children, said that she wished to know what offences committed by children might fall within the jurisdiction of those courts.

14. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she wished to know whether members of the armed forces, including border force guards, were trained to identify children returning to Bahrain who had participated in an armed conflict outside the country and what measures were taken to care for such children.

The meeting was suspended at 10.45 a.m. and resumed at 11 a.m.

15. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the military courts had jurisdiction over some offences committed against military institutions or in places under the control of the military. No one under 18 had ever been tried under military law. The law governing enlistment had been amended to ensure that no one under 18 could be recruited into the armed forces. Children therefore did not participate in armed conflicts. As children could not join the armed forces, it had not been necessary to establish a complaints mechanism for military cadets. There was no mandatory military service in Bahrain.

16. **A representative of Bahrain** said that the authorities had never identified a child returning to Bahrain who had participated in an armed conflict in another country. The Ministry of the Interior and Bahraini embassies around the world forwarded relevant complaints to agencies responsible for children's affairs, to which families living in Bahrain could also submit complaints. On the basis of those complaints, measures were taken to protect the children concerned. Children returning to Bahrain were assisted by a unit of the police that specialized in dealing with children. They subsequently received psychological support from the Child Protection Centre and benefited from rehabilitation and help reintegrating into society. Police officers, including those policing the borders, were given training in how to deal with children. The Child Protection Centre had subsidiary offices that provided health care, educational services and social services to children.

17. **Ms. Aho** said that she wished to know why a 15-year old prostitute would be considered an offender rather than a victim under the State party's laws. She would be grateful for more information on the extent to which the many laws and decrees adopted to protect the rights of the child had been implemented. She would also welcome further information on the budgetary resources allocated to programmes to support children and the number of social workers who had been trained to work with them.

18. **A representative of Bahrain** said that he wished to thank the Committee for the highly constructive dialogue and for the opportunity to discuss the measures taken in Bahrain to fulfil its commitments under the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 11.25 a.m.