



**Convention on the  
Rights of the Child**

Distr.  
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.354  
17 January 1997

Original: ENGLISH

---

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Fourteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 354th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,  
on Monday, 13 January 1997, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BELEMBAOGO

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Initial report of Panama (continued)

---

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.97-15071 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Panama (continued) (HRI/CORE/1/Add.14/Rev.1;  
CRC/C/8/Add.28; CRC/C/Q/PAN.1 (list of issues); written replies by the  
Government of Panama with no document symbol, in Spanish)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the Panamanian delegation resumed its place at the Committee table.
2. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that there were four points on which she would like some further clarification: whether the Family Code (para. 57) was still under discussion in parliament or was already in force; whether the new legislation provided for a single specific body responsible for children's affairs; whether there were discrepancies between the official data and some informal data that indicated a more serious situation and, if so, whether there was a reliable statistical basis for the formulation of policies for children; and, lastly, whether the written replies had been formulated by a government agency or there had been an input from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other bodies.
3. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that, although the figure of 44 per cent of the current budget for child-related expenditures seemed high at first sight, it was not excessive when children made up 50 per cent of the total population. Moreover, as Mrs. Badran had pointed out, a percentage increase in a period of budgetary constraint might conceal a reduction in real terms.
4. Each country must decide for itself on the institution of an ombudsman for children. While there were undoubted benefits in such an arrangement, there was also a risk that a separate focus on children would mean that they received a lower priority. Children's problems must be addressed in the context of the family and society, although special steps were needed to compensate for their specific vulnerability. Perhaps the best approach was to look at the basic needs. For example, he would like to know whether children in Panama could file complaints and expect some response and whether there was any independent institution having an overview of the position of children in society and their support needs.
5. He wondered whether the members of the delegation, who were obviously key figures with respect to the implementation of the Convention in Panama, had studied the periodic reports of other countries and the Committee's discussion of them: there was much to be learned from such an exercise. In that connection, it would be interesting to hear from the members of the delegation what their three major priorities would be for the implementation of the Convention.
6. Mrs. AROSEMENA DE TROITIÑO (Panama) said that, before deciding whether to establish a separate ombudsman for children, Panama wished to assess the effectiveness of the office of general ombudsman, which had been established in legislation but not yet in practice, as a means of protecting the human rights of the population as a whole. It was envisaged that the ombudsman would have the power to deal with children's affairs, and a specific provision

gave children access to his office. The first person appointed to the office would have to decide whether there should be any specific arrangement for dealing with children's complaints. The intention was to present to him the specific requirements of the protection of children's rights.

7. The Panamanian authorities had exchanged views on the topic with the authorities of El Salvador and Guatemala and had also met the Swedish Ombudsman. Mr. Hammarberg's comments were thus particularly welcome, because Panama was in the process of determining what arrangements would best guarantee children's rights.

8. The Family Code had been drafted in 1982-1985, but had not been approved by Parliament for another 11 years. The need for a legal instrument on children's affairs had become urgent in 1992 when Panama had acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The draft legislation previously produced did not, of course, take account of the provisions of the Convention. Consequently, although it incorporated the basic principles of the Convention, the Family Code did not satisfy the requirement of establishing an implementation machinery, though it did have a section on the participation of the State in the elaboration of policies for the family, providing that the best interests of the child should prevail in any conflict with its parents.

9. The Family Code also envisaged major changes in the structure of the juvenile justice system, introducing guarantees of due procedure and the right of appeal, as well as providing for specialized juvenile judges. One problem of the juvenile justice system was that it currently dealt both with children who were denied their rights and with children in conflict with the law. Moreover, the legislation even lacked a specific definition of the minimum age of criminal liability.

10. Before the adoption of the Family Code, there had been no specific legislation on children's rights in Panama, and it was to be hoped that the enabling legislation to put the Code into effect would be adopted in the near future.

11. In response to Mr. Hammarberg's request for her to name three priority problems requiring immediate attention, she would first cite the lack of awareness on the part of civil society of the commitment represented by Panama's accession to the Convention. A great effort would be needed to change cultural attitudes which relegated children to a lowly position, for which personnel trained in the requirements of the Convention would be needed.

12. The second problem was the general economic situation and the fact that the budget made no specific provision for the requirements of children. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had identified the need for a methodology to enable the planning services to focus social spending on children. Some progress had been made in that area: for example, the juvenile justice system had received increased funds for the current year, which would be channelled towards the most vulnerable groups.

