



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
3 February 2020

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child Eighty-third session

Summary record of the 2442nd meeting*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 27 January 2020, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Pedernera Reyna

Contents

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Rwanda

* No summary records were issued for the 2438th to 2441st meetings.

This record is subject to correction. Corrections 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 the present record to the Documents Management Section (DMS-DCM@un.org).

Any corrected records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be reissued for technical reasons after the end of the session.

GE.20-01200 (E) 030220 030220



* 2 0 0 1 2 0 0 *

Please recycle A recycling symbol consisting of three chasing arrows forming a triangle.



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

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

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

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Rwanda took places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Nyirahabimana** (Rwanda), introducing her country's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports (CRC/C/RWA/5-6), said that the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention had coincided with the twenty-fifth commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, which had had a disproportionate impact on the rights of children. The legacy of the genocide continued to inform laws, policies and programmes aimed at ensuring the full realization of children's rights in Rwanda. The Government was committed to upholding those rights. It allocated resources for the implementation of the Convention and had mainstreamed targets and benchmarks related to children's rights in national strategic frameworks and plans.
3. As part of efforts to ensure free and immediate birth registration, the Government had introduced legal reforms and launched countrywide campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of birth registration among citizens. On 30 December 2019, Parliament had adopted legislative amendments to provide for an e-birth registration system that would enable the collection of vital statistics and other data.
4. Under the Tubarere Mu Muryango ("Let's Raise Children in Families") Programme, all 3,323 children who had been living in orphanages in 2012 had been placed in families. A network of volunteers known as Inshuti z'Umuryango (Friends of the Family) had been established to monitor the situation of children, report any child protection issues to the relevant authorities and promote positive parenting and child-friendly practices at the community level.
5. Significant progress had been achieved in the health sector. Currently, 79 per cent of households in Rwanda were enrolled in a community-based health insurance scheme that provided access to affordable, high-quality services. According to the 2015 Demographic Health Survey, 93 per cent of children under 5 years of age had been immunized, and 91 per cent of births were attended by skilled staff in health facilities. There had also been an increase in the number of community health workers, who were deployed across the country and played a leading role in the provision of primary health care.
6. The National Early Childhood Development Programme had been created in 2017 to coordinate activities aimed at reducing child malnutrition and stunting, including the distribution of fortified foods. Around 92 per cent of pregnant women were given iron and folic acid supplements, while 95 per cent of children aged 6 to 59 months received vitamin A. Children aged 2 to 6 years were increasingly benefiting from home- and community-based early childhood development facilities, which provided a range of holistic services.
7. Access to primary and secondary education was free and compulsory, and almost 100 per cent of boys and girls were enrolled at the primary level. The Government remained committed to improving the quality of education, including through the introduction of competency-based curricula. The school feeding programme had helped to reduce dropout and repetition rates.
8. Laws, policies and programmes had been put in place to protect children against violence, exploitation and abuse. They included the revised Constitution of 2015, Law No. 71/2018 relating to the protection of the child and the Integrated Child Rights Policy of 2011. All forms of child labour were prohibited. Labour inspections were carried out on a regular basis, and anyone found to be employing children under 16 years of age was subject to prosecution.
9. The Government had adopted a number of measures to respond to the multifaceted challenges experienced by street children. The National Rehabilitation Service continued to rehabilitate and train young people who were orphans or from broken families. Children in need of protection were screened and either placed in a family or transferred to a

rehabilitation centre. Since 2018, a total of 5,065 children had been rehabilitated and reunited with their families.

10. Specialized chambers had been set up to try cases involving juveniles. Juvenile offenders were detained in child-friendly facilities and allowed to pursue their education. Those who showed discipline and performed well in national examinations could be granted a presidential pardon.

11. Children's forum committees had been established from the village to the national level. The committees came together annually at the National Children's Summit, which took place in Parliament. The Summit provided an opportunity for children to express their views regarding their rights, duties and expectations. Government institutions and civil society organizations regularly launched campaigns to raise awareness of and promote positive parenting, with an emphasis on child-parent dialogue.

12. Rwanda continued to fulfil its obligations under the two Optional Protocols to the Convention. In June 2019, the Child Online Protection Policy had been adopted with a view to protecting children from online risks and enabling them to navigate the digital environment safely and confidently. The Government had also enacted a stand-alone law on human trafficking that significantly increased penalties for child trafficking. Rwandan law explicitly prohibited the recruitment and use of children by security organs.

