



General Assembly

Seventy-seventh session

Official Records

Distr.: General
26 April 2023

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 12th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 7 October 2022, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Blanco Conde (Dominican Republic)

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22-22949 (E)



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

Agenda item 64: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*)

(a) Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) ([A/77/41](#), [A/77/140](#), [A/77/143](#), [A/77/221](#) and [A/77/282](#))

(b) Follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children (*continued*) ([A/77/309-E/2023/5](#))

1. **Ms. Otani** (Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child), introducing the report of the Committee on the Rights of the Child ([A/77/41](#)), said that the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Russian attack on Ukraine and extreme weather events were all having a negative impact on human development. Hundreds of millions of children were living in conflict, had insufficient food, were not in school and were affected by poverty, violence and mental health challenges. The progress made in children's rights in recent decades was increasingly threatened. Alarming, in all regions of the world and in intergovernmental forums such as the Human Rights Council, the status of children as rights holders was being questioned, and the agency and right to participation of children were being challenged. The Committee would continue to counter pushbacks against the rights of children and to ensure that those rights were high on all policy agendas.

2. It was crucial to integrate and mainstream children's rights into all United Nations activities and programmes, across the three pillars of human rights, development and peace and security. The Committee welcomed the decision of the Secretary-General to develop a guidance note on child rights mainstreaming and was committed to playing an active role in that pursuit. It had also been working closely with other treaty bodies, special procedure mandate holders and the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and on Violence against Children, while strengthening its engagement with the Human Rights Council. In addition, the partnership between the Committee and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) included a biennial meeting for high-level policy discussions on key children's rights issues. Children had participated for the first time in the Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour in 2022. Enhancing the participation of children in discussions on child labour, children in armed conflict and other areas was also necessary.

3. The only State that had neither ratified nor acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child was the United States of America. Ratification of the three Optional Protocols to the Convention had been slow,

with only four new ratifications in the past year. Universal ratification of the Convention and its Optional Protocols was necessary to ensure that all persons under 18 years of age were treated as children and as full rights holders, everywhere and at all times. With regard to reporting, no initial reports under the Convention were pending review. However, a total of 89 initial reports were still overdue. States parties should use the services of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for assistance in reporting. Discussions would be held on ways to facilitate reporting under the Optional Protocols, such as by applying simplified reporting procedures.

4. The Committee had reviewed the reports of 22 States parties in 2022, bringing the number of reports in the backlog pending consideration to 74. At its eighty-ninth session, the Committee had adopted a decision to move towards an eight-year predictable review cycle, with a mid-cycle follow-up review, and to offer the simplified reporting procedure as the standard reporting procedure with the possibility for States parties to opt out, as reflected in the agreed conclusions of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies of June 2022. Under the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure, the Committee had adopted decisions on 28 cases and registered 38 new cases since October 2021. The Committee was also working on four inquiries and had adopted its internal working methods on inquiries during its ninetieth session. Member States should support such efforts by cooperating with the Committee and providing more funding, as the inquiry procedure lacked dedicated human and financial resources.

5. Since the 2018 day of general discussion focusing on children as human rights defenders, the participation of children human rights defenders had become a standard practice in the work of the Committee. Currently, 13 children human rights defenders were advising the Committee on its draft general comment on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change. More than 7,000 children from 103 countries had participated in consultations on the first draft and had highlighted the need for urgent action to address the impact of climate change on their rights. The Committee had adopted a draft for public consultation, to be published in November 2022. All States were invited to provide comments on the draft general comment by February 2023.

6. The report of the Secretary-General on the status of the human rights treaty body system ([A/77/279](#)) reflected the conclusions of the Chairs on the predictable review cycle and aligned working methods. To implement those conclusions, increased resources were necessary for the treaty bodies and their

Secretariats to match the workload. The active support of Member States in considering the resource requirements of the treaty body system was critical to its future success.

7. **Ms. García Rico** (Spain) said that protecting children and adolescents was a key objective of domestic and foreign policy in Spain. In 2021, her Government had adopted a law on the comprehensive protection of children and adolescents facing violence and an action plan against the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. It was also working on a family law to reform and improve the national social protection system.