13. Thirdly, there was a need to increase the effective participation of children in social life. No such right had ever been recognized in Panama before and its exercise would be no easy matter. However, the "mini-summits"

on children's affairs held in several parts of the country had produced some recommendations that were being taken into account. In the education system, for example, curricula were being revised with a view to increasing the participation of children and ensuring that their views were heeded.

14. Mrs. GRAHAM DE SAMPSON (Panama) said that the enactment of legislation on children was still at an initial stage: a working group was studying the national situation. The Panamanian authorities were convinced that legislation could not just be copied from other countries but had to be tailored to the national situation and meet the national needs. UNICEF was supplying technical support for the study.

15. There was, in fact, no specific institution in Panama for the formulation of social policy. Policies were devised separately by each ministry and were then coordinated in the Social Cabinet, which was also responsible for monitoring their implementation. The National Council on the Family and Children, an independent body consisting of representatives of the Government and of civil society, also performed an advisory and coordination function with respect to social policies.

16. With respect to the question about discrepancies in the statistical data, she was able to confirm that the data presented in the report were provided by the Central Government Information Office, but some of them might have originally emanated from private bodies, as was the case in many countries. For the formulation of decisions and policies, only data provided by the Office of Statistics and Censuses was used. As her delegation had stated at the previous meeting, Panama had no institution specifically responsible for the statistical study of children's problems. The authorities were anxious to establish such an institution, precisely in order to have accurate data to help resolve children's problems.

17. As for the preparation of the written replies, the list of issues had unfortunately not been received until 18 December 1996, so that it had been very difficult to obtain full answers to all the questions in time. All relevant governmental and non-governmental bodies had, however, been requested to provide information for use as the basis for the replies. If more time had been available, the replies could have provided a fuller picture of the situation.

18. The figure of 44 per cent of the 1997 budget represented total social expenditure. An attempt had been made to persuade the Ministry of Planning and Economic Policy to provide a breakdown of the figure by recipient population, but to no avail. She hoped that, in the next periodic report, it would be possible to give specific figures of the budgetary allocations for children's needs.

19. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation of Panama to summarize briefly the information contained in the written replies relating to the sections in the list of issues (CRC/C/Q/PAN.1) entitled "Definition of the child" and "General principles" respectively.

20. Mrs. AROSEMENA DE TROITIÑO (Panama) said that article 34 of the Civil Code defined the various stages of physical and psychological development in

children in order to determine the legal age for certain capacities. According to the Family Code, however, a child was any person from conception until the age of 18. That represented a significant advance on previous legislation and was fully in line with the provisions of the Convention.

21. The Family Code did not permit the marriage of persons under 18 years of age without parental consent. A marriage could take place between a girl aged 14 or over and a boy aged 16 or more, with parental authorization, but was subject to certain restrictions with regard to monetary commitments. If the union remained intact, the restrictions were lifted upon attainment of the age of majority. Such marriages resulted in legal emancipation which was, however, subject to the limitations governing the protection of minors laid down in the Family Code.

22. Children aged 14 and above were allowed to work, provided that their right to education was protected through inter alia shorter working hours. The Administrative Code referred to seven years as the age of absolute criminal liability but that provision was no longer applicable in the light of the Family Code, although the Code contained no specific provision on the matter.

23. Children aged between 14 and 18 who were the victims of rape or seduction could not be regarded as having given their consent, in accordance with the legislation in force. Sexual relations with minors under the age of 14 were always treated as rape, even in the absence of violence.

24. In cases of adoption, there was specific legislation providing that the views of children aged seven years or over must be heard.

25. In judicial proceedings, children aged between 7 and 14 could not make a deposition or act as witnesses without the presence of a guardian. Although children over the age of 14 could act on their own behalf, their questioning must be strictly supervised by a judge.

26. There was no specific legal provision enabling children to seek redress in a court of law. None the less, since persons over the age of 14 were entitled to work and could seek compensation for grievances suffered in labour tribunals, it should, by analogy, be possible for them to seek redress in other situations.

27. Access to medical treatment without parental consent was not specifically provided for under Panamanian legislation. According to the Family Code, any administrative, medical or educational authority that had cognizance of or suspected the abuse or maltreatment of a child could request medical examination or treatment against the parents' will, if the health of the child was deemed to be in jeopardy.

