



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child Seventy-fifth session

Summary record of the 2198th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 17 May 2017, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Winter

Contents

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third to fifth periodic reports of Bhutan

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

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third to fifth periodic reports of Bhutan (CRC/C/BTN/3-5; CRC/C/BTN/Q/3-5 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Bhutan took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Choden** (Bhutan), introducing her country's combined third to fifth periodic reports (CRC/C/BTN/3-5), said that her country's Constitution required the State to take appropriate measures to ensure that children were protected against all forms of discrimination and exploitation, including trafficking, prostitution, abuse, violence, degrading treatment and economic exploitation. Bhutan continued to pursue pro-child policies and programmes in spite of the many challenges it faced as a small, landlocked and least developed country. The Government had taken steps to implement almost all of the recommendations issued by the Committee following the previous review (CRC/C/BTN/CO/2) and looked forward to further advice and guidance.
3. Three laws containing important legal reforms had been enacted: the Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011; the Child Adoption Act of Bhutan 2012; and the Domestic Violence Prevention Act of Bhutan 2013. In addition, rules and regulations, standard operating procedures and guidelines for their effective implementation had been adopted since 2015. The 2012 National Plan of Action on Child Protection sought to institutionalize a comprehensive and sustainable system for children in need.
4. With a view to expediting justice for women and children in child-related cases, the Government had recently established a Family and Child Bench in the Thimphu District Court and was looking into the possibility of replicating it in other districts.
5. In 2015 the Government had established a National Law Review Task Force representing relevant policymaking and legal entities to harmonize and consolidate laws and to make recommendations concerning procedural changes in the rule of law. The Women, Children and Youth Committee of the National Assembly had also initiated consultations with various agencies on amending and harmonizing contradictory provisions pertaining to women and children.
6. Various studies and assessments of women's participation in development and public life had indicated that inadequate child-care support and other facilities had a major impact on their contribution to development and on children's health and development. The National Commission for Women and Children had taken steps to establish child-care facilities at workplaces in order to support working mothers and ensure the well-being of their children. Ten workplace crèches were currently operating, and the National Commission for Women and Children was finalizing a Guideline for Child-care Crèches at the Workplace to ensure that basic care and safety standards were respected. Mandatory indicators on gender equality had been incorporated from July 2016 in the 2016-2017 Annual Performance Agreements of all government agencies. They required the provision of child-care support to employees through the establishment of crèches.
7. The Government, in keeping with its breastfeeding policy, had extended maternity leave for women in public service from 3 to 6 months and paternity leave from 5 to 10 working days with effect from March 2016. Given existing resource constraints, it was a major breakthrough for working mothers. A High-Level Task Force had been mandated to work with managers in the corporate and private sectors with a view to providing similar extensions of maternity leave to mothers employed in those sectors. According to a recent report, many private companies had raised maternity leave from two months under the Labour Act to at least three months. Four companies had extended it to six months.
8. The Child Protection Focal Person Network informed various agencies about the work of the National Commission for Women and Children. The Commission now had 40 focal persons in all ministries and districts and in other agencies, including NGOs. They were provided with training of trainers skills to generate awareness and impart child protection skills within their respective agencies. The goal of the capacity-building efforts

was to support the Commission in mainstreaming child protection issues in sectoral policies, plans and programmes, as reflected in the National Plan of Action on Child Protection 2012. Annual meetings of the focal persons were held to take stock of progress and to discuss challenges and remedial measures. The most recent annual meeting had been held in February 2017.

9. In line with the Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013, the Child Care and Protection Act 2011 and the Royal Bhutan Police Act 2009, the Government had established the Women and Child Protection Division in the Royal Bhutan Police Headquarters in March 2013. Three Women and Child Protection Units had been established since then in Thimphu, Paro and Phuentsholing as well as separate pretrial detention centres. In addition, eight Women and Child Protection Desks had been established in other districts. They provided women-friendly and child-friendly spaces with access to protected victims and witnesses. A child-friendly interview room established in the Thimphu Unit would be replicated in all districts.