13. The Government acknowledged that it continued to face challenges with regard to the collection and handling of disaggregated data, and was working to address those challenges in collaboration with various partners. To conclude, she wished to reiterate the commitment of Rwanda to promote and protect human rights and, in particular, to uphold the Convention.

14. **Mr. Lumina** (Country Task Force) said that the State party was to be commended for its efforts to enhance the national legal framework on children's rights. He noted, however, that paragraph 6 of the State party's replies to the list of issues ([CRC/C/RWA/RQ/5-6](#)) indicated that article 6 of Law No. 54/2011, which related to the principle of the best interests of the child, had not been included in Law No. 71/2018, on protection of the child, in order to avoid duplication. He wished to understand why it had been considered that such duplication would undermine, rather than enhance, the State party's efforts to ensure that the principle was reflected in all its laws, policies and actions concerning children. He would also like further information on what was being done to fully harmonize national legislation with the Convention and the two Optional Protocols and whether any steps had been taken to enable all stakeholders, particularly children and organizations defending their rights, to participate fully in the development and implementation of legislation on children.

15. He would be grateful for information on the financial, human and technical resources allocated to the implementation and monitoring of the 2019–2024 Strategic Plan for the Integrated Child Rights Policy and on whether a mechanism had been established to assess the progress achieved through the Plan and identify possible deficiencies. The Committee had previously expressed concern that the National Commission for Children lacked the stature, independence and capacity to perform its role effectively. He wondered what measures had been adopted to address that concern and would welcome additional information on the coordination mechanism for child protection systems established by the Commission. He understood that non-governmental organizations working on child protection submitted quarterly reports to the Commission for monitoring and coordination purposes and was curious to know how the Commission and the Government used the information contained therein. According to reports, in 2018, the number of child protection professionals had been reduced for budgetary reasons. He would appreciate an update on the situation and an indication of whether there were plans to increase the number of such professionals working in all districts of the country.

16. He would be interested to know what mechanisms were in place to ensure the efficient use of the budgetary resources allocated to social sectors of the economy, whether the impact of budgetary allocations was evaluated through, for example, child rights impact assessments and what measures had been taken to encourage transparent and participatory budget processes. In paragraph 46 of the State party's report, reference was made to "annual thematic budget briefs". He wished to know whether the briefs were publicly available and whether children had any input in their preparation. In that connection, he

wondered whether the Government was aware of claims that some local leaders saw no value in inviting children to budget meetings. If so, what was being done to address that reluctance?

17. He would welcome information on the efforts being undertaken to further strengthen the data collection system and ensure that it covered all areas of the Convention and its Optional Protocols and that data was disaggregated in a manner that facilitated analysis of the situation of all children, including street children and Batwa children, particularly in terms of health, violence, sexual exploitation, child labour, trafficking and child justice. Had the Government considered using the Washington Group on Disability Statistics modules to improve its methodology for gathering data on children with disabilities, and were data shared among relevant ministries? If so, how did the ministries concerned use the data to inform the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of sectoral policies, programmes and projects for the effective implementation of the Convention and its Optional Protocols?

18. According to information at the Committee's disposal, the Child Rights Observatory was largely unknown and, owing to financial and human resources constraints, dependent on volunteers, with limited capacity to ensure meaningful coordination and follow-up. He wondered what was being done to address those limitations and, in particular, to improve the Observatory's effectiveness, how the activities of the Observatory and the National Commission for Children were coordinated and what human and financial resources were allocated to the two bodies.

19. He would be glad to hear of any programmes to disseminate the Convention and of any measures to improve the general public's understanding of children's rights, especially the rights of children with disabilities. He was concerned about reports of arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance of human rights defenders, including persons working on children's rights. He invited the delegation to provide examples of cases in which threats against civil society organizations had been investigated, including details of the action that had been taken as a result.

20. Reports indicated that close to 147,000 children were involved in the worst forms of child labour in the State party, mainly in the tea and coffee, fishing, construction, mining, transport and hospitality sectors. In a 2019 report entitled "Analysis of the impact of key business policies on child rights in Rwanda", it had been argued that businesses routinely violated the Children's Rights and Business Principles and it had been recommended that the Government should establish a national action plan to address the problem. He wished to know whether such a plan had been developed and whether legislative or other steps had been or would be taken to put a stop to child labour, raise awareness of the impact of business practices on children's rights and, in particular, build the capacity of relevant civil society organizations. Lastly, in the light of reports indicating that the practice of child marriage persisted in Rwanda, particularly in refugee camps and rural areas, he would like to know whether there was any domestic legislation that explicitly prohibited child marriage and, if not, whether the State party intended to enact such legislation.