28. As for the issues arising under General principles, there were various pieces of legislation including the Family Code, the Labour Code, the Education Organization Act and the Domestic Violence Act which covered different situations with the aim of preventing all forms of discrimination.

29. Of the measures adopted to ensure respect for the rights enshrined in the Convention, she wished to highlight the steps being taken to enforce the provisions of the Labour Code. The Ministry of Labour, in cooperation with the International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), was monitoring the situation of working children in rural areas to ensure that the Labour Code was respected. Child labour in the free-trade zones was illegal. The Panamanian Special Training Institute provided care for the disabled which was aimed at ensuring their integration into the community and the labour market. There were also special health programmes to improve the general health of children, especially those under the age of five, living in rural areas.

30. Children in conflict with the law were guaranteed due process and other relevant safeguards by the Family Code. However, greater provision needed to be made for legal aid for children whose problems had to be settled in a court of law. There was general recognition of the increasingly important role played by NGOs in defending children's rights and many such organizations were actively involved in initiatives launched by the National Council on the Family and Children. Apart from medical and social workers, child-care centres also had family counsellors, who helped to resolve children's problems by acting as mediators. More family counsellors were needed to meet the rising demand for support resulting, *inter alia*, from the heightened expectations of society owing to the entry into force of the Family Code.

31. There was specific legislation to protect the disabled against discrimination. The Panamanian National Training Institute had been established in 1951 and the relevant legislation had recently been amended to encourage the participation of the disabled in the labour force through tax concessions for employers. The Family Code recognized the equal rights of the disabled and called for the provision of special health, recreation and training facilities. Under article 520 of the Code any person who violated those rights was liable to penal sanctions. Following an amendment to the Education Organization Act, disabled children would soon be able to attend normal preschool establishments.

32. Under the Constitution and legislation dating from 1946, no discrimination was permitted against children born out of wedlock. All children were equal before the law, including for the purposes of affiliation and adoption.

33. The legislation regulating adoption referred to in the initial report (CRC/C/8/Add.28) had been superseded by provisions of the Family Code, which laid down the safeguards, procedures and formalities required for legal adoption. Adoption was a binding commitment and could be declared null and void if the procedures had not been fully complied with. Adoptive parents were vested with the same rights, duties and parental authority as biological parents. The existence of appropriate follow-up procedures ensured that the best interests of the adopted child were taken into account.

34. A number of steps had been taken to protect the indigenous population against discrimination. In the health sector, projects funded by the World Bank were under way to improve levels of nutrition, immunization and sanitation in the rural areas. Priority was also being given to providing

adequate health care for the high-risk groups in the population. The necessary resources had been set aside for such projects in the national budget. In the education sector, efforts were being made by the Government, in cooperation with the World Bank, to prepare an alphabet for the languages of the indigenous people.

35. A social emergency fund, had been set up in 1992 to provide safe drinking water and primary health care for the population groups most in need including the, mainly indigenous, rural population. There was a further project to target four of the poorest districts in the country. Details of such initiatives had not, unfortunately, been included in the initial report (CRC/C/8/Add.28), which thus did not accurately reflect developments in Panama between 1992 and 1995.

36. The CHAIRPERSON said that, although the Committee was most grateful for the detailed information being provided, it was subject to time constraints and its members needed the opportunity to make comments and ask questions. She hoped that five more minutes would be sufficient to allow the delegation to complete its summary of the written replies concerning general principles.

37. Mrs. AROSEMENA DE TROITIÑO (Panama) said she would limit herself to a few examples of the manner in which the best interests of the child were currently taken into account in Panama. Where there was a legal conflict between the parents and the child, the judge was obliged according to the Family Code to take the best interests of the child into consideration when giving his verdict. In the event of a divorce or de facto separation, arrangements for the maintenance and custody of the child must be settled in his or her favour. Under a special provision of the Constitution, where a marriage was dissolved, the property and assets involved must remain with the parent responsible for supporting the child. In the case of adoption, the obligation to change a child's name could be waived where it was deemed to be in his best interest. Moreover, children over the age of seven were considered capable of forming their own judgement and their views must be heard in matters of adoption.

38. There were plans afoot for children's "mini-summits" during which children would have an opportunity to voice their opinions and make statements which must be taken into consideration by government institutions in the definition of the policies affecting them.