10. The first nationwide Report on Violence against Children had been launched on 11 October 2016, coinciding with the International Day of the Girl Child. The comprehensive scientific study had been conducted in three phases. The first phase had comprised a review of the literature and an analysis of secondary data. The second phase had consisted of qualitative research to identify and better understand the various forms of violence experienced by girls and boys; the drivers of violence in different contexts; the social, economic and contextual factors that augmented or mitigated children's exposure to violence; and responses to violence against children across Bhutan. The final phase had consisted of a quantitative survey of the prevalence of violence, associated risk factors and uptake of response services by persons faced with violence. The outcome was a document indicating the types and frequency of violence suffered by girls and boys in different age groups. The Government was taking steps to address the concerns raised, including a review of the National Plan of Action on Child Protection and the drafting of a Communication for Development Strategy on Child Protection.

11. The Government continued to conduct awareness-raising and advocacy activities on child rights and protection issues from normative, institutional and legislative perspectives. In August 2016, a high-level sensitization workshop on gender and child rights protection had been held for members of Parliament.

12. A high-level nationwide advocacy programme on HIV/AIDS, child rights and social protection issues, including violence against children, child marriage, teenage pregnancy and existing services for women and children in difficult circumstances, had also been implemented recently. It was targeted at district officials, employers in the entertainment sector, teachers, students and the general public.

13. Other developments included the establishment of the Bhutan Children's Parliament by the Election Commission of Bhutan with a view to engaging children in the electoral process and promoting their participation in democracy and decision-making. The Gyaltsuen Jetsun Pema Mother and Child Hospital had been constructed in Thimphu. The National Population and Housing Census to be conducted in 2017 would provide critical updates for the national database.

14. The Government had begun work on the 12th Five Year Plan to be launched in July 2018. Its objective was to achieve a just, harmonious and sustainable society through enhanced decentralization. The 16 National Key Result Areas were closely related to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. While resources were scarce, Bhutan was committed to taking vigorous action to implement the Convention and the two Optional Protocols with a view to investing in a better future for its children.

15. **The Chair** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that the Child Care and Protection Act was a major step forward but it focused on children in difficult circumstances. She asked whether there were any plans to extend its coverage to all children.

16. It was essential to harmonize provisions concerning child rights in different pieces of legislation. For instance, the Penal Code still contained provisions regarding corporal

punishment and the Marriage Act contained certain inconsistencies. Under the Bhutan Citizenship Act, children who were registered but lacked citizenship status could not attend school or have full access to health-care services. She enquired about plans to ensure that all children, regardless of their nationality, could enrol in school and have access to health-care services.

17. While the National Commission for Women and Children was responsible for taking action on all issues relating to women and children, it also served as a quasi-independent monitoring body. The two mandates were inconsistent. Moreover, according to the available statistics, the Commission was heavily underfunded and understaffed. She asked whether supplementary budgetary funds might be allocated to the Commission, and whether another really independent body might be established to conduct the requisite monitoring procedures.

18. She commended the State party on the large proportion of its budget allocated to social services, including education and health care. However, only a very small percentage was devoted to key protection issues. Child rights and protection indicators could perhaps be taken into consideration when the budget was prepared.

19. She enquired about procedures for disseminating the Convention and Optional Protocols in remote areas, and asked whether monastic institutions had access to relevant information. She also wished to know whether children with disabilities were provided with information concerning their rights, and whether human rights education was included in the official curricula of educational establishments, including monastic institutions.

20. Civil society was reportedly an important partner of the Government, albeit under the umbrella of particular ministries, which could impose undue restrictions on the work of NGOs. She asked whether the State party planned to offer NGOs more freedom of action so that they could adopt measures that the Government was unwilling to take.

21. She wished to know whether the business sector, including private-sector education providers and the tourism industry, were required to protect and respect children and to provide remedies for child victims and witnesses.

22. **Mr. Gastaud** (Country Task Force) said that the Marriage Act contained provisions that were inconsistent with the Convention, since girls were allowed to marry when they reached the age of 16. He requested the State party to confirm reports that the Act was being amended and, if the reports were accurate, to provide the timetable for adoption of the amendments.

