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Chair: Ms. Mejía Vélez (Colombia)

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

Agenda item 64: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/71/41)

(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/71/213 and A/71/253)

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children (*continued*) (A/71/175)

1. **Ms. Mballa Eyenga** (Cameroon) said that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must be seen as an opportunity to improve the situation of many children around the world, particularly in Africa, and address persistent inequalities. States must invest wholeheartedly in a world fit for children.

2. On the basis that education was one of the cornerstones of the realization of children's rights, Cameroon had established free schooling for both boys and girls in rural and urban areas. In collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), it was promoting inclusive education by ensuring that girls from disadvantaged groups received an education. Her Government was also involving traditional and religious leaders in its efforts to combat violence against women and girls and was implementing systematic vaccination programmes with support from the World Health Organization, civil society and the private sector. Greater access to paediatric treatment for HIV/AIDS was needed and children left orphaned or otherwise vulnerable by the disease needed greater protection.

3. With regard to the protection of children's rights, Cameroon was working to combat the recruitment of children by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram. It was also collaborating closely with several international organizations including UNICEF and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to implement the various legal instruments on children's rights. Cameroon greatly appreciated the support it had received from United Nations agencies, donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which had enabled it to respond to the humanitarian crisis arising from the Boko Haram attacks and an influx of child refugees.

4. **Ms. Bruell-Melchior** (Monaco) said that, despite the efforts made to date, 70 million children would die

before their fifth birthday between 2016 and 2030. Universal health care, including antenatal, birth and neonatal assistance, was fundamental, as was good nutrition. Universal education could break the cycle of inequality, improve children's living conditions and help fight violent extremism and terrorism. The World Association of Children's Friends (AMADE), an NGO set up by Princess Grace in 1963, had made health and education its top priorities, as had the Government through its international cooperation policy.

5. Violence against children was an affront to human dignity that affected 1 billion children every year. Prior to the high-level forum on sustainable development in 2017, a Solutions Summit would be held on tackling violence against children. One useful instrument was the guide published by the International Organization of la Francophonie, which provided practical advice on supporting children called upon to give evidence in court.

6. **Ms. del Águila Castillo** (Guatemala) said that the Sustainable Development Goals, which included goals on the health and well-being of children and adolescents, had been the outcome of an inclusive process. It was vital to invest in childhood and ensure that children could participate as agents of change.

7. The El Niño and La Niña phenomena had had devastating effects in Guatemala year after year and had exacerbated the existing problems of drought and malnutrition for the most vulnerable segments of the population. Her country was very grateful to the United Nations funds and programmes for their support and assistance and had joined the Scaling up Nutrition initiative, which aimed to boost the commitment of Governments and local communities to the right to food and good nutrition.

8. Migration policies in the region must take account of the numbers of separated and unaccompanied children in the Northern Triangle, and must include provisions for children and adolescents, in particular for their reintegration if they returned to their country of origin. Migrant children needed specific support and Guatemala had pioneered the provision of specialized consular protection to minors in foreign countries. It was imperative that States find alternatives to the detention of children and adolescents that were in their best interests and permitted them to remain with their families.

9. Guatemala agreed that, while combating bullying was in the interests of all children, it was important to prioritize the most vulnerable when fighting stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion.

10. **Ms. Kupradze** (Georgia) said that States had a common responsibility to ensure that children's rights were upheld. Violence and discrimination against children had reached unprecedented levels, and the humanitarian tragedy unfolding in Syria was the most vivid demonstration of the gross violations to which children in armed conflict were subjected.

11. The Government of Georgia was particularly concerned with improving the living conditions of refugee children and children affected by internal displacement, which it addressed through assistance programmes and a comprehensive national strategy. However, it was unable to promote or protect the human rights of the children residing in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, which were being illegally occupied by Russia. Those children continued to be deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms, including education in their native language and freedom of movement. Since local residents were not permitted to cross the occupation line, even for medical reasons, they were compelled to leave their permanent residence, thereby creating a new generation of internally displaced persons. Of even greater concern was the fact that none of the special mandate holders visiting Georgia over the past few years had been allowed to enter those regions to evaluate the situation on the ground.

12. Georgia was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had acceded to the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure in September 2016. The country's fourth periodic report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child was due to be examined in January 2017. Among other measures introduced by her Government, financial aid for children with disabilities had been increased; access to social care programmes had been broadened; the Juvenile Justice Code had been amended to better protect the interests of the child; forced marriage had been criminalized; and the trafficking of minors had been banned.

13. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that Morocco had ratified all the instruments on children's rights, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child

and its Optional Protocols. The new constitution of 2011 had enshrined the rights of children and had established that the international conventions took precedence over national legislation.

14. As a result, a number of initiatives had been launched. On the legal front, the Government Council had adopted draft law 78-14 on the Advisory Council on the Family and Childhood. A programme had been put in place for the period 2012-2016 that placed special emphasis on childhood with regard to education, health and the reporting of violence. To address new forms of criminal activity that were emerging as a result of technological advances such as the Internet, her Government had developed partnerships with service providers to protect children against sexual exploitation, and had run campaigns to raise awareness of safe online practices among parents. Lastly, the unwavering commitment of Morocco to children's rights had been demonstrated by the creation of the Mohamed V Foundation for Solidarity and the National Observatory for the Rights of the Child.