39. Mrs. SANTOS PAIS said she was concerned that, in spite of recent amendments to legislation, there was still a distinction between the age at which girls and boys could enter into marriage. She wondered what justification there was for that distinction, which ran counter to the provisions of the Convention and to the Constitution of Panama, according to which there should be no discrimination on the grounds of sex. Furthermore, such legislation merely perpetuated the problem of the prevalence of early pregnancies highlighted in the report. The only solution would seem to be an amendment to the relevant legislation, which she would welcome.

40. She would like some clarification regarding the provisions of the Labour Code on the employment of children. While 14 seemed to be the normal minimum age at which children could engage in work, she was concerned about the

exceptions permitted, for children to perform agricultural work or domestic service, apparently on condition that their school attendance was guaranteed. It was not at all clear to her how working hours and school attendance could be reconciled.

41. In view of the fact that there was no minimum age for criminal liability, she would like to know how the authorities reacted to children who committed acts contravening the criminal law. She noted that, in cases of corruption and indecent acts, the Criminal Code regarded children as victims up to the age of 18 whereas, in cases of rape and seduction, the age was 14. With a view to the protection of children in the spirit of the Convention, the latter age should surely be 18 also.

42. Lastly, she would like to know how Panama's legislative framework actually reflected the general principles set forth in the Convention and whether it would be necessary to apply the Convention directly in order to fill any legal gaps.

43. Mr. MOMBESHORA said that, while the definition of the child set forth in the Family Code was in accordance with the Convention, the definition contained in article 34 (a) of the Civil Code (para. 64 of the initial report) seemed to imply that persons over seven years of age were no longer children. Moreover, the different ages at which boys and girls were defined as pre-adolescents in the same article appeared to be discriminatory. The article should be redrafted, by analogy with article 125 of the Constitution, to read: "All Panamanians under 18 years of age, without distinction as to sex, shall be considered children."

44. To protect children from the attentions of unscrupulous medical practitioners, the Panamanian authorities should consider introducing a minimum age below which children were not permitted to consult a doctor without parental consent.

45. He would like to know what penalty was prescribed for persons having sexual relations with a girl under 12 years of age and whether there was any legal provision to cover sexual offences involving young boys.

46. Were there any special programmes to make indigenous children and children in rural areas aware of their rights, and did such persons have means of complaining to the authorities if they believed themselves to be victims of discrimination?

47. Mr. HAMMARBERG said he presumed that the exception whereby girls under the age of 14 and boys under the age of 16 could marry with parental consent was aimed at cases where the girl had become pregnant. Nevertheless, the provision might well send children the misleading signal that sexual relations, pregnancy and early marriage were socially acceptable. It also raised the question of the age disparity between boys and girls in that regard, and of the danger of young girls being pressurized into marriage.

48. Noting that the recent trend was to integrate disabled children into schools and the community rather than to relegate them to institutions, he asked if there were any measures in Panama to promote such integration.



49. While measures were needed to assist ethnic minorities, there was always the danger that such affirmative action might be perceived, and resented, by the majority as "positive discrimination". What steps were being taken to dispel any such perception? What was being done to ensure that participation by children, and particularly by children belonging to minority groups, was more than a mere token gesture in the school system?

50. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that the documentation revealed striking disparities between different regions of the country and between different population groups. She would thus like to hear the delegation's assessment of the actual, rather than theoretical, situation with regard to discrimination in Panamanian society and whether discrimination was a clear-cut issue or assumed covert forms. The Convention could be a potent political tool to assist in bringing about changes, not just in legislation, but also in attitudes.

51. Mrs. BADRAN asked whether anything was being done to eliminate discrimination against the girl child in the context of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women and whether the World Bank project which the delegation had mentioned provided preschool education for children belonging to disadvantaged groups.

52. Miss MASON asked how, in practical terms, the system of "mini-summits" in rural areas was to be implemented. In connection with the disparity between the minimum ages at which boys and girls could be married, she would like to know whether the Family Code recognized traditional cultural marriage rites as equivalent to civil rites. If emancipation did not imply a lack of protection for the minor, how was that protection ensured? Lastly, what was considered to be a sufficient age to allow children to form their own judgement in matters other than adoption; and by whom, and with reference to what criteria, was that age determined?

53. Mrs. KARP said she would welcome fuller information on programmes and policies reflecting the Government's acknowledgement of the existence of de facto discrimination in Panamanian society. In that regard, she suggested that the fuller data promised for future reports should be disaggregated by sector and by geographical area so as to reveal whether disadvantaged groups were being effectively targeted.