23. The State party had made progress with birth registration. However, children were not registered unless both of their parents were Bhutanese. He enquired about plans to end such discrimination. He also wished to know whether there was a deadline for the registration of children who could be legally registered, and whether sanctions were imposed on parents who failed to meet the deadline.

24. He asked whether freedom of expression was legally guaranteed for children, and whether they could express their views in the printed press or on radio or television. Freedom of religion was enshrined in the Constitution but it was not fully respected in practice. Religious minorities were subject to discriminatory measures. They were prohibited from proselytizing and building churches. Two protestant pastors had been arrested in the village of Dorokha for meeting Christians without the necessary permit and for planning to project a film without approval. The Hindu community was subject to similar restrictions.

25. He asked whether children were guaranteed freedom of association and, if so, under what conditions. With regard to the protection of privacy, he asked whether the legislation permitted disclosure of the identity of children who were involved in legal proceedings and the publication of photographs in the media. He asked whether authorization was required to run an Internet site and whether restrictions were imposed on the messages that could be circulated.

26. **Ms. Otani** (Country Task Force) commended the enshrinement of the principle of non-discrimination in the State party's Constitution and key legislation concerning

children's rights. One of the concerns expressed by the Committee during its dialogue with the State party in 2008 had been the rights of children of Nepalese ethnic origin, particularly their right to nationality, education and health services. The core document submitted in 1999 (HRI/CORE/1/Add.105) stated that Bhutanese of Nepali origin accounted for nearly 25 per cent of the country's population. She asked whether there had been a major change in the demographic data, and whether data concerning children disaggregated by ethnic origin were available or would be included in the National Population and Housing Census to be conducted in 2017.

27. It was unclear whether, in addition to complaints of child neglect and abuse, the National Commission for Women and Children had received any complaints of discrimination. She asked whether the Commission was competent to receive complaints of discrimination and if so, how such complaints were handled by its legal unit.

28. Commending the State party on its plan to set up a free helpline for children by 2019, she enquired whether the helpline would be available in local languages, given that over 19 dialects and two major languages other than the national language were spoken in Bhutan, and what measures would be taken to provide information about the helpline to all children, including those in rural areas, those who did not attend school, those with disabilities and those of Nepalese origin.

29. Noting with satisfaction the preparation of Policy Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Development, she asked how the State party ensured that the principle of the best interests of the child was observed in the day-to-day implementation of legislation and policies by administrative bodies and in judicial decisions, and whether it planned to provide training in that regard to the relevant professionals, especially judges who specialized in child-related cases.

30. With regard to child participation in policy development, she enquired how members of the Children's Parliament were elected and whether membership was open to all children, regardless of gender or ethnicity, including children with disabilities, children living in remote areas and children who did not attend school.

31. Noting that the Child Care and Protection Act, the Child Adoption Act and the Marriage Act provided for children's views to be heard in a range of situations concerning them, she asked how and by whom their views were heard and whether training was provided for those responsible for taking statements from children.

32. Drawing attention to the concern raised by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in paragraph 36 of its concluding observations on the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Bhutan (CEDAW/C/BTN/CO/8-9), she said that she would like confirmation as to whether custody of children under 9 years of age was automatically granted to the mother. As stated by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in its general comment No. 14 (2013) on the right of the child to have his or her best interests taken as a primary consideration, it was contrary to the best interests of the child if the law automatically gave parental responsibilities to either or both parents. The fact that children aged 9 years and over were entitled, under the Marriage Act, to decide to live with either parent was also a source of concern. She would like to know whether a court could overrule a child's decision in that regard, if it considered that the decision was not in the child's best interests.

33. **The Chair**, noting that corporal punishment was permitted under article 109 of the Criminal Code as a means of safeguarding and promoting a person's welfare, provided that there was no risk of death or serious bodily injury and only to the extent necessary, enquired how corporal punishment could ever serve to safeguard and promote a person's welfare; whether the risk of inflicting a less serious injury or causing psychological damage was taken into account; who was responsible for deciding the extent to which corporal punishment was necessary; and whether the Government had considered amending the article in question.