15. **Ms. Romulus** (Haiti) said that the title of the UNICEF report, *The State of the World's Children 2016: A fair chance for every child*, brought home the magnitude of the task that lay ahead. In particular, it had drawn attention to the challenges of extreme poverty, such as high infant mortality rates. While great progress had been made, the number of children between ages 6 and 11 attending school had fallen since 2011, a problem that was exacerbated in areas affected by armed conflict. Convinced that education was the only way to achieve social progress and sustainable development, the President of Haiti intended to do everything in his power to establish universal education in the country.

16. Respect for children's rights was a priority for her Government, which was working tirelessly to address the specific problems faced by the most vulnerable Haitian children. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour had taken a number of measures to suppress offences against the physical and mental integrity of children, and the draft Children's Code had been adopted by the Council of Ministers. Significant progress had been made on the harmonization of Haitian legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in line with the recommendations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and the

school enrolment rate had increased. All Member States must redouble their efforts to meet the health, nutritional and educational needs of children living in poverty.

17. **Mr. Al Muttairi** (Saudi Arabia) said that his country viewed the rights of children as particularly important and had adopted legislation to uphold those rights, in accordance with Islamic sharia, which, inter alia, safeguarded children's right to life even prior to their birth and prohibited abortion without compelling grounds. The rights of children were fully respected under the country's laws, and parents were legally required to ensure the well-being of their children, including by giving them appropriate names. Furthermore, in accordance with the Basic Law of Governance, the State took care of and fully protected all members of the family, which constituted the basic unit of Saudi society, and aspired to promote family bonds. A minimum age of employment had been established in the country and the worst forms of child labour had been prohibited. Saudi Arabia had also outlawed the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, and, in accordance with Islamic sharia, imposed appropriate penalties on the perpetrators of those crimes. A law criminalizing domestic abuse had also been adopted to protect all members of society, particularly children.

18. Saudi Arabia provided education to children through the school system, and ensured that they received instruction and guidance, including on the importance of ethical behaviour, through the media and at children's clubs and associations. Saudi Arabia also deeply appreciated the work of, and was strengthening its cooperation with, international and national governmental and non-governmental organizations working to promote and strengthen the rights of children.

19. His country would continue to comply with all its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, while maintaining its reservations with respect to all articles of that Convention that contravened the provisions of Islamic sharia.

20. The horrific image of the injured Syrian child Omran Daqneesh, who had been pulled from the rubble of his home after it had been bombed by the Syrian regime and its allies, had shocked the world and was a stark reminder of the ongoing bloodshed in Syria. The

world must take resolute and immediate action to end the suffering of the Syrian people and stop the atrocities perpetrated by the Syrian regime — a regime that continued to target defenceless civilians and which, according to the Syrian Network for Human Rights, had killed more 21,000 Syrian children.

21. **Mr. Joshi** (India) said that his delegation was concerned that official development assistance to the poorest countries had declined by 8 per cent between 2013 and 2014. India was home to the largest child population in the world and its constitution contained several provisions on child protection, welfare and development. Its National Policy for Children, adopted in 2013, took a rights-based approach.

22. Elementary education was a fundamental right in India, and his country had achieved full gender parity and full primary enrolment. Its flagship universal programme, the Integrated Child Development Services scheme, provided health-care services, immunization and preschool education to 37 million children aged 3 to 6 years. India was now polio free, and had recently overcome maternal neonatal tetanus.

23. The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights had been set up in 2007 with the aim of ending exploitation and violence against children. Action was also being taken to combat online child sexual exploitation, the Childline emergency outreach service was being expanded countrywide and an online tracking service was being used to collect data on missing children and facilitate their return. A comprehensive legislative and policy framework was in place to address the trafficking of women and children, while the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act had come into force in 2012. The Government of India was also strictly enforcing the ban on the employment of children. A number of programmes were addressing the declining child sex ratio and pursuing the empowerment of women.

24. **Ms. Elhassan** (Sudan) said that the protection of the rights of children was a top priority for her country. Sudan had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the two Optional Protocols thereto, the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). Sudan also strongly supported the Children, Not Soldiers campaign, which had been launched

jointly by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and UNICEF.

25. Domestic legislation prohibited the recruitment of children under the age of 18 by the armed forces, police and security services, while the 2010 child protection law had established an integrated system of juvenile and restorative justice, and specialized juvenile justice prosecutors dealt with cases involving minors in conflict with the law. Sudan had also enacted legislation to combat human trafficking, particularly the trafficking of women and children, and, in October 2014, had hosted an international conference on human trafficking and smuggling in the Horn of Africa.

26. Sudan had established child protection units in the armed forces as well as family and child protection units in the Ministry of the Interior. Her Government had also established the National Council for Child Welfare, and appointed a prosecutor to investigate accusations of human rights violations, especially against children, in Darfur. A fact-finding commission was also investigating the abduction of children and their use as soldiers in Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile states. On a more general level, in 2013, his Government had launched a 10-year national action plan for the protection of human rights in Sudan.

