



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2822nd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 28 August 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Skelton

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Turkmenistan (CRC/C/TKM/5-6; CRC/C/TKM/Q/5-6; CRC/C/TKM/RQ/5-6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Turkmenistan joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Turkmenistan**, introducing his country's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports (CRC/C/TKM/5-6), said that several laws had been adopted or amended in recent years to improve the domestic legislative framework on children's rights and align it with the Convention. The Social Services Act had been adopted in 2021, as had a new version of the Education Act, and the 2012 Migration Act had been amended to include a section on migrant children and stateless persons. Amendments had also been made to the State Youth Policy Act, the Tax Code, the Social Protection Code, the Code of Administrative Offences and the Criminal Code. Turkmenistan had acceded to several international treaties in recent years, including the Convention against Discrimination in Education of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The National Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of Turkmenistan for the period 2022–2052 and the President's Programme for the Socioeconomic Development of Turkmenistan for the period 2022–2028 reflected key provisions of international instruments such as the Convention and were being implemented on an active basis. The National Action Plan for the Realization of Children's Rights in Turkmenistan for the period 2023–2028, developed on the basis of relevant domestic legislation and international instruments, was also being implemented. The Office of the Ombudsman had been strengthened through the creation of regional structures and its mandate had been expanded to cover the rights of children, women and persons with disabilities. In June 2024, two departments, for the protection of women's and children's rights and the protection of human rights in the private sector, had been established within the Office.
3. Among the strategies and programmes implemented with the aim of improving children's health were the National Programme for Healthy Nutrition of the Population of Turkmenistan for 2020–2025, the National Early Childhood Development Strategy for the period 2020–2025 and the National Strategy on Maternal and Child Health for the period 2021–2025. Immunization was mandatory for all children and was provided free of charge, resulting in 95.3 per cent vaccination coverage. In 2020, the Government had worked with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to develop a plan allocating \$83 million to ensure that all children could be immunized against 14 infectious diseases over the period 2021–2025. The Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov Charitable Foundation for Assistance to Children in Need of Care had been established in 2021 to provide medical care and rehabilitation services to children across the country. The Foundation had funded 423 operations between 2021 and 2024, including 141 operations in the first half of 2024, as well as the purchase of 50 ambulances for children's wards at district hospitals.
4. Significant progress had been made in modernizing the national education system, in particular through the implementation of the Concept for Improving Teaching Methods in General Education Programmes in the period to 2028, approved pursuant to a presidential decree in May 2024; the National Early Childhood Development Strategy for the period 2020–2025; and the programme for improving the activities of preschool establishments in the area of early development and enhancing the preparation of children for school in Turkmenistan for the period 2020–2025. In 2023, the Government had worked with the UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education on a road map for cooperation to advance the digital transformation of the education system. As a result, new distance learning technologies had been introduced and electronic educational materials had been made more accessible.
5. Implementation of the Joint Programme on Improving the System of Social Protection through the Introduction of Inclusive Quality Community-based Social Services, a project developed in cooperation with the United Nations, had concluded in 2022. Its aim had been to improve the country's social services system by introducing new social work practices to benefit the most vulnerable groups, including children. The Social Services Act contained

measures aimed at improving the living conditions and meeting the needs of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, as well as orphans and children without parental care. In 2023, two of the country's universities began offering four-year bachelor's degree courses in social work.

6. The number of children aged under 16 years in employment had decreased since the Labour Code was amended to raise the minimum employment age from 16 to 18 years. Other measures taken to prevent child labour included the adoption of a road map for cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) for the year 2023 and another for the period 2024–2025. In the scope of that cooperation, there were plans to align domestic legislation on forced and child labour with the relevant ILO Conventions, in particular by prohibiting forced and compulsory labour in cotton harvesting. In July 2024, the Minister of Labour and Social Protection had signed an order to add cotton growing and picking to the list of jobs with harmful or hazardous working conditions in which the employment of persons under 18 years of age was prohibited.