54. She was less concerned about the discrepancies between the minimum permitted marriage ages for boys and for girls than about the harmful consequences of early marriage as such. Early marriage should be authorized, if at all, not by the parents but by a court or some other authority.

55. She also wished to know whether any services existed to provide counselling to adolescents who did not wish to seek parental guidance on issues such as sex and drugs. Was sex education compulsory and, if not, was it to be included in the new curriculum? Lastly, was there any mechanism to ensure that the employers of children aged between 12 and 14 complied with the requirement that such children must also attend school?

56. Mr. KOLOSOV said that children's survival and development could not be secured in the absence of adequate housing. That, of course, posed a

budgetary problem. Since, however, Panama had no armed forces and derived income from the exploitation of the Panama Canal, the budgetary resources should be available. He wished to know, therefore, what proportion of the national budget was earmarked for improving housing conditions?

57. Mrs. GRAHAM DE SAMPSON (Panama) said that she had noted the Committee's concern about the minimum age for marriage. The basic principle applied was that children under the age of 18 were not permitted to marry. However, the legislators had had to recognize the unfortunate fact that many children, in rural areas in particular, terminated their education on completion of primary school, at which point they were then regarded as marriageable. The disparity between the minimum ages at which boys and girls were permitted to marry merely acknowledged the biological fact that girls generally reached puberty at an earlier age than boys. Authorization for early marriage was granted either by the parents or by the guardian or person vested with parental authority.

58. On the minimum age for employment, a discrepancy existed, not between the provisions of the Constitution and those of the Labour Code, but between national legislation and the provisions of the International Labour Organization's Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), which stipulated a minimum age of 15. The reason why Panama had not ratified that Convention was precisely because its provisions conflicted with domestic legislation. Consideration was, however, being given to bringing that legislation into line with the ILO standards.

59. In addition to the measures already enumerated, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare had established inspection units to ensure compliance with the restrictions on employment of children imposed by the Labour Code, which provided, inter alia, for a six-hour working day and attendance at school by working children, and which prohibited the employment of children in unhealthy or dangerous activities.

60. The "mini-summits" programme would be continued on a nationwide basis, as it had proved extremely effective in raising awareness of the rights and obligations set forth in the Convention and ensuring that children were active participants in, rather than passive observers of, the process.

61. A National Women's Council had been established, within the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, to follow up the commitments entered into by Panama at the Fourth World Conference on Women. It drew its membership from a broad cross-section of society and had launched a campaign to spread awareness of its aims nationwide. The Ministry of Education was currently revising school textbooks with a view to purging them of sexist language.

62. Sexual education was currently dealt with under various subjects of the curriculum, such as science and civic and religious education. She believed that it would be included as a separate subject in the new curriculum. She did not think that the Family Code actively encouraged early marriage. The purpose of the relevant provisions of the Code was to ensure that adolescents finding themselves in a situation of early marriage were not deprived of educational opportunities.

63. Mortality-rate indicators and percentages with a breakdown according to age group, together with other information would be sent to the Committee to demonstrate how the situation had improved in Panama in that respect.

64. The disparity between rural and urban areas had decreased in recent years, in terms of housing for example. The problem of the integration of indigenous groups had also been eased significantly by involving them in various programmes and policies dealing specifically with their problems. They had a voice in parliament and representatives who ensured that the laws relating to indigenous populations were implemented.

65. The income from the Panama Canal was divided among the various governmental programmes but, in recent years, particular attention had been paid to improving the housing stock and overcoming the housing shortage. More information on that subject would be provided at a later date.

66. Mrs. AROSEMENA DE TROITIÑO (Panama) said, with regard to the age of consent, the minimum age for marriage and the need for due and harmonized legal protection of children under the age of 18, that the concerns of the Committee had been noted and would be passed on.

67. As for the protection of children's rights after the age of emancipation - in the case of early pregnancies for instance, the original text of the Family Code had been amended to provide for the continuing rights of the young mother. She would not be regarded as emancipated simply because she had had a child.

68. The right of a child to express his or her opinions was not explicitly provided for in legislation to date. In practice, judges, particularly those dealing with minors, listened to the children's views in situations affecting them.

69. Again, there was no specific provision stipulating the age at which a child could seek a medical examination without the consent of the parent or guardian, but there was nothing to prevent a child from seeking medical advice in practice. Children could complain to the authorities of abuse. It was then up to those authorities to begin proceedings.