27. Technical and high-level meeting were being held to spearhead implementation of the action plan on the protection of all children in conflict, which had been signed by the Government of Sudan and the United Nations on 27 March 2016. In that regard, Sudan had recently released 21 child combatants who had fought with insurgents in battles in Fanga and Goz Dango, and would take steps to rehabilitate them so that they could be reunited with their families. The Government of Sudan would, moreover, continue to work closely with UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to promote the interests of all children in the country.

28. In closing, she stressed the need to help countries to put an end to conflicts. The international community must also help countries to address the underlying reasons why children dropped out of school and were used as soldiers; critical factors in that regard included poverty, climate change, developing countries' sovereign debts and the imposition on certain Member States of unilateral sanctions. Developing countries

also needed technical and capacity building assistance in order to uphold the rights of children effectively. Robust mechanisms were, moreover, needed to ensure that insurgent groups adhered to the agreements they had signed on the prohibition of the use of children as soldiers, and desisted from further violations of children's rights. Any violations must be forcibly condemned by the international community, which must also take firm action to disarm those groups and ensure their participation in peace negotiations.

29. **Ms. Karabaeva** (Kyrgyzstan) said that the protection of the rights and best interests of the child was a fundamental value in her country's path to development. Her Government had adopted a number of long-term programmes and plans of action on schooling, juvenile crime and violence against children, mostly focused on raising public awareness, including within schools. It was also implementing a programme for an efficient and fair justice system for child offenders, witnesses and victims, focused on children in vulnerable situations. Some 60 centres provided disadvantaged children and families with free legal aid, social and recovery services and assistance for their reintegration into society, while a helpline for counselling and legal advice had been established in 2015.

30. Protection of childhood, the family and motherhood was the most important pillar of Kyrgyzstan's national policy. According to the State of the World's Children 2016 reports of UNICEF, extreme poverty in Kyrgyzstan had decreased from 7 to 2 per cent between 2010 and 2014; infant mortality had plummeted from 49 to 21 deaths per 1,000 live births between 2000 and 2014; all children had access to schooling; and over 90 per cent of children had access to drinking water and sanitation. In May 2016, Kyrgyzstan had hosted an international conference on children with disabilities and later that year it would hold an international forum on diet and food security. Efforts were currently being made to improve the quality of drinking water as part of the Scaling Up Nutrition Movement of the World Food Programme.

31. **Ms. Gebremedhin** (Eritrea) said that Eritrean customary laws accorded protection for all children even before birth. Eritrea had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had appointed a national interministerial committee to monitor its implementation.

The newly published legal codes criminalized the use of corporal punishment. Children under the age of 12 could not be prosecuted, while those between the ages of 12 and 18 were considered juvenile offenders.

32. Countrywide sensitization programmes were being conducted to support vulnerable children or provide training and advocacy to youth and adolescents. A pilot project to reintegrate street children in the education system had recently been launched. A proclamation prohibited the employment of children under the age of 14 and a national plan of action against the sexual exploitation of children had been adopted. An awareness campaign was under way to combat trafficking in children and the Government was working to bring the perpetrators to justice. The focus in the health sector was on care during pregnancy and childbirth, post-delivery and neonatal care and nutrition. Malaria had been reduced by 90 per cent and polio and neonatal tetanus had been eradicated. Immunization coverage of children had increased to over 90 per cent.

33. Free schooling was provided to all children from elementary to higher levels. As a multi-ethnic society, Eritrea provided for the instruction of children in their mother tongue at the primary level. Special attention was given to girls, nomadic communities and children with disabilities. The practice of female genital mutilation had been criminalized but further work was needed to eliminate the strongly rooted cultural and religious beliefs associated with it.

34. **Ms. Soulama** (Burkina Faso) said that, despite rapid population expansion, coupled with weak economic and social indicators, her country had made significant legislative, social and educational advances. Three pieces of legislation had recently been adopted to prohibit the sale or prostitution of children and child pornography; to protect children either in conflict with the law or at risk; and to prevent and eradicate violence against girls and women and provide redress and support for the victims. The gross enrolment rate in primary schools for girls had risen to 83.9 per cent in 2014/15 compared with 83.6 per cent for boys. Awareness campaigns to promote protection of child victims of abuse and exploitation had been launched and reporting methods established, together with stiffer penalties for perpetrators. Projects to eradicate child and early marriage had yielded satisfactory results,

while the prevalence of female genital mutilation among girls under age 15 had fallen from 36 per cent in 1996 to 11 per cent in 2015.

35. Further efforts would be needed to overcome barriers and consolidate existing advances. The Government of Burkina Faso urged the international community to continue to provide assistance to enable his country to effectively safeguard the rights of the child.

36. **Ms. Guzmán** (Dominican Republic), drawing attention to various programmes geared to the well-being of children and adolescents, including early childhood education and care for persons with disabilities, said that her Government provided for the temporary protection of all vulnerable or at-risk children and all those suffering flagrant violations of their rights. With support from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children and UNICEF, the Dominican Republic was following a road map for the prevention and elimination of violence against children, building synergies between the relevant parties and avoiding leaving any children behind. The road map was part of a plan promoted by the Office of the President for preventing violence.