8. The process led by the Committee on the Rights of the Child to draft a general comment on children's rights and the environment was an opportunity to broaden the scope of the rights of the child in the context of the climate crisis, which had a negative impact on the enjoyment of human rights. The setbacks in the fulfilment of the rights of children and adolescents due to the COVID-19 pandemic were a matter of concern, affecting the most vulnerable groups in particular. States should place the rights of children and adolescents at the centre of their recovery policies in order to reverse that trend in key areas such as health, education and protection against physical and mental violence.

9. **Ms. Ruhama** (Malaysia) said that, as a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Malaysia ensured the promotion and protection of children's rights nationally through various laws, policies and action plans. In order to guarantee high-quality and affordable education for children, her Government continued to provide subsidized early childhood care and education, particularly for those in poverty and for low-income households. Monthly financial assistance enabled underprivileged children and orphans to continue living with their guardians while also having the potential to grow and develop. Her Government was reviewing the judicial process for children with a view to further strengthening their protection.

10. Her country would continue to promote the rights of children and called on the international community to strengthen cooperation in that area. She would be interested to hear how the Committee was progressing on the backlog of reports for review that had been postponed owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and whether that backlog had affected the work of the Committee in moving forward post pandemic.

11. **Ms. Ekmektzoglou** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that the European Union was concerned by the setbacks to children's rights and to the achievement of the

Sustainable Development Goals during the COVID-19 pandemic. She asked what potential solutions the Committee on the Rights of the Child had identified to address the significant backlog of reports as a result of the pandemic and how Member States could assist in addressing that challenge.

12. The meaningful participation of children in the work of the United Nations was a priority area for the European Union. It therefore welcomed the steps taken by the Committee to increase the participation of children, including children human rights defenders, in its work. Children needed to participate in any discussions and decision-making processes that affected their lives and rights, whether directly or indirectly. She asked what other avenues could be taken to further increase the meaningful participation of children, including children human rights defenders, in the work of the Committee. How could children from all backgrounds and regions, especially those in vulnerable situations, have equal opportunities to participate, and how could Member States assist in that endeavour?

13. **Ms. Sorto Rosales** (El Salvador) said that her Government upheld its commitments to children by promoting laws, plans and programmes in the interests of infants, children, adolescents and their families. Such laws had enabled the provision of comprehensive care for mothers and their babies before, during and after birth; protection for children throughout infancy, childhood and adolescence; and the promotion and protection of, and support for, breastfeeding through the adoption of measures to ensure suitable environments and conditions to that end.

14. El Salvador remained committed to complying with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international commitments in that field. She wondered how the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child could be harmonized with the new global challenges that were not reflected in the Convention.

15. **Mr. Ruidíaz Pérez** (Chile) said that his Government welcomed and was committed to fulfilling the observations made by the Committee on the Rights of the Child following the examination of the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Chile (CRC/C/CHL/6-7). In the context of the examination, his Government had committed to developing a draft law to protect the human rights of intersex persons and to prohibit so-called normalization surgeries. Ongoing guidance from the Committee and the sharing of experiences with other States were crucial to making progress together on that global challenge.

16. Chile had also adopted a law on guarantees for and comprehensive protection of the rights of children and

adolescents, adapted to the standards of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. That law constituted the logical new institutional framework for children in Chile, following the establishment of various bodies for their protection. In line with its commitment to the human rights of children, Chile had submitted its candidacy to the Human Rights Council for the period 2023–2025.

17. **Ms. Matos Menéndez** (Dominican Republic) said that the rights of the child were essential to achieving sustainable development and guaranteeing a world of equal opportunities for future generations, leaving no one behind. The interconnectedness between various global emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which had affected low- and middle-income countries in particular, and climate change, which disproportionately affected small island developing States, meant that children from countries like the Dominican Republic faced a higher level of vulnerability.

18. She asked what measures the Committee on the Rights of the Child had considered recommending to countries to better respond to the inequalities faced by children, such as unequal access to education and health, as well as in terms of violence, particularly in spaces that were meant to be safe, such as that of the family, religious communities and educational institutions. How could accountability be guaranteed while avoiding retraumatization in daily life and strengthening positive parenting strategies?