7. Efforts had been made to modernize the child justice system and shift the approach from correction to socialization. Coordination between law enforcement agencies and child protection bodies had been strengthened, and effective prevention and response programmes had been developed to address the needs of children in contact with the law, including child victims and witnesses to violence. Family support programmes for those children, as well as children living in alternative care arrangements, had been improved. Under domestic legislation, refugee, migrant and displaced children were assured of access to the universal basic services available in the country. Two child-friendly facilities for pretrial interrogations, the first of their kind in Turkmenistan, had been opened with the support of UNICEF.

8. **Ms. Beloff** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that the measures taken by the State party, in particular in cooperation with international actors, clearly demonstrated its commitment to compliance with the Convention.

9. **Mr. Mezmur** (Country Task Force) said that he would like to learn more about the impact that the recent constitutional reforms had had on children in Turkmenistan and wondered how those reforms interacted with domestic laws concerning children and with the Convention. In addition, it would be interesting to know whether children's issues had received more consideration in parliamentary debates in the aftermath of the reforms. Given the wide range of legislative reforms carried out recently in Turkmenistan, he wished to hear whether the State party had considered conducting a comprehensive study of the ways in which the new laws interacted with one another and with the Convention. The delegation might wish to explain how the duties of children set out in article 32 of the Rights of the Child (State Guarantees) Act complied with the Convention and whether there were any safeguards in place to prevent abuse of those provisions. He wondered whether the absence of implementing regulations and decrees relating to the Act had hindered compliance with the Convention in Turkmenistan and whether temporary measures had been taken to avoid that situation.

10. It would be helpful to hear whether the increases in budgetary allocations to the social sector had been commensurate with population growth, especially growth in the child population, and whether the funds allocated were sufficient to meet children's needs. He would like to learn more about the State party's plans regarding the collection of data disaggregated by age, sex and geographic location. He wished to know whether the State party had considered establishing separate child protection departments within local authorities and would welcome clarification of the roles of the Commission on Minors' Affairs and the guardianship and trusteeship authorities as they pertained to children's rights, including whether any changes to those structures were envisaged. Information regarding the enjoyment of children's rights in the business sector, including with respect to child labour, would be welcome.

11. **Ms. Kiladze** (Country Task Force) said that she would like to know whether the State party had adopted legislation on preventing and responding to discrimination that affected vulnerable groups, such as children belonging to ethnic minorities, including the Baluchi, Nohur, Kazakh and Uzbek minorities, children with disabilities and children living in

poverty. If so, she would like to know how effectively that legislation was implemented. She wished to know whether children belonging to ethnic minorities faced restrictions in the enjoyment of their right to education in their mother tongue and whether the State party had conducted awareness-raising campaigns to combat discriminatory attitudes.

12. She would be interested to hear how the State party ensured that the best interests of the child were prioritized by all three branches of the State in decisions affecting children. In addition, she would be grateful for information on measures taken to train professionals working with and for children to ensure that the best interests of the child were taken into account in line with the Convention. She would like to know whether there were legal procedures in place that set out systems and procedures enabling social workers and courts to ensure that children could exercise their right to be heard by all three branches of the State. If that was the case, it would be useful to know whether children, civil society organizations and the wider public had been involved in their development.

13. She would appreciate clarification regarding any mechanisms in place to facilitate the naturalization process for stateless children and their family members under the Citizenship of Turkmenistan Act. The delegation might wish to comment on the accuracy of reports that former refugee and stateless children, as well as children from mixed families who were citizens of the State party, had been required to provide evidence that they did not hold citizenship of another country when renewing their passports. If those allegations were true, she would like to know whether there were plans to remove that requirement. Information on the collection of data on stateless children would be welcome. She would like to learn whether the State party shared statistical information with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

14. It would be useful to hear how freedom of expression and the freedom and independence of the media were ensured in Turkmenistan in both online and offline contexts. She would appreciate additional information on the practical implementation of the provisions of the Rights of the Child (State Guarantees) Act on the right to freedom of speech; in particular, she would like to know whether children were able to freely and safely express their opinions, including in family, school and community settings. The delegation might wish to describe measures taken to enhance digital literacy among children, their families and teachers and explain whether the State party made use of artificial intelligence in the context of children's rights.