37. A campaign was being conducted jointly with civil society, government agencies, municipal authorities and other interested parties to promote positive parenting, raise awareness of the problem of violence and provide training for parents, teachers and community leaders. Inspired by the principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, her country would continue to expand its services to children and invest in upholding their rights with a view to realizing “the future we want”.

38. **Ms. Maduhu** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the Government of Tanzania had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, as well as the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and was committed to their effective implementation. To that end, it had adopted the Law of the Child Act of 2009, for Mainland Tanzania and the Children’s Act, 2011, for Zanzibar. A new national plan for the period 2016-2021 addressed violence against women and children and sought to promote a unified national protection system in line with the 2030 Agenda. The 2009 Act was currently

being translated into Kiswahili and would be disseminated to communities. A Child Helpline had been set up to receive reports of abuse and a high-level national task force on street children was being coordinated.

39. Convinced that education was not only a good investment in the nation's future but would also reduce the prevalence of early marriages, the Government had instructed public schools to provide free primary and secondary education to all children. The Child Marriage-Free Zone campaign had been launched in August 2014 as part of a series of initiatives to combat the early marriage of young girls. Her Government had also signed the Kigali Declaration, which set out a framework for action to end such marriages. The Government had the primary responsibility for the well-being of its people; however, it relied on the continued support of the international community to achieve the universal standards that had been established.

40. **Mr. Eriza** (Republic of Indonesia) said that all countries had a moral obligation to promote and protect the rights of the child. Notwithstanding the work of all stakeholders, many children were still deprived of their liberty, trapped in armed conflicts or caught up in emergency situations. Since its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990, Indonesia had improved its legal framework, strengthened its institutional capacity and put in place an implementation mechanism. Under the National Action Plan on Child Protection 2015-2019 and the National Strategy on the Elimination of Violence against Children 2016-2020, public advocacy and outreach were being increased to promote the rights of the child, while measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination and bullying, including cyberbullying, were being intensified.

41. As a founder of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, Indonesia believed that a holistic approach to the issue was needed and should combine a sound legal framework with practicable measures and effective law enforcement. The primary responsibility for nurturing and protecting children lay with the family and it was imperative for the Government to implement family-friendly policies.

42. With 25 per cent of the national budget allocated to health and education, Indonesian children benefited

from 12 years of free, compulsory schooling and their basic health and nutritional needs were met. Indonesia had achieved gender equality in primary education and illiteracy rates had fallen to 4.5 per cent in 2015. Recognizing the need for an environment conducive to the respect, promotion and protection of children's rights, the Government had consistently promoted child-friendly communities and cities.

43. **Ms. Steinarsdóttir** (Iceland), recalling that more than half of the world's 21 million refugees were children, said that all displaced children — whether as a result of conflict, persecution or poverty — were first and foremost children. The rights asserted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child applied to every child, irrespective of status. Iceland was committed to protecting and promoting children's rights at home and abroad and would continue supporting multilateral efforts to advance that cause. UNICEF had been a key institution in her country's multilateral development cooperation agenda and the parameters of that collaboration had recently been codified in a new framework agreement.

44. The Convention had been fully integrated into Icelandic law, resulting in a critical improvement in the legal status of children. States should look beyond the legislative realm and integrate the treaty into public policy, in particular at the municipal level. UNICEF was working with Icelandic schools on adopting a model for implementing the Convention in their everyday work.

45. Iceland was a co-sponsor of the resolution on child, early and forced marriage. The fact that every single day, almost 40,000 girls were subjected to that practice was a stain on the global community. The millions of girls already affected must be empowered through quality education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and must receive the sexual and reproductive health-care services that they needed.

46. **Ms. Nunoshiba** (Japan) said that Japan placed emphasis on international cooperation in the field of education and, particularly, on education for girls. It had assisted in building middle schools for girls in Tanzania, where early marriage and pregnancy often prevented them from completing their education, and in setting up girls' dormitories in Nepal and Malawi to improve completion rate of female students in middle and high schools. The release of more than 115,000

child soldiers through the good offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict was a welcome achievement but the international community should continue to work tirelessly in that area. Japan funded the UNICEF programme that supported the release and reintegration of children from armed groups in African countries and had contributed \$6 million over the three previous years for the reintegration of child soldiers and for the protection and empowerment of children in armed conflict throughout Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

47. In her country, children living in relative poverty, the condition of living on less than half of the average income of society, received educational support, while their guardians were given assistance in finding suitable jobs. Families in need, in particular single-parent households and those with many children, benefited from administrative services tailored to their circumstances. Recognizing the importance of stable employment, the Government provided comprehensive support in the area of employment and childcare. Japan would spare no effort in continuing to promote children's rights through cooperation with other States and civil society.