19. **Ms. Chakir** (Luxembourg), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the significant and effective participation of children at the national level and in the United Nations was essential, in line with article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Accordingly, Luxembourg had undertaken several projects to enhance the participation of children in the country. The youth parliament of Luxembourg gave young people from 14 years of age the opportunity to participate in political life, serving to educate and raise awareness of global issues among children and enabling them to voice their concerns for the future. However, the participation of young people could be effective only if it was taken seriously. She would be interested to hear how the results and the work of national organizations led by children, such as youth parliaments, were taken into account in the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

20. **Mr. Magosaki** (Japan) said that a comprehensive approach, placing children at the heart of human rights, development and peace and security, was crucial in the current time of human security crises. Bilateral donors, funds and programmes would significantly benefit from

inputs in that regard. He asked whether there had been any missed opportunities for collaboration and, if so, how Member States could assist.

21. **Ms. Raban** (United Kingdom) said that her country was unwavering in its defence of children's rights and was deeply concerned by the impacts of conflicts and crises, including climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, on those rights worldwide. The prevalence of violence against children was also deeply troubling, and the nature, severity and drivers of such violence often had significant gendered differences. When addressing that issue, gender must be considered and responses must reflect the diverse experiences of children. Accordingly, her Government was committed to putting women and girls at the heart of its foreign and development policy, using all its tools to drive progress in that area. The United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office would publish a new strategy for women and girls that year, on the themes of educating girls, empowering women and girls, and ending violence. She wondered how to better ensure that girls were meaningfully consulted on the issues that affected them, not only in international forums but also at the national and regional levels.

22. **Ms. Wiig** (Norway) said that, in March 2022, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had co-organized a high-level event with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and Norway to promote the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. She asked how the Special Representative and the Committee could collaborate more closely to improve the protection of children and their rights in conflict zones, and how Member States could contribute to that endeavour.

23. **Ms. Purba** (Indonesia) said that the achievements of Indonesia in terms of the participation of children were significant. They included the establishment of national and local children's forums, allowing children to participate in government policy development, and the launch of an emancipated learning programme enabling schools to listen to students and flexibly adjust their curricula, with the support of a digital application that was used by millions of teachers and students across the country.

24. While digital transformation in education had brought tremendous benefits, the risk of online violence against children was a matter of concern. She asked how States could best strike a balance between maximizing the benefits of the digital transformation while avoiding the risks that it posed to children.

25. **Ms. Romulus Ortega** (Mexico) said that the international community must ensure that the multiple current social, economic and geopolitical crises were not detrimental to the enjoyment of the rights of the child. The increase in forced displacements affected a growing number of children, particularly unaccompanied children, and must be adequately addressed. She asked what actions the Committee on the Rights of the Child was taking to ensure the participation of children in programmes to mitigate the impact on mental health and personal security of the current socioeconomic, food and geopolitical crises.

26. Given the challenges in ensuring business continuity during the COVID-19 pandemic, Mexico commended the achievements of the Committee in strengthening the treaty body system, the increase in the participation of children in the work of the Committee, the establishment of regional coordinators and the interinstitutional efforts to monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols worldwide.

27. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that, to his delegation's displeasure, the Committee on the Rights of the Child was continuing to promote the Western position on the situation in Ukraine at every opportunity. During the nineteenth Meeting of the States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, his delegation had called for the Committee to adhere to the principle of neutrality and impartiality, but its comments had unfortunately been ignored. The examination of the most recent periodic report of Ukraine on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child ([CRC/C/UKR/5-6](#)) had been clearly politicized. No questions had been asked about the violations of the rights of the child committed by Ukraine, which had been repeatedly reported by not only Russia but also non-governmental organizations. On 4 August 2022, Amnesty International had published a study in which it had found that the Ukrainian armed forces were endangering the lives of civilians, including children, by using schools for military purposes. Such information had regrettably been overlooked by the Committee. The Committee should make better use of the time allocated to it for meetings and should not become sidetracked by activities that were not covered by its mandate. The most recent periodic report of the Russian Federation ([CRC/C/RUS/6-7](#)) had been submitted to the Committee on time back in 2019, but there was still no information on the Committee's website about when it would be considered. Perhaps if the Committee were to spend less time on politics and more on its core work, it would process reports more efficiently.

28. **Mr. Al-Suwaidi** (Qatar) said that his country reaffirmed its commitment to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. Qatar was also committed to continuing its efforts to protect the rights of children in situations of armed conflict, in which children were subjected to grave violations of their right to education and deprived of education because of attacks on schools. Such efforts were made through its international development and humanitarian aid programme, in which the education sector received 17 per cent of the total assistance provided by Qatar.