70. On the question of statistics, there were various studies which gave a clear idea of the disparity between urban and rural areas and helped the Government to identify the poorest areas and most vulnerable groups for the purpose of targeting its action plans and budgetary allocations.

71. Mrs. KARP asked whether young girls could seek an abortion and if so, whether they needed their parents' consent. She also asked whether police units that dealt with children's complaints existed outside the capital.

72. Mrs. EUFEMIO asked at what age a child could join the police force; consume alcohol; be given access to information on his or her biological family in cases of adoption; and change his or her family name and identity. She also inquired whether Panama was planning to re-establish armed forces.

73. Mr. HAMMARBERG asked how article 3 of the Convention on the best interests of the child was interpreted in Panama and integrated into the decision-making processes.

74. Mrs. GRAHAM DE SAMPSON (Panama) said that abortion was categorically prohibited in all circumstances and at any age.

75. There were no proposals to reintroduce armed forces in Panama. The police force could not recruit anyone below the age of 18 years. The special Children's Police (policia de menores) set up under the Family Code, which could receive complaints from children, was based in the capital. However, a child could go to any police station throughout the country to lodge a complaint which would then be submitted to the competent authorities.

76. There were no legislative provisions permitting the consumption of alcohol by minors. Under the Family Code, a child found to be consuming alcohol or drugs was sent immediately for treatment. He or she had to continue his or her education while undergoing treatment and would subsequently be monitored.

77. There was no age at which an adopted child could have access to information on his or her biological family. Under the system of definitive adoption, contained in the Family Code, the adoptive parents assumed full responsibility for the child. The Civil Register recorded the new information pertaining to the adoption and discarded the previous information. There was a provision for changing one's name but only once the age of majority had been reached. The parents or guardians could apply for a child's name to be changed on the basis of use or custom. However, that did not imply any change of identity.

78. Mrs. AROSEMENA DE TROITIÑO (Panama) said that Panama made every effort to keep the best interests of the child as the focal point of all activities and measures, institutions and authorities that had any bearing of the lives and rights of children.

79. The judicial authorities sought, on a case by case basis, to determine, where there was any doubt, whether a child should remain under the authority of his or her parents or guardians. Where necessary, a judge could suspend their authority in the best interests of the child. If needed, family therapy was provided. Children could be placed in the care of the State in institutions or in homes which were strictly monitored, again to ensure that the best interests of the child were respected.

80. The CHAIRPERSON invited the delegation of Panama to reply to the questions in the section entitled "Civil rights and freedoms".

81. Mrs. GRAHAM DE SAMPSON (Panama) said that a child had to be registered within 15 calendar days of birth. However, special arrangements had been made to cover cases where the child had not been registered or it was difficult to register a birth for one reason or another. For example, auxiliary registrars operated in remote areas where it might be difficult to reach an official

registry office, often with the mayor acting as the registration officer. There were annual refresher courses for registry officials to keep them abreast of new processes and techniques.

82. To avoid stigmatization of or discrimination against children born out of wedlock, the mother's maiden name was recorded as the child's surname. The child faced no discrimination later in life in the education system and his or her inheritance rights were not affected.

83. The Constitution set forth the rights of all citizens, including children, to freedom of expression. The only restrictions were those relating to damage to the rights or integrity of others.

84. Article 25 of the Constitution provided for the right of freedom of religion, the only condition being that, in the exercise of one's faith, due respect should be given to Christian morals and to public order.

85. Children's associations were usually centred on health, education, sports and cultural activities. Support was provided by international organizations, including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The calendar of events targeting children and children's issues included workshops, seminars and radio broadcasts.

86. Under the Family Code, educational authorities were legally required to report all suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. Failure to do so would result in a prosecution for complicity. Any form of child abuse, including abuse in a domestic context, was treated as a criminal offence. A national monitoring network had been established to ensure that the legislation was respected.

87. NGOs had provided assistance in setting up a federation of associations dealing with children. The federation was responsible for defending children and provided effective monitoring procedures.

88. Any complaints of torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment made to persons in authority - such as doctors or teachers - were treated as confidential. The persons in authority were legally obliged to report all cases of such treatment, whether known or suspected. A failure to do so would result in a prosecution for complicity. Other independent mechanisms such as the National Council on the Family and Children were also available to deal with cases of suspected ill-treatment of children.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m