48. **Ms. Dagher** (Lebanon) said that armed conflicts and terrorism had left millions of children hungry, homeless or mired in poverty. They had been internally displaced or had become refugees, and while hundreds had drowned in the Mediterranean, many of those children continued to hold fast to their dreams of a better future. Since the previous session of the General Assembly, many promises had been made and there was universal acknowledgement that stronger cooperation and urgent action by the international community were needed to save an entire generation of children and strengthen respect for their rights. Under the slogan "no one left behind", numerous international initiatives had been launched in the previous 12 months, including in the areas of climate change, humanitarian operations, education, migration and asylum, and the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The General Assembly and Security Council had also adopted numerous resolutions with a view to creating a "world fit for children", as called for in the outcome document of the 2002 Special Session of the General Assembly on Children. Lebanon had participated in all those international initiatives and believed that upholding the rights of children was an

essential prerequisite for the creation of pluralistic and open societies that were based on respect, justice, equality and the rule of law.

49. Lebanon was committed to upholding the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It had ratified the Convention the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol thereto on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) and the Trafficking in Persons Protocol. Lebanon had also promulgated legislation to uphold the rights of children, including laws and decrees on education, child labour, social security, health, disability and juvenile justice, and was working with specialized agencies and international and civil society organizations to formulate policies to protect and improve the living conditions of all children living in Lebanon.

50. Education could play a key role in strengthening and safeguarding the rights of children and empowering them to reject extremist views and resist recruitment by extremist groups. Educational initiatives could, moreover, help counter violence, human trafficking, child marriage, discrimination, intolerance, xenophobia and bullying. It was therefore regrettable that less than 12 per cent of global humanitarian assistance was earmarked for educational projects. It was vital to increase that figure in order to give thousands, if not millions, of children and adolescents the chance of a better life. Education lay at the heart of Lebanon's policies to address the humanitarian crisis that had resulted from the entry into the country of 1.5 million Palestinian and Syrian refugees, half of whom were under 18 years of age.

51. **Ms. Salazar** (Panama) said that, among the huge waves of migrants entering Panama, many were children fleeing their countries in search of a better future. Whether alone or accompanied, many were victims of human rights violations, including abuse, human trafficking, sexual exploitation and forced labour. A multidisciplinary committee set up by the Government under the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and Family was assisting communities. Shelters had been set up for over 1,000 migrants of various nationalities. The committee sought to implement policies for the comprehensive

protection of the rights of children and adolescents, and to guarantee respect for their rights as child migrants.

52. Investing in quality education to halt the intergenerational transmission of extreme poverty and in health care to reduce neonatal mortality and provide universal health coverage was crucial for improving the future of each child. Panama was committed to ensuring a better future for the coming generations and was striving to implement policies and strategies to cater for the needs of the most vulnerable, such as children with disabilities, indigenous children and those of African descent. Also of concern was the problem of bullying and cyberbullying, which could impact children both physically and psychologically. The Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the Office of the Ombudsman, UNICEF and the private sector, had launched a programme entitled “Safety in school — No to bullying”, its purpose being to foster peace and a positive and harmonious school environment, free from harassment or violence. Schools also had psychoeducational services to deal with bullying.

53. **Ms. Myat** (Myanmar) said that her country had become party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and to its Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in 2012, and was in the process of becoming party to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. After a new law on children was approved by the parliament, the ratification of the Protocol could be finalized.

54. As peace and national reconciliation were prerequisites for the successful implementation of development policies and programmes such as the 2030 Agenda, the Government of Myanmar was working toward those goals. Children, particularly in conflict areas, who did not have access to education were vulnerable to violence and exploitation. In order to address that issue, free and compulsory primary and secondary education had been introduced beginning in the 2016-2017 academic year. Children were taught about human rights in school.

55. Myanmar had been cooperating closely with relevant United Nations organizations for the promotion and protection of the rights of children. It had also made efforts to prevent the exploitation of

child labour by ratifying International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 on elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

56. To prevent and eliminate underage recruitment and use of children by the military, in June 2012, the Government of Myanmar had signed a joint action plan with the United Nations country task force on monitoring and reporting on the use of children in the military. In cooperation with the country task force, the government had taken important steps including centralization of the recruitment process, discharge of children from the military, allowing of visits to military units and advocacy campaigns. Since the signing of the joint action plan, 810 underage children had been discharged from the military and support and assistance, such as education, vocational training and community reintegration were being provided. In light of those achievements, Myanmar should be delisted from the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict.

57. **Mr. Hassani Nejad Pirkouhi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his delegation expressed its strong dismay that the interests of children had been compromised in the 2016 Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict due to unjustified political pressure. An arms embargo on Governments that engaged in mass killing of children was the least that the United Nations could advocate.

58. As recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children required a family environment and an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding in order to flourish. Families should therefore be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that they could meet their responsibilities.

59. Almost half a million refugee children, 100,000 of whom were undocumented, were attending schools in Iran free of charge. Donors had apparently failed to meet their commitments to those children, resulting in an enormous burden on the educational system. The Government was committed to improving that situation by creating a supporting legal framework and by promoting public awareness of children’s rights at every level of decision-making, from parliament to civil society. Similarly, the national focal point for the implementation of the Convention was expanding and would eventually be present in all provinces of Iran.