29. **Mr. Riva Grela** (Uruguay) said that his country was a long-standing defender of children's rights and was committed to implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as reflected in its domestic policy, which aimed to recognize and fulfil the rights of children. Among the challenges faced was the COVID-19 pandemic, which had exacerbated the existing digital gap, as well as the gender gap and the gap between developed and developing countries.

30. In terms of digitization, through the One Laptop per Child initiative his Government had implemented a network of interconnectivity across the entire country, as part of a plan that had lasted for 16 years and passed through four Governments. Access to connectivity was essential to fulfilling the right to education. However, compliance with article 28 of the Convention could not be achieved if the gaps in society continued to expand. He asked how the Committee on the Rights of the Child planned to continue its work to implement and fulfil the right to education in the light of the increasing digital gap.

31. **Mr. Altarsha** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that infants in his country were suffering owing to the lack of milk formula and power supply issues. Syria could not even import surgical threads. He wondered whether such sanctions should be considered the primary reasons behind grave violations of the rights of children. Paragraph 49 of the report of the Committee on the Rights of the Child referred to the need to repatriate children detained in the Syrian Arab Republic and the right to maintain contact with both parents. In Syria, there were more than 58,000 foreign terrorist fighters with their family members, 93 per cent of whom were children. As defenders of human rights, countries should shoulder their responsibility towards those children and take them, the wives and the foreign terrorist fighters back instead of asking others to defend human rights, withdrawing those children's citizenship or even separating them from their families. His delegation supported the comments made by the Russian Federation regarding procedures.

32. **Ms. Otani** (Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child) said that the issue of the backlog of reports for review was a matter of serious concern that must be addressed. Reports should be reviewed when received from States parties; if that process was delayed, the information contained in the reports would not be up to date. Such delays also meant there was a protection and monitoring gap for the children in the countries in question. As agreed by the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies in June 2022, the treaty bodies as a whole were currently working to change to a predictable review cycle, which would involve the integration of backlog issues into a new system. It was therefore not possible for individual treaty bodies to address the backlog issues separately from the shift within the whole system to an eight-year predictable review cycle.

33. Harmonizing the work of the Committee with global challenges, as well as taking into account gender dimensions, required collaboration among the various treaty bodies and special procedure mandate holders, with a view to enhancing approaches to human rights and child rights issues. There were significant overlaps and interconnectedness between the issues faced, including those related to gender. There were also many opportunities to enhance children's participation and the child rights agenda, including in the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the universal periodic review, the Commission on the Status of Women and the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

34. With regard to missed opportunities for collaboration, it should be noted that human rights issues, including those pertaining to children, were part of the mandates of the United Nations funds, programmes and specialized agencies. The Committee was therefore interested not only in working with other United Nations human rights mechanisms, but also in strengthened collaboration with the United Nations specialized agencies, funds and programmes. International cooperation, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, was also necessary to achieve goals related to education and early childhood development, in particular fulfilling the right to education for all children in all countries. In addition to multilateral cooperation, including through United Nations funds and programmes, bilateral international cooperation was also beneficial, for example through the use of official government assistance. States should look at the concluding observations and recommendations for all countries and collectively provide assistance to the States in need, with a view to implementing the recommendations of the Committee.

35. Given that the work of the Committee in Geneva was focused on addressing the gaps in implementing the

Convention, there was unfortunately no time available to share good practices. However, hearing about good practices was both encouraging and beneficial, and they should be shared among Member States. After the issuance of concluding observations and recommendations by the Committee, a follow-up should also be conducted to identify good practices from other countries.

36. The Committee could do more to increase collaboration with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. One idea would be to work together to support the States that had not ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Committee could also work with United Nations agencies with a view to helping those States to implement the Optional Protocol and fulfil their reporting obligations.

37. **Ms. Singhateh** (Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other sexual abuse material), introducing her report ([A/77/140](#)), said that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was crucial to eradicating the sale and sexual exploitation of children. Addressing the exacerbated inequalities and vulnerability of children to the harmful practices of child marriage, child labour and sale and sexual exploitation was a collective responsibility.