34. Given that it was widely believed, in schools, families and monasteries, that corporal punishment was an indispensable method of education, she asked how the State party intended to build on the findings of the Violence Against Children Study in order to

develop an action plan and bring about a change in public opinion. Noting that many domestic workers and employees of local businesses such as bars were subjected to corporal punishment, she asked whether the Government had considered introducing legislation that would explicitly prohibit and punish violence in the home and in all institutions and workplaces, followed by an action plan for the implementation of that legislation.

35. Lastly, in connection with the Marriage Act, she asked what steps were being taken to ensure that girls were entitled to receive a full education up to the age of 18 years.

The meeting was suspended at 10.50 a.m. and resumed at 11.25 a.m.

36. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that the Child Care and Protection Act focused on protection rather than child well-being because previous efforts in that field had been targeted towards the latter and the issue of protection had not been fully addressed. Steps would be taken to incorporate the issue of child well-being into all action plans, including the National Plan of Action on Child Protection, which would be reviewed in the light of the Violence Against Children Study.

37. The National Commission for Women and Children had initially been established as a monitoring body, but had since become responsible for implementation as well, pursuant to the Child Care and Protection Act, the Child Adoption Act and the Domestic Violence Prevention Act and the related rules and regulations, pending the identification or establishment of a separate implementing agency. That issue could not be addressed immediately, owing to resource constraints; however, a note had been issued to the Cabinet on the importance of assigning implementation and monitoring to two separate bodies as soon as possible.

38. A study conducted in 2010 had shown that 99 per cent of all births were registered. There were no sanctions for failure to register a birth; however, parents who did not register within the first 12 months were subject to a lengthier registration procedure.

39. It could not be denied that the National Commission for Women and Children was both understaffed and underfunded. The Royal Civil Service Commission had given its approval for an organizational development initiative that should lead to an increase in human and financial resources. The small budget allocated to protection-related issues would be reassessed and hopefully increased when the National Plan of Action on Child Protection was reviewed.

40. In the framework of the twelfth five-year plan, a number of child protection indicators had been included under the national key result areas; under area 16, for example, there was an indicator on the timely development of justice services, especially for children in conflict with the law and in difficult circumstances. Following the introduction of gender-responsive budgeting in 2010, child-related budgeting initiatives were now being considered.

41. Targeted awareness-raising had been carried out, aimed at remote communities, monastic institutions and children with disabilities, for example. The Gross National Happiness Commission had conducted a study on disability-related issues and was drafting a disability policy. Efforts had also been made to raise awareness in the tourism sector, in coordination with organizations such as the Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators. Gender focal points in the private sector often served as child focal points as well, because it was not possible to appoint two separate focal points.

42. **Ms. Dema** (Bhutan) said that the National Commission for Women and Children had been working since 2015 to raise awareness of the Convention and related national legislation in schools and local communities; so far, its work had reached 4,000 students and 3,000 persons at the community level, in 13 districts. There were also civil society initiatives to raise awareness of issues affecting women and children, including high-level advocacy work led by Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck. The Bhutan National Legal Institute had organized information sessions on legislation concerning women and children in 11 districts since 2013; those sessions were also broadcast on television and radio by the Bhutan Broadcasting Service Corporation.

43. **The Chair** asked whether any special measures were being taken to disseminate information on the Convention and child rights to monastic institutions, which were generally difficult to reach.

44. **Ms. Choden** (Bhutan) said that the National Commission for Women and Children had been able to communicate with monastic institutions, which had become much more open in recent years. An expert committee dedicated to developing care and protection programmes for children in monastic institutions had been set up. Efforts had also been made to disseminate information through the Bhutan Nuns Foundation.

45. **Mr. Gastaud** asked whether children whose parents were not both Bhutanese were registered.

46. **Mr. Tenzin** (Bhutan) said that children with at least one Bhutanese parent were registered provided that their parents took the necessary steps within 12 months of the birth. Such children did not, however, qualify automatically for Bhutanese citizenship. A child with one Bhutanese parent had the right to apply for citizenship once he or she had reached the age of 15 years.