21. **Ms. Otani** (Coordinator, Country Task Force), noting that, according to paragraph 243 of the replies to the list of issues, the 2019–2024 Strategic Plan for the Integrated Child Rights Policy was aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 1 to 6 and 16, said that Goal 10, relating to reduction of inequalities, was also highly relevant to the issue of children's rights. In that connection, she wondered whether special measures were being taken to help close the gaps in access to health, education and other services faced by children in historically marginalized communities, including children from Batwa communities.

22. She would encourage the Rwandan authorities to reconsider their view that it was unnecessary for the country's laws to explicitly recognize the principle of the best interests of the child, since the provisions of the Convention had binding force under the Rwandan Constitution. It seemed especially important that the principle should be enshrined in Law No. 71/2018, which was a fundamental piece of legislation for the protection and promotion of children's rights. In respect of that principle, she would welcome more information on how officials were trained to identify what was in a child's best interests, a task that was not always easy. For example, had any guidelines on the application of the principle been developed?

23. Under article 12 of the Convention, States parties were required not merely to allow children to express their views in matters affecting them, but also to facilitate the expression of those views – by providing information on legal proceedings in child-friendly language, for instance. She wished to know what view the Rwandan authorities took of the right of the child to be heard and whether children in Rwanda had the right to express their views in custody decisions, cases concerning placement in an institution and adoption or asylum proceedings. She would particularly like to know what steps were taken to ensure that children in situations of vulnerability could exercise their right to be heard. She would also be interested in learning what action was taken on the resolutions adopted by the yearly National Children's Summit. Were they taken into account in decision-making processes at the district or national level?

24. The Committee had been informed that the Government had closed thousands of houses of worship and arrested religious leaders who had protested the closures. She was concerned about how those closures, and government policy and restrictions in general, affected the rights of the country's children to exercise freedom of thought, conscience and religion and the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

25. Ensuring greater access to the Internet was a commendable goal. She wondered, however, whether all the country's schools had electricity, whether teachers had the necessary skills to provide instruction on the use of digital technology and what steps were taken to protect children from violations of their rights, particularly their right to privacy, online.

26. **Ms. Aho Assouma** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know when the country's electronic birth registration system had been set up, whether people were aware of its existence and how many birth certificates had been issued through the system. She also wished to know what measures were taken to ensure that children born before the establishment of the system and children born to asylum seekers, refugees or other migrants had access to birth registration services and birth certificates. In addition, she wondered whether the Rwandan custom of waiting a week to name a newborn child persisted and whether it also applied to children born to refugees or other migrants. It would be useful to know whether birth registration drives had been conducted in 2019 and, if so, whether they had reached all parts of the country. She would like to know how much birth certificates cost, including those issued late, and what coordination mechanisms were used by health centres, civil registration offices and notaries to ensure accurate reporting of births and reliable birth statistics across the country.

27. She would welcome information on the status of the draft national action plan on violence against children and on the size of the budget for the plan's implementation. She wondered whether steps had been taken to combat widespread corporal punishment – for example, by repealing the provision of the Civil Code under which parents were granted the right to “correct” their children. She also wondered whether the State party had conducted campaigns to raise awareness of the harm caused by corporal punishment. In the same vein, she would like to hear about any measures taken to promote positive parenting with a view to protecting children from abuse and negligence.

28. It would be useful to know whether children had a means of reporting sexual abuse, including sexual abuse to which they were subjected at school; what steps the Ministry of Education intended to take to prevent such abuse; whether any criminal proceedings had been instituted against the alleged perpetrators of sexual abuse in the country's schools; and what support services were available to child victims of violence and how those victims were compensated. In addition, she wished to know what actions had been taken in Rwanda in follow-up to the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage.

The meeting was suspended at 4 p.m. and resumed at 4.25 p.m.

29. **Ms. Nyirahabimana** (Rwanda) said that, having listened to the Committee's comments, the delegation would seek to ensure that the principle of the best interests of the child was explicitly included in relevant laws, in particular the law on the protection of the child (Law No. 71/2018). That principle informed everything done by the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion. In order to ensure that the best interests of the child were being served, all relevant stakeholders, including government institutions and civil society and religious organizations, were consulted as part of the development of laws and policies.