38. In her report, she had identified those most at risk of or vulnerable to sale and sexual exploitation under targets 5.3, 8.7 and 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals and had set out good practices for mitigating their vulnerability and protection needs in the context of the family, the digital space and institutional settings. Certain groups of children were at a higher risk of falling victim to sale, sexual exploitation and abuse owing to inequalities exacerbated by factors such as discrimination. Such groups included children affected by poverty, those in street situations, those in rural or marginalized communities, those affected by conflict, those on the move or internally displaced, those whose births had not been registered, those in institutional and alternative care and exposed to violence and abuse, and those engaged in child labour. Those children were also at risk of being left behind in strategies to tackle sale and exploitation, as they remained largely excluded from data collection exercises.

39. While States had made significant gains in protecting vulnerable children, the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, outbreaks of conflicts and the climate crisis had compounded the issues and caused enormous strains on child protection

systems, causing setbacks to the achievement of the Goals.

40. As Governments strived to build back better, it was essential to adequately address the vulnerability of children to sale, sexual abuse and exploitation at the national, regional and international levels through legislation, policies, programmes and the allocation of sufficient resources. Those responses should equally be reflected in the reporting processes and national reviews within the scope of the Goal targets and be backed up by disaggregated data to inform evidence-based policymaking, with a view to ensuring that no child was left behind.

41. **Ms. González Ramírez** (Mexico) said that her delegation wished to know how collaboration with the private sector could be strengthened to combat the online exploitation of children, identify criminal groups and reduce demand for and the reproduction of related materials. Recognizing the link between sexual abuse and exploitation of children and the structural causes due to gender inequality and toxic masculinity was crucial to combating such crimes. Gender-based violence led to a normalization and perpetuation of violence against children.

42. Access to sexual and reproductive health services was essential to countering the health risks to victims and survivors. In addition, integrating comprehensive sex education into the curriculum was key to preventing child marriage, sexual exploitation and abuse, including online, and trafficking in persons. Above all, it should be recalled that children were rights holders and agents of change. Mexico invited the Special Rapporteur to participate in the commemorative activities on the World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence, with a view to fostering commitment among Member States to eliminating child sexual exploitation and abuse, including through the introduction of comprehensive sex education for children.

43. **Ms. Ekmektzoglou** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that the European Union supported a holistic approach to eliminating the serious violations of human rights that were highlighted in the report of the Special Rapporteur. Measures to that end included eliminating discriminatory laws and policies; implementing adequate socioeconomic measures to increase the resilience of families and their capacities to provide a safe and healthy environment for children; upholding the right to education and ensuring access to health-care services for children, particularly survivors of violence and abuse; collecting and using adequate data to identify

those at risk and to ensure early warning and intervention; and regulating the digital environment and providing digital skills to ensure its safety for children.

44. She asked what role policymakers, lawyers, researchers, social activists and religious and community leaders could play in those efforts, and how the private sector, including tourism, could be involved in upholding the rights of the child. It was crucial for child protection and welfare policies to reach not only institutions but also children themselves, who were the intended beneficiaries. She wondered whether there were any best practices in that regard. Lastly, her delegation wished to know what could be done at the national level to prevent child abuse stemming from the production and distribution of child abuse materials on the Internet.

45. **Mr. Shaked** (Israel) said that his delegation commended the attention given to the safety of children online by the Special Rapporteur in her report. Sexual exploitation and abuse of children was a phenomenon that should not exist in the physical or digital spaces. Efforts to eliminate the sexual exploitation and abuse of children in all its forms were critical. The digital space and new technologies offered many positive opportunities for children but also presented numerous threats. The wide reach of the Internet had led to the emergence online of sexual services. He would welcome further information on reviews of the global efforts to prevent the digital space from being used as a platform for prostitution while maintaining the freedom of online activities.

46. **Ms. Gunderson** (United States of America) said that her Government had committed to directly addressing the root causes of child sexual exploitation and abuse, while also taking action against other factors that exacerbated those causes, such as the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, the White House Task Force to Address Online Harassment and Abuse had been launched with the aim of stopping the distribution of child sexual abuse materials and the sexual exploitation of children. The Child Exploitation Investigations Unit of the United States Department of Homeland Security continued to rescue victims worldwide and to provide training to international law enforcement partners. Her Government had also expanded the Child Tax Credit in the American Rescue Plan, lifting millions of children and families out of poverty and providing critical funding to support community child abuse prevention programmes. She asked what measures could be taken to foster cooperation with the information, communications and technology sector to address child sexual abuse and exploitation.