47. **Ms. Choden** (Bhutan) said that under the first Citizenship Act, only children whose father was Bhutanese had rights to citizenship. Following amendment to the Act, citizenship was granted to children of any Bhutanese national. Furthermore, once children's births had been registered, they were allowed to attend school, regardless of citizenship status, until the age of 15.

48. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that she would like an explanation as to why registration of births took so long once the one-year deadline had been missed, and whether it was a question of waiting months or even years. The length of the procedure surely meant that there were children who were not registered and thus could not attend school. She asked what provisions had been made to allow the children of nomadic people and families living in remote areas to register. She wondered how it was possible to know at what age children joined monasteries if they had not been registered, and whether they were sufficiently old enough to do so.

49. **Ms. Choden** (Bhutan) said that many parents did not register their children at birth because they were not aware of the laws, and new measures were being taken to raise awareness of marriage and birth registration. The length of the registration process, once the deadline had passed, was generally long due to difficulties with documentation. If parents had the necessary documents, the process tended to be shorter.

50. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that there were community information centres throughout the country, which provided information to parents in remote communities and enabled them to register their children. Children born in hospitals were automatically registered and birth certificates were issued. Otherwise, the registration period of one year would apply.

51. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she wished to know whether civil society groups were involved in the preparation of the report submitted to the Committee, and whether consultations were held with children. Did awareness-raising efforts cover only the Convention, or the two Optional Protocols as well? How were children informed of the contents of the Convention? She asked whether there was a strategy or special teaching aids for raising awareness among the specific groups involved, which included not only children but also those who worked with children. Lastly, she welcomed the planned independent follow-up mechanism by the National Commission for Women and Children. However, since violence was relatively widespread, she would appreciate an explanation of the current procedure by which children could lodge a complaint and an indication as to whether a complaints mechanism was already in place.

52. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that the report had been drawn up following consultations with both government and non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, children had the opportunity to contribute via youth groups, through which information on legislation was shared and feedback received. The Convention was available in a format that was accessible to children, and there were plans to provide a child-friendly version of the Optional Protocols. Programmes for raising awareness of the Convention had also been

carried out by the Bhutan Nuns Foundation and the monastic institutions. The Communication for Development Strategy on Child Protection was under development to increase awareness of children's rights.

53. **Ms. Dema** (Bhutan) said that a curriculum for providing training on the Convention and Optional Protocols to police officers, local leaders and heads of monastic institutions had been developed with the support of UNICEF. The Convention and the two Protocols had also been translated into the national language and disseminated to all stakeholders, including schools and government officials.

54. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that he wished to know whether the oversight and supervision of children in monasteries had been part of the programmes and projects undertaken at monastic institutions. He also asked whether there were any mechanisms whereby children could lodge complaints discreetly and action could be taken to address the problem.

55. **Ms. Ohm** (Bhutan) said that civil society organizations were answerable to the civil society authority, and not to any government ministry. The civil society authority was made up of two ministers, a lawyer and two elected members. The chair was elected and all decisions were adopted by a simple majority. Civil society organizations played a key role in government action and the Government shared human and financial resources with them. They also enjoyed a high degree of freedom in their activities.

56. **Mr. Tenzin** (Bhutan) said that marriage was permitted from the age of 16 under the Marriage Act. However, since the adoption of the Convention, marriage certificates were no longer issued to children under the age of 18 in practice. Furthermore, the Penal Code of 2002 had introduced automatic criminal liability for spouses who engaged in sexual activity with their partner where he or she was below legal age, which discouraged marriage of children. There was a task force to ensure harmony between laws and international instruments, and to make recommendations to parliament.

57. Children enjoyed the same rights and freedoms under the Constitution as adults. They therefore had the same rights of access to information. Ensuring that they did not have access to information that could be detrimental to their development was the parents' responsibility. A recent amendment to the Penal Code of Bhutan made attempting to convert people through force, coercion or inducement a criminal offence. Children, just like adults, were free to form any association with a lawful purpose.

58. The rights of children as victims or witnesses were protected throughout court proceedings by numerous pieces of legislation. Children could only be questioned in the presence of their parents, guardians or legal representatives. The press was prohibited from printing the child's name or photograph, and proceedings involving a child could not be reported on without the permission of the court.