30. The Integrated Child Rights Policy had been adopted in 2011. A second strategic plan for the implementation of the Policy had been adopted in 2019. The funds for implementation of the plan were allocated by the institutions responsible for each area. If, for example, an activity involved promoting the right to education, the budget for the activity was drawn up by the Ministry of Education.

31. The number of social workers and child protection officers working for the National Commission for Children had been reduced because the greatest demand for child protection services was to be found at the local level, not at the national level. Children's committees met in each of the country's administrative divisions, and the views expressed within the committees were transmitted to relevant authorities. Children generally spoke about their needs rather than about budgets. The authorities then made every effort to ensure that the budgets that were drawn up covered those needs.

32. The Child Rights Observatory was operated by the National Commission for Human Rights. Its work, however, was made possible by the support of a network of volunteers who were active in all areas of the country. The work of community-based volunteers was a home-grown solution to the problems caused by the inability of national institutions and their staff to be everywhere at once. Moreover, having strong networks of local volunteers, such as Inshuti z'Umuryango, helped to strengthen community resilience.

33. As she had noted earlier, measures were being taken to improve the collection of disaggregated data concerning children. The Government would look at how it might improve the coordination of data collection and the sharing of data. Child labour, in particular on coffee and tea plantations, was strongly discouraged, and violators of the country's child labour laws were punished. She had been surprised by the Committee's comments on child marriage in Rwanda. In fact, children were encouraged to stay in school, and the minimum age for marriage was 21. As far as the authorities were aware, child marriage was not a phenomenon in the country. Any information that indicated otherwise would be looked into, however.

34. The principle of non-discrimination was enshrined in the Constitution. The only form of discrimination that was considered lawful was what was referred to as positive discrimination. The country's social protection system helped ensure that special consideration was given to children in situations of vulnerability. The benefits to which children were entitled were channelled through their parents. Additional help, including cash payments, was provided to families living in extreme poverty and persons with disabilities. Schools provided free lunches to students from the poorest families. The authorities were nonetheless aware that the children of Rwanda, a country that faced considerable resource constraints, were not always able to fully exercise their economic and social rights. The Government would continue striving to improve the situation of the country's children.

35. Some houses of worship had been closed because, having been on the verge of collapse, they had posed a danger to those who had frequented them. The closures had had nothing to do with freedom of religion or expression.

36. Work was in progress to ensure that children had access to computers and the Internet, with a focus on equal access to information for those in remote and rural areas. That work was being conducted in parallel with efforts to provide electricity to all.

37. With regard to birth registration, the aim was to ensure that all health-care facilities were able to register births. Given that 91 per cent of children were born in such facilities, the new mechanism would enable high coverage, although the Government was still working out some details, such as how to ensure that all registered children received their birth certificates.

38. **Ms. Uwera Kanyamanza** (Rwanda) said that the Integrated Child Rights Policy was implemented by various ministries and institutions, which received their budget allocations from the Government. The role of the National Commission for Children was to ensure coordination and follow-up, collaboration to set priorities and the development of an implementation plan. The Commission chaired the Child Protection Subcluster of the National Gender and Family Cluster, which met once per quarter and included both government and civil society representatives. At those meetings, the Government shared its priorities and heard reports from the different organizations on efforts to help children in

Rwanda. A Social Cluster facilitated coordination for decision-making based on the best interests of the child. The Commission mitigated its lack of staff by using a decentralized approach. Local authorities employed gender officers who were responsible for family promotion and worked closely with the Commission, although they required further training to handle issues specific to children. The Commission also had an advisory council, which acted as a further channel for receiving feedback from both government and non-government partners on its work.

39. **Ms. Umurungi** (Rwanda) said that the Government greatly valued the input of civil society organizations involved in human rights work on the ground. The Ministry of Justice coordinated a task force comprising representatives of government institutions and civil society organizations, including numerous organizations involved in children's rights. The task force had contributed to the preparation and approval of the periodic report currently under discussion. The National Institute of Statistics had begun to use the module of the Washington Group on Disability Statistics, as recommended by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

40. **Ms. Nyirahabimana** (Rwanda) said that child victims of violence were referred to one of the 44 Isange one-stop centres, where they had access to psychologists, social workers and doctors and could be offered temporary accommodation. The children were interviewed for the purpose of launching a criminal investigation. The Inshuti z'Umuryango community volunteers helped to conduct awareness campaigns and encourage reporting of abuse. The Government's focus was on providing services at the lowest administrative level in order to ensure accessibility. Although the main emphasis was on prevention, when abuse did occur the appropriate mechanisms for assisting victims were in place. If schoolteachers were found guilty of abuse, they incurred heavier penalties because of their position. The Ministry of Education took a tough position on such breaches of the code of conduct and issued regular reminders to teachers of their duty of care.