47. **Ms. Matos Menéndez** (Dominican Republic) said that, in low- and middle-income countries, disproportionately high numbers of vulnerable groups, often linked with low economic status of children, were involved in child labour in dominant sectors of the economy. Her Government was working tirelessly to combat the sale and sexual exploitation of children, and would welcome more information on best practices of legal frameworks and policies for regulating the online space to counter such activities.

48. **Ms. Murphy** (Australia) said that her Government was very concerned about the global rise in child labour and was committed to keeping children safe from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. In that connection, a national strategy to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse had been launched for the period 2021–2030, together with a five-year national action plan to combat modern slavery. Furthermore, to improve transparency and accountability, mandatory reporting notices had been issued to online service providers, requiring them to report on the steps being taken to deal with child sexual exploitation and abuse material on their platforms. It was important to understand and address the drivers of those crimes. Her delegation would be interested to learn how nations could work together with the private sector to better prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation across borders.

49. **Mr. Micallef St. John** (Malta), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the vulnerabilities of children should be adequately addressed within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. His delegation was alarmed by the rising number of child, early and forced marriages, and by the fact that children affected by conflict might be at greater risk of sexual exploitation. It was therefore imperative for Member States to prioritize the protection of children and to further assess and address the long-term impact of violent armed conflict on them. In view of the Special Rapporteur's recommendations to States and other stakeholders to address the many vulnerabilities of children to sale and sexual exploitation, further details would be welcome on possible contextual challenges to ensuring digital literacy for children.

50. **Ms. Ducasse** (Canada) said that her delegation was concerned by the multiple ongoing crises and conflicts, and their impact on the rights of children, worldwide. The situation was further aggravated by the growing presence of the digital space in daily life, which increased the risk of child sexual exploitation. In that context, Canada had played a key role in the drafting of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution

and child pornography. Through its foreign policy, her Government supported an intersectional approach to the prevention of and response to gender-based violence. Guidance on the best way to support victims and survivors of online sexual exploitation would be appreciated. Canada was working closely with its partners to end child, early and forced marriage, and wished to know how international collaboration could be strengthened to accelerate actions aimed at eliminating those harmful practices, in keeping with target 5.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals, to reach the poorest and most marginalized women and girls in particular.

51. **Ms. Tambwe** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her Government remained steadfast in its commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of the child, in accordance with the national Constitution and with regional and international human rights treaties. The United Republic of Tanzania was using a holistic approach to create an enabling environment for girls and was implementing a free education policy aimed at reducing the economic burden borne by parents. Families were empowered through a national social security fund, which was intended to increase economic security for impoverished families, and a national strategy to eliminate child labour had been implemented for the period 2018–2022.

52. **Ms. Raban** (United Kingdom) said that the digital environment was presenting new risks for children, and the international community needed to play its part in keeping children safe, both online and in their communities, by balancing privacy concerns with the need to maintain child safety. Tech companies needed to act further and faster to prioritize safety, and her Government had been working with international partners to strengthen global efforts in that regard. The United Kingdom welcomed the negotiations on a United Nations cybercrime treaty and supported the work of the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, to which it would provide £16.5 million in funding over the following three years. In addition to international cooperation, robust national efforts were also required. Her Government had developed an online safety bill to place legal obligations on tech companies, requiring them to proactively address and remove child sexual exploitation and abuse content, under the supervision of an independent regulator. Her delegation would welcome the Special Rapporteur's views on the use of the term "child pornography" in place of "child sexual abuse material" to better represent the horrific nature of the crime and better support victims and survivors.

53. **Mr. Dibba** (Gambia) said that his Government welcomed the report of the Special Rapporteur and

would thoroughly study and address all her recommendations. Member States were encouraged to welcome the report and adopt the policies recommended therein to curtail all forms of abuse against children, in a spirit of collaboration and partnership. The continued diligence and service of the Special Rapporteur would help to protect children and preserve their innocence and dignity.

54. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation fully supported the Special Rapporteur's point about the importance of a safe family environment in a child's life. As part of the Decade of Childhood in the Russian Federation, his Government was implementing an action plan that included assisting children and parents in cases of violations of the rights of the child, identifying ways to prevent child abuse and rehabilitating child victims of abuse and crime. A range of measures involving more than 2,000 social service organizations had also been developed to protect children from abuse and crime. Such measures were aimed at improving the assistance provided to child victims of abuse and crime, raising awareness among minors and children of the different forms of violence and of rules for online safety, and strengthening the skills of specialists working with child victims of abuse and crime. Since 2017, his Government had been implementing a strategy for the prevention of child neglect and juvenile delinquency, aimed at ensuring the right of every child to live and be raised in a family and strengthening the institution of the family. As part of those efforts, psychological and medical support was provided to children and adolescents.

55. **Mr. Mohd Zim** (Malaysia) said that his Government fully supported children's access to the digital environment, as well as their ability to express their views and opinions, in accordance with the rights provided for under national laws and regulations. While the Internet and social media provided learning and developmental resources, and enabled young people to communicate and interact with the global community, they also exposed children to a wide range of threats, including cyberbullying, cybergrooming, identity theft, pornography and violence. Additional suggestions would be welcome on how Member States could streamline their efforts to better protect children from cyberthreats and on what they could leverage from the United Nations system to help them in that endeavour.

56. **Mr. Altarsha** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, while the Special Rapporteur mentioned in her report that those who lacked stable homes were at increased risk of exposure to sale, sexual abuse and other threats, she did not address the reasons behind the lack of stability. It would be preferable to prevent the causes of

the problem than to find solutions for its repercussions. Syria took the issue of child abuse very seriously and imposed heavy prison sentences, and even the death penalty, on those who violated children. The fourth recommendation contained in the report concerned the dissemination of information in the languages of vulnerable groups, and his delegation failed to understand the intended purpose of that recommendation and the rationale behind the terminology used. The link between the dissemination of information and the languages of vulnerable groups was unclear.

57. **Mr. Harrison Greenwood** (Observer for the Sovereign Order of Malta) said that, 30 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, threats to the survival and healthy development of children worldwide remained apparent, and children remained the most vulnerable in situations of armed conflict. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, the Sovereign Order of Malta had mobilized thousands of volunteers and relief workers to provide housing and medical and humanitarian assistance to persons in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries hosting displaced children and families. It had also provided thousands of meals to displaced Ukrainian children in Poland and had delivered relief, supplies and psychological counselling to families displaced within Ukraine. Since education was essential for the maximum development of children, the Order had made language classes a special priority to facilitate integration into public schools in Poland and Hungary. His delegation had also supported and developed a protocol for adoption by the World Health Organization (WHO) to aid health-care workers to identify those at risk of trafficking and exploitation.

58. **Ms. Singhateh** (Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other sexual abuse material) said that the support received from Member States would help to strengthen the commitment to protecting children from sale and sexual exploitation. The term "child pornography" was discouraged because it implied some form of voluntary participation on the part of the child, and Member States were encouraged to use the term "child sexual abuse material" in its place. In addition to legislation, other mechanisms and measures, such as awareness-raising, could be put in place to protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation in the digital sphere. The risks associated with the use of online technology should be discussed and included in school curricula in order to teach children how to use technology safely. Accordingly, professional educators needed to be trained and given

the appropriate information for imparting knowledge to their students.

59. Given that online abuse was a cross-border phenomenon, it was important to encourage collaboration, not only among Governments, but also among law enforcement agencies and personnel, to facilitate the sharing of information, knowledge and resources. The digital divide needed to be bridged to ensure that all persons had access to the positive aspects of technology, and capacity-building efforts were required to give Member States access to technology and resources. While all children were vulnerable, the most vulnerable children were those from marginalized and Indigenous communities, where different languages might be spoken. For those children to have access to services, the language barrier needed to be addressed, and information and resources needed to be shared in a language understood by marginalized groups.

60. The role played by stakeholders in different sectors, including the tourism and travel sector, in protecting children from sexual exploitation and abuse was an important issue that should be further considered, since children were being sold and sexually abused in different ways in different sectors. The most important means of addressing the issue and protecting children in the tourism sector was raising awareness. In her report, she briefly addressed the dangerous trend of unregulated volunteering by tourists in orphanages and encouraged the regulation of that sector to ensure that children in institutional care were protected. Collaboration and partnerships among Governments, and between Governments and the private sector, were also crucial. The private sector and tech industries were urged to comply with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in the conduct of their business. States were also strongly encouraged to regulate the private sector and to ensure that laws were in place to guide the sector and ensure compliance.