60. **Ms. Pires** (Timor-Leste) said that in 2015, her country had approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, acknowledging the dignity of children and their right to live free from fear and violence. There was deep concern over bullying in Timorese schools, particular cyberbullying.

61. Despite the complex nature of modern conflicts, it was imperative to protect children and to work to minimize the impacts such conflicts had on them. Timor-Leste urged parties to armed conflict to respect and protect children's rights and refrain from recruiting child soldiers. Efforts must also be made to provide child soldiers with the necessary assistance for reintegration.

62. Over 50 per cent of the population of Timor-Leste was under 19 years of age, and hence it was important to focus on education and technical and professional training for youths. To that end, Timor-Leste was committed to ensuring access to education for all children, particularly those with disabilities and girls, and national legislation had been enacted to support the reintegration of teenage mothers in the school system. Other child-centred strategies undertaken in the country included health programmes focusing on antenatal care, which had led to a sharp decline in child mortality rates in recent years.

63. **Ms. Jeewon Park** (Republic of Korea) said that a comprehensive and coordinated approach was necessary for promoting the rights of children. Providing security, nutrition, health care and quality education to all children, including those living in conditions of armed conflict, was a complex task that required efforts from actors both within and outside the United Nations system. In that regard, the Republic of Korea welcomed efforts that were being made by United Nations agencies to strengthen collaboration with civil society organizations.

64. Education should be expanded to include the most vulnerable and marginalized. Millions children did not have access to quality education and were thus at risk of further marginalization. In addition, access to education was important for entire communities, as it was necessary for a sustainable and inclusive society based on human rights, equality, rule of law and respect for diversity. Her Government would therefore continue to highlight education as a tool for individual empowerment and social development.

65. Although the international community had made progress in advancing gender equality, girls were more susceptible to discrimination and various forms of violence, as could be seen in the higher school attrition rates among girls. More efforts should be devoted to protecting girls and helping them realize their potential, and to that end, in 2015 the Government had launched the "Better Life for Girls" initiative and would provide \$200 million over the next five years to support girls' health, education and vocational development.

66. **Ms. Al Jawdar** (Bahrain) said that her country had acceded to international instruments on the rights of children, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which had been ratified by Bahrain in 1992. It had also entered into memorandums of understanding on children's rights with international organizations such as UNICEF and had launched a national strategy on children which would act as a road map for the implementation of legislation on children's rights. In the area of health care, Bahrain had successfully lowered maternal and child mortality rates. The Government also provided routine vaccinations for almost all children.

67. The Child Protection Centre reported to the Ministry of Social Development and worked to protect children from all forms of abuse and neglect. The Centre provided services related to the evaluation, investigation, treatment and follow-up of those children through coordination with various Government and civil service agencies. The Centre received reports of child abuse as well as reports transferred by officials in various ministries and the Office of the Public Prosecutor.

68. Bahrain had also supported charitable projects outside the Kingdom, particularly in countries affected by war and disasters. Bahrain's Royal Charity Organization had given aid to needy children and orphans inside the country and abroad, providing schools for Syrian refugee children in Jordan and providing assistance in Yemen, Djibouti and Nepal.

69. **Mr. Mohammad** (Kuwait) said that the constitution of Kuwait stipulated that the family was the basis of society and was founded on religion, morality and patriotism. It also stipulated that the State would cater for the welfare of its young people and protect them from exploitation and moral, physical and

spiritual neglect. In order to promote those constitutionally-enshrined principles, and in addition to its international obligations as contained in instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols, Kuwait had enacted domestic legislation concerning the family and children. In 2015, Kuwait had enacted a law establishing a family court, which contained a number of articles on how family disputes should be addressed so as to minimize impact on children. Another law, on the rights of the child, was a comprehensive piece of legislation that gave children the right to a cohesive family environment, as well as the rights to education and health.

70. It was not possible to discuss children's issues without mentioning the suffering of Palestinian children in Israeli-occupied territory. Kuwait was worried about deteriorating living conditions and exacerbated feelings of alienation, despair and deprivation among Palestinian children as a result of the occupation. In furtherance of its support for the rights of the Palestinian people, Kuwait would be hosting a conference on the suffering of Palestinian children.

71. **Ms. Natividad** (Philippines) said that her country recognized its duty to provide a safe environment for children's development free from violence, exploitation and abuse. Since children's right to education was of paramount importance, a substantial portion of the Philippines' national budget for 2017 would be reserved for education in an effort to improve access to schools and increase graduation rates. The 2017 budget had also allocated additional funding for the conditional cash transfer programme, whose objective was to keep children from poor families in school and healthy. Children should also enjoy their time in school, and to that end, the Philippines had passed an anti-bullying law which required all elementary and secondary schools to address bullying by establishing reporting requirements and outlining sanctions.

72. The Government had created inter-agency committees and councils to oversee implementation of laws to protect children from sale, child prostitution and pornography. Mechanisms, such as a protocol regarding case management of child victims of abuse and exploitation, had been developed to address issues

related to the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases and the Government, in cooperation with national and foreign police, had stepped up its efforts to curb commercial sexual exploitation of children.