41. **Ms. Otani** said that she would like to know whether children could submit complaints to the Child Rights Observatory, directly or through volunteers, or whether any other child-friendly complaints mechanism was available. She wondered whether the Government would consider reviewing all relevant legislation to ensure that children had the right to be heard in all judicial or administrative proceedings concerning them. In addition, she would appreciate clarification as to whether corporal punishment was explicitly prohibited, as it seemed that the existing law covered only excessive punishment.

42. **Ms. Aho Assouma**, observing that the fact that children were born in a health-care facility did not guarantee that their births would be registered, said that she had not heard answers to her questions about the charge for birth certificates, the traditional eight-day waiting period before naming a child and coordination between health-care facilities, civil registries and notaries with regard to birth registration. She would like to know what information had been disseminated to the public about the Irembo portal, how long the portal had been in operation and how many certificates had been issued through it. She would also like to know how many birth registration campaigns had been conducted in 2019 and what their impact had been. Statistics on birth registration would be appreciated.

43. She wondered whether children had access to a hotline to report incidents of violence and would be interested in any available statistics on violence against children. She would also be interested in hearing about the results of the Umurage campaign against child marriage, the actions and strategies developed following the campaign and the system in place for monitoring trends with regard to child marriage. In addition, she wished to know what measures were taken to rehabilitate and protect victims of child marriage and whether individuals who forced children into marriage were prosecuted. If so, she would appreciate case statistics. Information on compensation for victims would also be welcome.

44. **Mr. Lumina** said that he would like more information about how the National Commission for Children tracked spending under the Integrated Child Rights Policy, given that the budget was distributed among various ministries, and about how the Commission coordinated the overall implementation of the strategic plan for the Policy's implementation. He wished to know whether child rights impact assessments or other tracking mechanisms were used to ensure efficient use of the resources allocated to different sectors. In addition, he wondered what the Government was doing to cultivate greater appreciation among local leaders of the importance of child participation. He would

be grateful for answers to his questions about what had been done to address threats against civil society organizations and abuses of children by the business sector, including any plans to introduce harsher penalties for companies that violated child labour laws.

45. **Ms. Marshall-Harris** (Country Task Force), welcoming the State party's annual National Children's Summits, asked how child participants were chosen and whether the views of street children, child refugees, very poor children and other marginalized groups were heard during the summits.

46. **Ms. Otani** said that she would appreciate clarification as to whether child abandonment remained a crime under the revised Penal Code and, if so, whether malice was required for abandonment to constitute a crime. She welcomed the National Strategy for Childcare Reform and the State party's commitment not to institutionalize children. She wondered, however, whether orphanages still existed in the country and, if they did, how many children lived in them. The State party's policy of preferring family care did not seem to extend fully to children with disabilities. She wished to know how placement decisions involving children with disabilities were made and whether the best interests of the child principle was fully applied.

47. It would be useful to know the legal basis for the National Rehabilitation Service. She was concerned that rehabilitation centres might constitute a mechanism for institutionalizing children and therefore wished to learn more about the procedures used to determine whether children would be returned to their families or sent to a rehabilitation centre. Was there a maximum amount of time that a child could spend at such a centre, and were there any procedures for periodic review?

48. She wished to know how many children were living with their mothers in prison and whether any measures had been taken to prevent such situations, particularly in the case of pregnant women or mothers with small children. In addition, she would like to know whether the State party's laws, policies and procedures with respect to intercountry adoption fully complied with the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption. She wondered whether government authorities had the capacity to assess applications for intercountry adoption and apply the best interests of the child principle. Relatedly, she would like to know how the best interests of the child were ensured in domestic adoptions, including adoptions under the simple procedure. Did children have the right to be heard in simple adoption proceedings?

49. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that she wished to know what percentage of children in Rwanda had disabilities, whether any provisions under Law No. 01/2007 of 20 January 2007, relating to protection of the rights of people living with disabilities, specifically addressed children with disabilities and whether awareness-raising campaigns had been held on preventing and eliminating discrimination against children with disabilities. She would be grateful if the delegation could provide information about any measures for early detection of disability and also any measures to assist children with disabilities who were living with HIV/AIDS or had lost their parents to HIV/AIDS. She wondered whether poor children with disabilities living in rural areas had access to health care and inclusive education, including textbooks and other resources adapted to their needs.