59. **Mr. Gastaud** said that he would appreciate clarification as to when religious conversion was considered forced and when it was not. He also requested specific information on who had technical control over children's access to unsuitable media. With regard to children's freedom of association, he would welcome statistics on the number of children's associations in the country. Noting that intrusions into private life were unlawful, he said that it would be useful to have examples where criminal penalties had been imposed on perpetrators of such offences.

60. **Mr. Pedernera Reyna** asked what specific measures Bhutan was implementing to ensure that children were able to express their views and that their opinions were taken into account.

61. **Ms. Choden** (Bhutan) said that democracy clubs had been established in schools, where children could discuss issues relevant to them. They could then go on to become part of the children's parliament, the resolutions of which were considered by the national parliament and incorporated into government policy were appropriate. Children were also allowed to participate in some regional and international forums.

62. It was difficult to verify figures suggesting that people of Nepalese origin comprised 25 per cent of the Bhutanese population, as data were normally disaggregated in all

censuses and demographic data were rarely collected. Government policies and strategies reflected the need to combat discrimination and exclusion on ethnic and religious grounds, among others. The experiences of other countries were taken into account.

63. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that all cases concerning violations of children's rights were handled by the legal unit at the National Commission for Women and Children. A toll-free helpline would be established in 2019 to provide support for children in difficult circumstances, and the Government was examining ways of raising awareness of the helpline.

64. **Ms. Dema** (Bhutan) said that the helpline would be continuously manned by counsellors and operators. It would initially be available only in Dzongkha and English, but staff would have knowledge of local dialects, with the possibility of introducing other dialects if required in future. The Government would use the media and public events to raise awareness of the helpline among children, in addition to working with existing youth networks and conducting outreach activities such as school visits.

65. **Mr. Tshering** (Bhutan) said that the draft national education policy was undergoing review, but educational institutions should provide a safe learning environment, taking gender, age, ability and climate conditions into account. Corporal punishment had been prohibited in Bhutanese schools since 2008, and in 2011, the Ministry of Education had developed a framework to help schools adopt non-violent disciplinary techniques. In addition, the code of conduct for teachers had been revised in 2012 to strictly prohibit all forms of physical, verbal or psychological abuse.

66. Under Bhutanese law, it was illegal for children to be subject to torture, abuse, or harsh and degrading punishments in their homes or schools. Child battery was also prohibited, as was the use of restraints or force as means of punishment, although their use was permitted if all other measures failed or it was necessary to protect the child or others from injury. Research suggested that the existence of such prohibitions had deterred adults from committing violent acts against children.

67. **Ms. Otani** said that further information would be welcome on the intercountry adoption process, particularly with regard to how children and their adoptive parents were matched, and on whether the National Commission for Women and Children was the only competent authority for facilitating adoption. If private adoption services existed, it would be helpful to know what role they played, and whether they were regulated under the Child Adoption Act.

68. As the Bhutanese legal framework was in line with the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, she asked whether the Government would consider becoming party to it, whether such consideration had already started and, if not, whether there was a plan to begin a process leading to accession to the Hague Convention. It would be useful to know what obstacles prevented the Government from acceding to and implementing the Hague Convention.

69. Although the establishment of residential central schools had been positive in implementing the right to education and providing high quality education, it was of concern that an increasing number of children as young as 6 years old would be separated from their families as a result. She wondered what measures were envisioned to ensure the right of children in boarding schools to grow up in family environments, to alleviate any physical, emotional or psychological harm they might experience, and to protect them from abuse and violence.

70. **Mr. Lumina** (Country Task Force) asked what mechanisms were in place to monitor implementation by schools of the standards for inclusive education, and what remedies or sanctions were available in the event of non-compliance by a school.

71. It would be useful to know to what extent, if at all, children with disabilities, their families or relevant organizations were involved in drafting a national disability policy, and whether there was any effort to adopt a legal, rights-based framework for children with disabilities. He asked whether a curriculum inclusive of the needs of children with disabilities had been developed, and if so, whether the State party could provide examples of elements of the curriculum that promoted inclusive education. In addition, he requested

information on measures being implemented to tackle the stigmatization of and prejudice against children with disabilities, and who was targeted by those measures.