73. The Council for the Welfare of Children continued to implement the monitoring and reporting mechanism for Grave Child Rights Violations. Local governments had participated in a series of workshops on the mechanism to learn how to respond to grave child rights violations, and in April 2016, a hotline had been set up to receive reports of grave child rights violations.

74. **Mr. Nibishaka** (Rwanda) said that children represented a large percentage of the Rwandan population as a result of the horrific genocide that had taken place in the country in 1994. The repercussions of that massacre had affected the lives of Rwanda's children in various ways, compelling the Government to take certain measures to prioritize children's rights. For example, primary and secondary education were free and compulsory and progress had been made in meeting primary school enrolment and parity goals. In line with the Convention, Rwanda had also introduced measures to prohibit corporal punishment, and had passed laws protecting women and children against violence.

75. Rwandan law condemned child prostitution, slavery and abduction, and the Government had recently instituted a national anti-trafficking action plan. Given the volatile situation in the region and porous borders that facilitated human trafficking, Rwanda continued to investigate, prosecute and convict traffickers. The Government also provided protective services, including counselling, medical and legal services and short-term housing for trafficking victims.

76. The character and tactics of armed conflict had created new threats to children, and therefore, the international community should continue to establish comprehensive frameworks to protect children in such situations. The Children, Not Soldiers campaign was a positive development in that regard, as was the signing of action plans by some listed State and non-State parties. Nevertheless, greater efforts should be made to address the root causes of those conflicts.

77. **Ms. Bellout** (Algeria) said that childhood should be incorporated into every development goal. Algeria, which had achieved all of the Millennium Development Goals related to education, had increased its education budget tenfold in the previous 15 years, with free education offered to over 8 million students, including to children in refugee camps in Tindouf. Significant achievements had been made in improving the efficiency of the Algeria education system and enabling all children to receive primary education. The Government had also recently enacted a child protection law containing provisions on the protection of at-risk children, on child offenders and on child protection within specialized centres.

78. **Mr. Rattray** (Jamaica) said that children suffered disproportionately during conflicts and armed violence, were seriously impacted in the aftermath of natural and man-made humanitarian crises and were exploited in the human trafficking trade. In the face of such calamities, urgent action was clearly needed. The 2030 Agenda provided a unique opportunity to deal with children's rights in a universal and inclusive manner, with particular emphasis placed on the plight of marginalized children, who faced added challenges because of their specific vulnerabilities.

79. Jamaica's comprehensive approach to children's rights, on the one hand, tackled access to primary and tertiary education through tuition-free education; a policy that no child should be barred from schooling on account of the parents' or guardians' inability to pay fees; and legislative amendments to codify the right of access to education. On the other hand, the approach addressed violence against children through Jamaica's membership of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children; the implementation of the National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence; and a revision of the Safety and Security Manual to Address Bullying in Schools.

80. **Mr. Tupouniua** (Tonga) said that, as a small island developing State, Tonga endeavoured to make the most of limited resources to uphold the rights of the child. In 2013, it had enacted the Family Protection Act, which guaranteed the safety and protection of children who had experienced or witnessed domestic violence, and the Education Act, which provided children with access to quality education and free tuition throughout primary and secondary education,

prohibited corporal punishment and made education compulsory between the ages of 4 and 18. Free health care was available for all children without exception. The Government had also moved to codify laws on child labour through the Employment Relations Act.

81. The rights of the child were incorporated into the country's Strategic Development Framework 2015-2025. As the country had no social welfare schemes of its own in place, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and UNICEF were currently implementing child and social protection projects, including legal and policy reform. Additional child-focused events were being organized to commemorate United Nations Day and national cyber week. The latter event in particular would focus on the building of a safer and healthier digital world for children by providing guidance on the use of legislation and other actions to uphold children's rights online.

82. **Ms. Klein** (Madagascar) said that Madagascar had set up a child protection network, comprising hundreds of bodies spanning the entire country, to report cases of abuse, support victims and raise community awareness. That initiative was complemented by regional and community child protection plans. In 2016, the Government had drawn up a document on services offered to child victims of mistreatment and a practical guide on the management of such cases. Staff working in State bodies and teaching establishments received training on child protection in schools.

83. Her Government considered women's and children's health to be one of its main priorities and had launched national campaigns to promote child immunization against polio and malaria. It had also stepped up efforts to combat sex tourism involving children, signing a convention with national and international partners to promote child-sensitive sustainable tourism and, in May 2015, applying a code of conduct governing the sexual exploitation of children for commercial purposes or for sex tourism.

84. Madagascar had been battered by natural disasters which had a direct impact on people's health and well-being and exacerbated malnutrition. Her Government wished to thank all partners working to help children in Madagascar as well as the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator for her recent

visit in the wake of the devastation left by the El Niño phenomenon.

85. **Mr. Bai** (Fiji) said that the rights of the child were an integral element of his country's fundamental rights policy and had been enshrined in its Constitution. A new provision under the Constitution extended protection to children from all forms of violence at home and in school.