15. **Ms. Beloff** said that she would be interested in hearing the delegation's perspective on the apparent discord between the prohibition of violence against children in domestic law and the continued tolerance of such violence in practice. In particular, it would be useful to learn about the root causes of domestic violence and whether the reasons behind the tolerance of it against children in Turkmen society were social, economic or cultural. Information on the role of local authorities in the elimination of violence against children would be appreciated. She wondered whether the delegation shared the view that the lack of reports lodged concerning violence against children, despite the availability of reporting mechanisms, was worthy of note and wished to know whether the State party had taken steps to assess the effectiveness of those mechanisms. It would be useful to hear about any measures taken to address violence against children in institutions and comments the delegation might have on the lack of complaints of violence lodged with respect to those children.

16. She would welcome further information on support provided to children and their families with a view to preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. Additionally, she would like to know whether policies on combating those phenomena were effective and to receive data on sexual abuse and violence perpetrated against children. She would appreciate clarification as to how the State party ensured that anti-cyberbullying policies were implemented in a manner that did not infringe on the right of children to enjoy access to digital technologies and to use computers for educational purposes.

17. It would be helpful to know what practices constituted abuse and ill-treatment in the State party, as there appeared to be no clear definition of those concepts in domestic legislation. Statistical data on child marriage would be welcome, and it would be interesting to learn whether legislative amendments and capacity-building initiatives had made an

impact on those figures. It would be useful to hear about the role played by local authorities in eliminating child marriage.

18. Further information regarding the treatment of adolescent offenders would be appreciated, as would information on any support, such as medical or psychological assistance, provided to child victims once they were no longer involved in legal proceedings. She wished to know whether child victims were assured of reparation and non-repetition in domestic legislation and whether those principles were applied in practice. Since no reports of trafficking in children had been lodged with the authorities, she would be interested to hear how the State party collected data on cases of trafficking and other acts of violence against children.

The meeting was suspended at 3.50 p.m. and resumed at 4.10 p.m.

19. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that, according to the Constitution, the universally recognized principles of international law took precedence in the country's hierarchy of legislation, and when Turkmenistan acceded to an international treaty, the Government strived to domesticate its provisions. For instance, in 2022, provisions concerning various groups, such as children with disabilities and children in care homes, had been added to the State Youth Policy Act, and the Tax Code had been amended to include tax exemptions for parents, adoptive parents and guardians of children with disabilities aged under 18 years. The Code of Administrative Offences had also been amended the same year to include provisions establishing liability in cases where the rights of parents or guardians had been violated, including cases of violence; measures to prevent violation of the rights and the social integration of minors in situations of neglect, vulnerability or coercion had been introduced into the Crime Prevention Act. The Infectious Diseases Act had been amended in 2021 to include provisions on preventing the spread of infectious diseases in children's homes. Following the 2021 amendment of the Act on the legal status of foreign nationals in Turkmenistan, children aged under 16 years were no longer liable to pay consular fees to extend their residence permits or receive copies of certificates or other documents relating to statelessness. Under the amended Social Protection Code, women who had given birth to and raised more than eight children had the right to receive a special pension from the age of 52 years.

20. Since the entry into force of the amended Criminal Code in 2023, pregnant women and women with children aged under 3 years could no longer be sentenced to correctional or compulsory labour and children aged under 16 years could not be subjected to compulsory labour. The Code also granted courts the power to suspend sentences for minor offences handed down to pregnant women, women raising children aged under 14 years and single men raising children aged under 14 years whose mothers had died or had been deprived of parental rights. Children could not receive custodial sentences of more than 1 year for minor offences, more than 5 years for less serious offences, more than 9 years for more serious offences and more than 12 years for the most serious offences. Separate provisions applied to children with disabilities. Violation of a minor's privacy had been made a criminal offence, as had the refusal to hire, and the dismissal of, women on the grounds that they were pregnant or had children aged under 3 years. Several offences related to the distribution of pornographic material to minors had also been codified.

21. An analysis of domestic legislation had informed the formulation and implementation of recommendations for further legislative reform. In the light of the dynamic situation regarding children's rights both nationally and globally, the Government was planning to conduct another analysis more closely focused on the detail of national legislation with a view to ensuring the full implementation of the Convention in Turkmenistan. The National Action Plan for the Realization of Children's Rights in Turkmenistan for the period 2023–2028 contained several measures aimed at further improving legislation on children's rights.

22. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that there were more than 70,000 children belonging to ethnic minority groups in Turkmenistan. Around 98 per cent of the population were Turkmen, 1.8 per cent were Uzbeks and the remainder belonged to other minorities. Education was provided in the Turkmen language, and students wishing to receive instruction in other languages had the opportunity to study in other countries. Most of the country's 200,000 schoolchildren were Turkmen, with smaller groups of Russian and Uzbek children.

Eleven foreign languages were taught in schools around the country. Due attention was paid in the education system to ethnic and gender diversity, and inclusion and multiculturalism were promoted.

23. The use of digital technologies in education was a priority. The Concept for the Development of the Digital Education System in Turkmenistan 2017–2025 advocated the strengthening of legislation on the matter and the creation of a digital education system with a view to building capacities among staff and developing digital skills among the public. Elements of that document, including its recommendations on remote learning, had been incorporated into the revised Education Act. An expert council on education had been established by the Ministry of Education in 2021, and a digital learning platform had been launched to allow curricula to be updated regularly. Also available were a large database of video lessons and a website bringing together all of the country's online education portals in one place. A news outlet had launched a digital platform aimed at children, and educational courses on digital technologies including artificial intelligence and big data had been rolled out. Several young people had had the opportunity to develop their ideas for projects through the creation of a start-up support platform. An online safety and information security training hub had been set up, with many courses provided in English.

24. Measures were being taken to address violence in domestic and educational settings. As part of the Government's efforts to build safe and inclusive environments in schools and promote peace and tolerance among new generations, a programme for older students had been established to raise awareness of issues such as the rule of law and extremism and to promote peaceful interactions, combat negative stereotypes and prevent violence. School management teams were alert to instances of gender-based violence and discrimination and addressed them in a timely manner. To prevent acts of discrimination, students were informed of their rights and obligations in school settings, and regular discussions were held with representatives of civil society organizations, parents' associations and law enforcement agencies to raise awareness among students of the importance of violence prevention and the need to treat others, including people of the opposite sex, with fairness and respect.

25. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the National Action Plan for the Realization of Children's Rights in Turkmenistan for the period 2023–2028 recognized the rights of all children to freedom from violence, exploitation, ill-treatment and neglect and provided for effective protection and support for vulnerable children. Any act of violence that resulted in physical, psychological or any other kind of harm to a child's health or diminished his or her capacity to work could be prosecuted under the Code of Administrative Offences, with increasing penalties for repeat offences. In addition, article 108 of the Criminal Code provided for prison sentences of up to 2 years for perpetrators of physical or psychological violence against children.

26. Recognizing the need for concerted action by the State, society and individuals, the Government was strengthening legislation on preventing sexual violence against children by setting out clear definitions, severe punishments for perpetrators and victim protection systems in domestic law. Awareness-raising campaigns were being carried out to educate children, teachers, parents and the wider public about how to identify child victims of and protect children from sexual violence. Laws were in place to protect children from being drawn into prostitution, and programmes had been established to provide victims with medical, psychological and legal assistance under conditions of confidentiality. State agencies had systems in place to allow a rapid response to reports of such crimes, and children and their parents received support from judges, prosecutors and adoption and fostering agencies where needed. Reports could be filed through systems administered by the police and the prosecution service, with assistance provided to minors unable to file reports themselves. There were no age restrictions for reporting cases of sexual violence.

27. New legal provisions had been adopted to improve the way in which police interacted with child victims in the justice system. Juvenile affairs commissions worked with law enforcement agencies and the Ministry of Internal Affairs on child protection issues at the local level. The Government was working with UNICEF to expand and modernize existing child protection measures across the country and had undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the child protection system with that organization's support in 2021, which had resulted in recommendations calling for extensive reform to legislation on adoption,

fostering and the work of the juvenile affairs commissions. New recommendations for further improvements to child protection measures were currently being developed with technical support from UNICEF and would be presented to the relevant State agencies in due course.

28. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that progress had been made in the implementation of programmes to support families of children in conflict with the law, child victims of violence and ill-treatment and children living in alternative care arrangements. A holistic approach had been adopted with a view to reducing vulnerability among children and their families and ensuring that children could receive the care and support they needed while remaining with their families. With the support of UNICEF, the Government was developing a strategy to promote the enjoyment of the rights of all children, including victims, witnesses to crimes, children in contact with the law and children in fostering and adoption proceedings. To combat violence against children at the local level, inspectors were individually assigned a specific geographic area and were responsible for identifying rights violations committed against minors in that area, including at schools and sports clubs. Reports of rights violations were referred to the law enforcement agencies if it was clear that a criminal offence had been committed.

29. While it was not possible to rule out the possibility that strict disciplinary measures were used in Turkmenistan, as was the case in all countries, it was unlikely that such measures were particularly widespread and it was inaccurate to suggest that children were exposed to high rates of violence in the country. Isolated reports of violence in schools had been sufficiently addressed by the law enforcement agencies.

30. To improve access to justice among children, the Government was working to increase the number of qualified social workers in the country and was providing them with ongoing training on conducting individual assessments and supporting families. Activities to enhance access to justice had been included in annual action plans developed with UNICEF. The principle of non-discrimination against children was enshrined in the Rights of the Child (State Guarantees) Act, which contained provisions on the creation of appropriate conditions for children to live their lives free of violence.

31. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the annual State budget had increased from 85 billion manat in 2023 to 102 billion manat in 2024. More than 70 per cent of the budget was allocated to social spending, much of it for the benefit of young people, who accounted for roughly half the population. Regardless of wider economic trends, the levels of public sector wages, pensions and social support for children were always either maintained or increased on an annual basis. Furthermore, by presidential decree, wages and certain benefits – including support for children under the age of 3, orphans and children with disabilities – had been increased by a factor of 10 per cent.

32. The department for the protection of human rights in the private sector, which had recently been established within the Office of the Ombudsman, was holding a series of meetings with representatives from industry, the service sector and private businesses to ensure that children's rights were being adequately upheld in all areas of the private sector. Those meetings were also used to raise awareness among private sector actors of their responsibility to comply fully with national and international legislation on the rights of the child.

33. Turkmenistan was an active participant in the global campaign of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to end statelessness within a decade. Over the previous 10 years, some 35,000 stateless persons had received Turkmen citizenship and, at a conference scheduled to take place in November 2024, the Government intended to adopt a plan to award citizenship to the few remaining stateless persons in the country. The State Migration Service was working in close cooperation with local authorities and police forces to implement a government programme, developed in partnership with the High Commissioner for Refugees, to ensure that all stateless persons entering the country were identified and registered. Under the Citizenship of Turkmenistan Act and the Constitution, dual citizenship of nationals of Turkmenistan was not recognized. Therefore, any person applying for citizenship status was required to prove whether or not he or she held the citizenship of another country.

34. The Interdepartmental Commission on Compliance with the International Obligations Undertaken by Turkmenistan in the Field of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law was currently reviewing the effectiveness of the reporting mechanisms set up under the Commission on Minors' Affairs. The feedback it had received so far from law enforcement officers, legislators and local authorities was somewhat inconsistent, and the Government had not ruled out introducing new reporting mechanisms for children. In the meantime, the child protection system continued to function with the participation of the Office of the Procurator-General and various agencies of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Care for victims of violence, including psychological support, was offered by both the Government and civil society organizations; the latter also worked with victims, including child victims, of human trafficking.

35. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that, under national legislation, the minimum age of marriage was 18 years. However, children aged 17 could be authorized to marry in certain cases where there was full agreement and consent from both parties. In general, early marriage was not an urgent or widespread problem in the country, which was why no specific steps had been taken to eradicate it. The authorities were, nevertheless, keeping abreast of best international practice on the matter.

36. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the parliament was responsible not only for developing new laws but for monitoring the implementation of existing legislation. Furthermore, it was commonplace for government agencies to formulate and adopt by-laws designed to enforce legislation. Those by-laws were registered by the Ministry of Justice.

37. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the national education system was undergoing a rapid process of digitalization at all levels. With every passing year, an increasing number of educators participated in short-term refresher courses run by the Government and international organizations, including UNESCO, on subjects such as information and communications technology, computer sciences, networking technologies and cybersecurity. Educators at all levels received training on how to integrate modern computer technologies into their teaching, and seminars and workshops were regularly held on key themes such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality and big data. Plans had been made to train a number of digital specialists who would be tasked with disseminating information throughout the country on international best practice regarding digital education, the digital economy and cybersecurity. The Government had also organized a series of international events and exchanges for educators with the aim of strengthening their knowledge of the latest developments related to cybersecurity.

38. **Ms. Beloff** asked whether the delegation considered that the residence registration (*propiska*) system continued to have a negative impact on the rights of certain children, notably those of minority groups, in the State party, given the need for them to prove that they did not have citizenship of another country.

39. **Mr. Mezmur** said that he would be interested to learn what tangible impact the constitutional amendments of 2019 had had on the enjoyment of children's rights. It would also be useful to hear how effective recent legislative measures on freedom of association, such as the 2020 reform of the Voluntary Associations Act, had been in creating a more favourable environment for the work of civil society organizations. In particular, he wished to know whether the amendments had made it easier for children's rights organizations to provide support to victims of violence.

40. **Ms. Kiladze** asked whether children who belonged to minority groups were offered language classes to learn the language associated with their ethnic culture.

41. **Mr. Jaffé** said that he would like to know what proportion of children had access to smartphones and the Internet. He would welcome further information concerning any social media platforms to which access had been restricted by the State party and how such measures affected children's enjoyment of their rights. Lastly, it would be interesting to know whether there were any organizations led by children that were particularly popular in Turkmenistan.

42. **Ms. Todorova** said that she would like to know what obstacles had prevented the State party from implementing the recommendation made in the Committee's previous

concluding observations (CRC/C/TKM/CO/2-4) that it should assess the level of violence against children in all settings and establish an appropriate reporting mechanism through which they could address complaints, and when it intended to do so. As things stood, what action would a police officer take if he or she was confronted by a child, unaccompanied by a parent or guardian, who claimed to have been severely beaten or sexually abused?

43. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she wished to know whether the Office of the Ombudsman had the power to receive complaints from children. If so, she would welcome clarification as to whether a child could submit a complaint directly to the Office or needed to be represented by a parent, guardian or another adult. It would also be helpful to learn whether the Office could take proactive action to address suspected violations of children's rights that had not been the subject of a formal complaint.

44. **Ms. Beloff** said that, while the State party might not be faced with a problem of widespread violence on its territory, it was also clear that not all acts of violence were reported to the authorities. She would therefore be interested to hear the delegation's thoughts on why so few violent incidents were reported and what action the Government might take to identify the root cause of the underreporting of violence.

45. **Ms. Aho** said that she would welcome an update on the vaccination rate, the number of children in the State party who had never received a dose of vaccine and the action being taken to address such cases. She would welcome any statistics that the delegation could provide on the number of children who had been victims of violence. Further information about the support they received from specialized care providers, such as child psychiatrists, would also be of interest. Lastly, she would like to know how many social workers were currently employed and what functions they carried out.

46. **Ms. Correa** said that she would like to know how many authorizations had been given for marriages involving persons under the age of 18. It would be useful to hear more about the circumstances under which a child of 17 could legally marry and to know whether the Government would consider introducing an absolute prohibition on marriage for persons under the age of 18. She would be interested to learn what impact the legislation on preventing early marriage had had on society from a cultural perspective and whether the Government had taken any measures to establish how many early or forced marriages had taken place outside the law in the State party.

47. She had read disturbing reports of girls being sexually exploited at the hands of adults who had been allowed into their homes by their parents. Did the delegation have any further information on such allegations? How did the Office of the Procurator-General go about investigating such cases and prosecuting those responsible?

48. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the department within the Institute of State, Law and Democracy that was responsible for receiving and examining complaints from citizens had been closed down following the establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman. The Institute had never received any complaints from children; if it were to in the future, it would refer them to the Ombudsman.