50. She wished to know the size of the country's health budget. The delegation had indicated that health centres were available throughout the country, but she wondered how well equipped they were from a technical standpoint. She would like to hear more about the strategies employed by the National Early Childhood Development Programme to achieve its goal of reducing malnutrition and stunting. For example, had any rapid-response mechanism been put in place to address malnutrition-related conditions such as rickets? She wondered whether children were invited to share their views about health matters at annual paediatric conferences. The introduction of blood delivery by drone was a welcome development, but she wondered what the cost of a bag of blood was and whether the entire population, but especially women undergoing caesarean sections, had access to blood. She also wondered whether Rwandan hospitals had incurred any debt in relation to obligations under the Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa.

51. She would be grateful if the delegation could provide data on the current rate of immunization coverage and indicate whether there were strategies to improve coverage and to strengthen routine immunization, especially in rural areas. With respect to malaria prevention, she wondered whether there had been any follow-up to ensure that the

insecticide-treated mosquito nets that had been distributed were being used, especially by children under 5 and pregnant women, and whether intermittent preventive treatment in pregnancy (IPTp) was available in rural areas. It would also be interesting to know whether there was a campaign to prevent the sale of medicines by street vendors.

52. She wished to know the rate of exclusive breastfeeding, what the Government was doing to promote it, whether the Government regulated breast-milk substitutes and how it followed up on compliance with the relevant regulations. It would also be useful to receive information on any programmes addressing obesity; any government response to the high cost of condoms, which contributed to the high rate of teen pregnancy; any mental health and drug treatment services for children; and the HIV seroprevalence rate and any measures to assist children with or affected by HIV/AIDS. Lastly, she would appreciate an update on the Government's plans regarding drinking water facilities and efforts to improve the housing situation of the Batwa and other historically marginalized groups.

53. **Ms. Marshall-Harris** said that the State party was to be commended for its active promotion of children's rights. She was concerned, however, by the significant disparity between urban and rural areas in terms of school facilities and quality of education. The matter needed urgent attention, given that 80 per cent of the country's children lived in rural areas. As it was doubtful that the "one laptop per child" programme would be effective in rural areas lacking electricity, the priorities for those areas might need to be reconsidered.

54. Although the delegation had indicated that education was free and compulsory at the primary and secondary levels, the high dropout rate among secondary school students indicated that it was not, in practice, compulsory. She would be interested in hearing the delegation's views on how to address certain hidden costs, such as fees for materials or teacher bonuses, that reportedly contributed to the high dropout rate. She would also like to know the delegation's views on the root causes of the high dropout rate among boys, as information available to the Committee suggested they were leaving school to work in mines and on construction sites.

55. Comprehensive sexuality education played an important role in reducing rates of early pregnancy and, consequently, reducing dropout rates for girls. Although efforts were made at the central level to encourage girls to stay in school, the Committee had been informed that many principals pushed pregnant girls to leave school. While there was a law on child defilement, charges were rarely brought under it, which meant that girls had to bear the burden of pregnancy alone.

56. Instruction in English was encouraged under the education policy, but research suggested that the quality of teaching was inconsistent because of inadequate teacher training. She was pleased that decisions regarding grants of educational assistance were made at the community level, but it seemed that those decisions did not always benefit the poorest children, especially in rural areas. Moreover, there were disparities in early childhood education in terms of access to nursery schools and nursery school facilities.

57. Despite legal prohibitions, there were reports of widespread use of corporal punishment in schools, which needed to be addressed. The data on street children were not particularly clear. Although the Penal Code had been revised to decriminalize activities such as begging, vagrancy and street vending, it appeared that the children involved were still often rounded up and taken to a facility where they were beaten. The State party had indicated that it had no separate juvenile courts because there were too few cases involving children, but she wondered whether there only appeared to be a lack of cases because children were being held in arbitrary detention without being brought before a court. She urged the State party to look closely at the marginalization of Batwa children, as they did not have access to the same benefits as other children.

58. **Mr. Lumina** said that great strides had been made in demobilizing child soldiers recruited by the Rwandan army, but he wondered what efforts the Government was making to free children who remained with armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, particularly M23, and whether special measures were in place to address the situation of former girl soldiers, as they were often stigmatized and ostracized to a greater degree than boys, especially if they became pregnant while they were with an armed group.

59. **Ms. Otani** said that she was curious to know why the State party had not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure when it had ratified similar optional protocols to other conventions.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.