86. Access to quality education was of paramount importance to the Fijian Government. In 2015, education at primary and secondary schools was made free for the first time, with fees for textbooks and other study-related costs incurred also covered by the State. As part of its commitment to end all violence against children, his Government had launched a confidential child helpline in 2015 allowing callers in need of support, care or protection to speak to trained counsellors.

87. Fiji was a staunch proponent of Sustainable Development Goal 5 and incorporated gender mainstreaming into all its programmes and initiatives. It had also included provisions into its Constitution to limit the marginalization of persons with disabilities and was considering ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

88. **Ms. Tsevtanova** (Bulgaria) said that her Government had established targeted measures for promoting the rights and well-being of all children, especially those who were most vulnerable or marginalized. All Government policies and programmes took the best interests of the child into consideration, with emphasis placed on childhood development and equal access to quality education for all. Bulgaria had made significant progress in deinstitutionalizing childcare, preventing child abandonment, encouraging good parenting, supporting families with children and providing foster care and integrated services in communities. The Government was also strengthening its child protection systems and campaigning to raise awareness of the scope of the problem of violence against children.

89. Bulgaria remained committed to promoting children's rights in all international processes. It had co-chaired the Group of Friends of Children and Sustainable Development Goals; advocated the consideration of children's rights during

intergovernmental negotiations on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and during the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants; actively participated in the UNICEF global initiative, the World's Largest Lesson; and chaired the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers when the Strategy for the Rights of the Child 2016-2021 had been adopted.

90. Since children were particularly vulnerable in the current global humanitarian crisis, any response must be founded on the rights of the child. As a transit and host country for thousands of migrants and refugees, Bulgaria was working with partners to protect the human rights of all those seeking refuge.

91. **Mr. Momen** (Bangladesh) said that the best way to protect the rights of the child was through education. In accordance with the principle enshrined in its Constitution that education should be free and compulsory, Bangladesh had approved an education policy providing for education for all; introduced education grants for needy but outstanding students and scholarships for girls; and had distributed braille books for visually challenged children.

92. The Child Marriage Restraint Act and a national toll-free helpline were instrumental in preventing child marriage. The Government had also set up one-stop crisis centres to provide services for children who fell prey to violence and had adopted a five-year action plan to reduce child labour. Bangladesh welcomed the observance of the International Day of The Girl Child and commended the Secretary-General's Children, Not Soldiers campaign. He urged all Member States to reaffirm their commitment to put an end to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

93. Forced migration had compelled millions of children to leave their homes. Migrant children deserved the basic rights guaranteed by international human rights and humanitarian law. Unless the international community could provide adequate support for such children, countries would have no chance of achieving their Sustainable Development Goal targets.

94. **Mr. Komara** (Guinea) said that, despite broad political will and good progress towards the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 2030 Agenda, the situation of children worldwide was still dire owing to the failings of

Member States, dehumanizing laws and policies, environmental degradation and inconsistent national development programmes.

95. Guinea, recognizing its responsibility to children, had enacted the Children's Code and revised its mining code in order to afford children better protection from their environment. His Government was also proud to have signed the UNITLIFE agreement with UNICEF, which redistributed a share of mining revenue to fighting malnutrition. Free education, child vaccination programmes supported by UNICEF and the World Health Organization and the establishment of new human rights institutions were signs of the Government's determination to comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Furthermore, the adoption of a national strategic plan against female genital mutilation and the raising of the age of marriage showed concern for the situation of young girls.

96. Despite its undeniable political will, the Ebola crisis had dampened many of the Government's ambitions, such as plans to build children's courts, expand outreach centres and improve care for persons with disabilities. Technical and financial support from partners and the Ebola Recovery Plan did, however, give some reasons for hope.

97. **Ms. Nguele Makouelet** (Congo) said that her country's new constitution, which had entered into force in 2015, had strengthened the legal and regulatory provisions, including the strategic framework of the national system for children. Her Government had also created a children's parliament, which was represented in each of the country's departments.

98. The most vulnerable children, including children with disabilities and indigenous children, were included in her Government's policy on the protection and promotion of the rights of children. The strategic framework on schooling and the resumption of schooling for children with disabilities had been approved, and children with disabilities had received school materials and assistive devices. Her country had worked to register several thousand indigenous children.

99. Partnerships were a vital aspect of policy implementation and, with the aim of combating hunger

and malnutrition, a letter of agreement had been signed with the World Food Programme in April 2015 for the implementation of the 2015-2018 country programme. The national child protection system had been activated throughout the country and information on child protection was being disseminated.

100. **Mr. Nkoloi** (Botswana) said that ongoing armed conflicts in many parts of the world, particularly the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia and South Sudan, had subjected children to displacement, abduction, sexual violence, forced marriage and trafficking. Botswana strongly condemned grave abuses and violations against children and barbaric attacks on schools and hospitals and urged Governments and parties to armed conflict to respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law. His delegation welcomed the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, the Education Cannot Wait fund and the Children, Not Soldiers campaign and individual action plans by parties to conflicts as effective initiatives for preventing grave abuses and violations against children.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.