49. The primary function of the Institute was to conduct research in the field of democracy and governance. It had its own doctoral programme and published a quarterly journal in three languages containing statistics on human rights issues, including the rights of the child. In its capacity as coordinator of the Interdepartmental Commission on Compliance with the International Obligations Undertaken by Turkmenistan in the Field of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, the Institute oversaw the implementation of national plans on, among other things, the prevention of human trafficking, the promotion of gender equality and the realization of children's rights. Another key objective of the Institute was to raise awareness of the law and human rights among young people. It had set up human rights resource centres in five regions of the country, and representatives of the Institute carried out local awareness-raising activities on issues such as the rights of the child, discrimination against persons with disabilities and discrimination against women, and the related Conventions, often in the company of international experts or representatives of the Office of the Ombudsman. The Institute also had a working group that worked alongside members of parliament to develop new legislation in response to the recommendations received from the United Nations treaty bodies.

50. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that, although the residence registration (*propiska*) system was still in place, it did not restrict the movement of citizens in the country. Its purpose was simply to register each person's permanent place of residence; it in no way restricted the right to leave that place of residence. All people were free to move to other parts of the country on a temporary basis without having to register their whereabouts on the system.

51. Children from all population groups, including those belonging to ethnic minorities, had access to schools where the basic education curriculum was taught either in Turkmen or in Russian. Children who wished to be taught in another language were free to leave the country to pursue their education abroad. There were also many online courses available for children who wished to continue their learning outside school, including tuition in a wider variety of languages.

52. Complaints could be submitted to the Office of the Ombudsman either by children directly or by parents on behalf of their children. The Office played a key role in protecting and promoting the rights of children in a number of ways, including through its interactions with the Government, local authorities and law enforcement agencies, through its awareness-raising activities and through its monitoring of the country's fulfilment of its international obligations. With the creation two months previously of the new department for the protection of women's and children's rights, the Government expected the Office's role and impact in relation to children's rights to continue to grow.

53. **Ms. Kiladze** said that she would like to hear whether any measures had been taken to strengthen the system of family support in order to prevent abuse, neglect and abandonment of children. It would also be useful to know whether the State party had adopted a comprehensive deinstitutionalization strategy, including measures to abolish temporary placement in institutions and to conduct periodic reviews of placements. She wished to learn whether any legislation had been passed to prevent children from being removed from parental care because of their family's financial or material poverty, including whether the State party assessed each case comprehensively or if, in practice, conditions directly attributable to poverty were sometimes used as the sole justification for separating a child from his or her family.

54. She would be interested to know whether the State party ensured that there were sufficient family- and community-based care services for children without parental care. The Committee would welcome further information on the measures implemented to ensure adequate foster care and adoption services, including the size of the budget allocated to those systems, the extent of the training provided to foster and adoptive families and the steps taken to review placements. It would be useful to know whether the State party had put in place safeguards and clear criteria based on the best interests of the child to determine whether a child should be placed in alternative care, as well as obligatory standards for monitoring, reporting and remedying maltreatment of children in such settings. She wished to know whether there were any confidential, child-friendly reporting mechanisms for children in alternative care and, if so, how often they were used. It would be helpful to hear whether a mechanism had been established for the early identification and support of children left without parental care due to labour migration. Did the State party provide training for professionals working with children to raise awareness of alternative care services and the rights of children?

55. Lastly, the Committee would welcome further information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations on adoption that had been included in its previous concluding observations. Had the State party established a centralized system for the registration of adoptions with a view to generating disaggregated data? How effective was domestic legislation on adoption, particularly article 122 of the Family Code and article 156 of the Criminal Code, in ensuring that adoptive children enjoyed the right to know their biological parents? Had the State party made any plans to ratify the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption?

56. **Ms. Sidikou** said that she would like to know what measures were being taken to make education more accessible and inclusive so that children with disabilities could fully enjoy their right to education. It would also be interesting to learn whether the State party

had introduced community-based rehabilitation, home-based care or social protection for vulnerable families in order to reduce the institutionalization of children with disabilities. The delegation might like to explain what measures were being taken to improve the living conditions of poor families with children with disabilities and indicate whether the State party would consider prioritizing family support measures over investment in care institutions. She wished to know whether any social services or community mechanisms had been put in place to protect children with disabilities and whether each child enjoyed access to the specialized treatment he or she needed, including physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

57. It would be helpful to hear whether any appropriately staffed and equipped schools had been developed specifically for children with disabilities, in particular hard-of-hearing children, children with visual impairment and children with mental or psychosocial disabilities. She would also like to know whether professionals such as psychologists, social workers and educators received training on the specific needs of children with disabilities and whether there were any mechanisms that allowed children with disabilities to participate in community decision-making processes concerning issues that affected them.