72. It would be helpful to have an update on the training of health workers in community-based rehabilitation and disability assessment, and, in particular, on how many health workers had been trained to date and how they were distributed across the country. He asked what had caused the reduction in budgetary allocations to social investment, and what plans were in place to ensure the increase of budgetary allocations to the health sector. Moreover, he wished to know what measures were being taken to address disparities in the access, quality and use of health services between regions, rural and urban areas and income groups.

73. Although there had been a significant reduction in rates of malnutrition, it would be helpful to know the percentage of children under five who were stunted as a result of malnutrition and the parts of the country particularly affected by malnutrition among children. He asked what efforts had been made to implement the recommendations made at the 2014 high-level meeting on chronic malnutrition, and what support had been provided by the World Bank and other development partners to combat chronic malnutrition. In addition, he requested information on any measures to bring maternity leave in the private sector in line with that of the public sector.

74. In addition to the National Adolescent Health Strategic Plan 2013-2018, it would be helpful to know what further measures were being implemented or planned to address adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues, such as: whether there was a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policy for adolescents; whether sexual and reproductive health education was part of the curriculum for all schools; what efforts were being made to promote access to information and services to reduce adolescent pregnancies and increase access to contraceptives, particularly in rural areas; how many full-time counsellors and health teachers had been appointed at schools nationwide; what steps were being taken to decriminalize abortion in all circumstances and to what extent the views of the child were considered in abortion decisions; and what programmes were in place to address the harmful effects of smoking, alcohol and substance abuse among adolescents.

75. In the light of Sustainable Development Goal 13, he asked what strategies and programmes were in place to address climate change and disaster risk management, and whether the vulnerabilities and needs of children, as well as their views, had been taken into account. Moreover, considering Sustainable Development Goal 6, he wished to know what efforts had been undertaken to ensure access to adequate sanitation, particularly in rural and poor urban areas, and what percentage of the population had access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation facilities.

76. **Mr. Gastaud** asked whether there were plans to make education mandatory. Although education was free in principle, he wished to know how the Government planned to address hidden additional costs that made it difficult for poor families to access education. In addition, he requested information on any measures taken to remedy the high numbers of children dropping out of or repeating school.

77. It would be useful to know whether public, private and monastic schools had to meet common standards, and whether there was any overall supervision of the different kinds of schools. In view of poor quality primary school education caused by insufficient teacher training, he asked what could be done to improve the quality of teaching. He also requested an update on the status of the draft national education policy.

78. **The Chair** wished to know whether there was any plan to return or resettle Bhutanese refugee or asylum-seeking children in camps in Nepal. Similarly, she requested further information on the citizenship rights of Nepalese children in camps in Bhutan, and whether those children had equal access to education and health among other benefits, and whether they were able to use their own language.

79. Regarding child labour and sexual exploitation, she asked how the Government intended to reconcile the 10 years of compulsory schooling in Bhutan with the fact that children were legally able to work from the age of 13. She wondered whether there were

any measures in place to assist girls, especially those from poor families in rural areas who worked in the entertainment industry, where sexual exploitation was known to occur.

80. She asked whether the new bench in Thimphu addressing cases relating to women, children and families dealt with civil or criminal matters. In addition, as the length of a sentence of imprisonment for a child was set at a minimum of half the length of an adult sentence, she wished to know whether judges were able to hand down shorter sentences in such cases, and whether mediation was used in criminal cases involving children.

81. **Ms. Sandberg** requested information on the measures taken to ensure that children did not face discrimination in school or elsewhere.

82. **Mr. Gastaud** said that further information would be welcome on the right to leisure time specifically with regard to whether the Government raised awareness among parents and teachers of the importance of play for children, and whether children were guaranteed enough time and space for play activities.

83. **Ms. Lhamu** (Bhutan) said that, under the Marriage Act, the custody of children under 9 years of age was awarded to their mothers. However, a new marriage bill had been drafted which allowed custody of a child to be given to either parent according to the child's best interests.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.