58. Noting the difficulties in accessing health care for inhabitants of rural areas and children with disabilities and the lack of qualified staff, insufficient medical equipment and poor infrastructure in the national health system in general, she said she would like to hear what was being done to guarantee high quality health-care services for all children in all areas of the country. She would also like to learn why the neonatal mortality rate was so high, in spite of considerable investment in public health care, and what action was being taken to strengthen the capacity of medical professionals in the State party.

59. She would like to know whether the State party had a national social protection policy and, if so, whether it was adequately funded. It would be useful to know what specific measures were taken to help children in vulnerable situations, including children with disabilities and children belonging to minority groups, as part of wider efforts to fight poverty. The Committee would also welcome further information on efforts to improve social services at the national level and whether sufficient human and financial resources had been allocated to roll out social services in all parts of the country. Had any measures been taken to provide financial assistance to the most vulnerable children and their families? Lastly, it would be interesting to know what action the State party had taken to implement the recommendations that had been issued following the 2021 review of its child protection system.

60. **Mr. Mezmur** said that he would like to know to what extent children participated in the development of national climate change policies. It would also be useful to know whether the State party collected disaggregated data on natural disasters and, in particular, on the children who were at risk of being exposed to such events. He wished to know whether any legislative or administrative measures were being taken to prevent water pollution and hold polluters to account and what was being done to inform children of the dangers of polluted water. It would be helpful to learn whether the Government had made any plans to put early warning systems in place for events such as flooding and, if so, how they took the specific rights and needs of children into account.

61. He would like to know whether the State party was taking any measures to collect disaggregated data on the performance of children in specialized education environments, such as boarding schools. He would also be interested to learn why there were no statistics on dropout rates and whether the Government had any plans to collect such data in the future. The Committee would welcome updated information on the progress made under the national strategy for early childhood development for 2020–2025, including any challenges encountered with its implementation and plans for future action. Lastly, it would be useful to know what steps were being taken to address the challenges relating to education that had arisen during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, including those associated with reduced school hours and students' access to computers and the Internet.

62. **Ms. Beloff**, noting that the State party had indicated that there were no refugee children from Afghanistan on its territory, said that she would be interested to know whether there were any other refugee children in Turkmenistan and what measures were taken to ensure that, in practice, they had access to basic social services. She also wished to know

what status was given to the children of parents who emigrated from Turkmenistan and whether the State party provided them with support or placed them in institutions. There were no references to children in street situations in the State party's report. It would be interesting to learn whether that was simply not a problem and, if so, whether there was a connection between the absence of children in street situations and the recent increase in the number of institutionalized children.

63. She would be interested to hear the delegation's thoughts on the apparent incompatibility between the minimum age of criminal responsibility, set at 14 years for offences such as theft and robbery, and the commendably human approach to juvenile justice outlined in the State party's report. It would also be useful to know whether the State party used restorative justice measures to deal with teenagers found guilty of sexual abuse. The Committee would welcome statistical information on the length of time that children in conflict with the law, particularly those under the age of 14, spent in places of deprivation of liberty. The delegation might like to clarify whether the Government would consider making the maximum period of deprivation of liberty dependent on the age of the child and the type of crime committed. She also wished to know whether deprivation of liberty was used as a precautionary measure for children who stood trial.

64. She would like to know whether the State party would consider amending the declaration it had issued when ratifying the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, according to which children aged 17 years could be called up for military service. It would also be helpful to know what progress had been made towards criminalizing all the offences defined in the Optional Protocol, in particular by defining as a war crime the act of enlisting children under the age of 15 to participate in armed conflict.

65. Lastly, certain doubts remained over practices at military schools. How did the State party ensure that children enrolled in military schools voluntarily and not because of social reasons or pressure from their family? How were conditions at military schools monitored and were there any mechanisms for children to report abuse? How did the State party ensure that military schools struck the right balance between their focus on military issues and the need to treat students in a manner that was commensurate with their young age?

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.