61. While the contributions of 34 Member States had been received and included in her report, all Member States were encouraged to provide specific details on their own efforts towards the protection of children from sale and sexual exploitation, so that the information could be shared with others.

62. **Mr. Wang Zixu** (China) said that the promotion and protection of the rights of children were important components of international human rights. Despite the progress made in recent years, various threats persisted, including poverty, sickness, hunger, conflict and disaster, which were all harmful to the lives and health of children. The international community needed to approach the issue strategically, by focusing on human

heritage and development, to fulfil its commitment and responsibility to future generations, and to promote and protect the right to development.

63. Ensuring peace was the best way to protect children. The international community needed to uphold the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, adhere to the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes and foster a safe and stable environment to spare children from the scourge of war and turmoil. Development underpinned the growth of children, and his Government advocated for development to be a policy priority rooted in the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the eradication of child poverty, through the promotion of economic growth in developing countries and the effective safeguarding of children's rights to life, health, development and education. International cooperation was critical in that regard, and China supported UNICEF, WHO and other multilateral agencies in their role of enhancing the health and well-being of children. All countries should strengthen policy communication and the sharing of experiences to foster a sound environment for the healthy growth of children.

64. China was home to 250 million children, and his Government had always prioritized their development while taking a multipronged approach, including legislative, administrative and judicial measures, to safeguard their rights, promote their welfare, close development gaps and support their all-round development. China was continuously improving its legal system and had enacted or amended specialized laws and regulations, including a law on the protection of minors, a law on the prevention of juvenile delinquency, the civil code, criminal law, criminal procedure law and a law against domestic violence. Furthermore, his Government had been implementing childhood development programmes, improving childhood health care, expanding access to inclusive educational resources and optimizing the social environment for children in order to strengthen socioeconomic development. It valued the role played by international human rights instruments in that regard and had conscientiously reported on its implementation of international conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols thereto, and the Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

65. **Mr. Shaked** (Israel) said that, despite the near-universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, millions of children around the world continued to be left behind and to have their rights denied. Children were disproportionately affected by

global crises, poverty, violence, inequality and exclusion, and more needed to be done to secure their future.

66. Digital technologies had become an increasingly integral part of all aspects of life; while they offered many positive opportunities for children, they also presented new risks and threats, which needed to be addressed. One such risk was that of cyberbullying, which could be carried out anonymously and cause considerable embarrassment and disrespect to a person's body or character, since a single online act could be widely disseminated, with short- and long-term repercussions that were not easily assessable.

67. The magnitude of cyberbullying among children had been recognized by various international organizations and bodies, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). As part of his country's efforts to tackle cyberbullying, the Israeli child online protection bureau had launched a strategic plan for effective online prevention and intervention, with the aim of eradicating dangers and threats to children and young people on social media, applications and forums. An online volunteer patrol had also been set up to guide, advise and support children and teenagers in need of assistance; to raise awareness of cyberbullying, violence and safe Internet surfing; to discourage the production of harmful content; and to offer tools to deal with online dangers. That initiative would be extended throughout the country and would complement existing governmental efforts with civic efforts.

68. Israel had joined global efforts to combat cyberbullying and had jointly initiated a resolution on countering cyberbullying at the current session of the Human Rights Council with Argentina, Germany and Greece. The resolution, which had been adopted by consensus, was aimed at raising the issue of cyberbullying in a multilateral forum, addressing it as a form of violence affecting human rights and galvanizing Member States into taking action. The international community needed to ensure a nurturing environment for the children of the world and their needs to enable them to fully enjoy their human rights, grow with dignity and realize their full potential.

69. **Ms. González Ramírez** (Mexico), speaking as a youth delegate, said that her Government remained committed to protecting, promoting and respecting the rights of children, and to upholding the principle of the best interests of the child at all times. In that respect, it had adopted a general law on the rights of children and

adolescents, which recognized them as agents of change and holders of rights, outlined specific measures for their protection against all forms of physical and mental violence, and was crucial to guaranteeing and promoting their rights in all agencies and at all levels of government.

70. As a country of origin, transit, destination and return, Mexico had in recent years recorded an increase in the arrival of children and adolescents, many of them unaccompanied, and had expedited certain measures to meet their needs. Her Government therefore encouraged all national and local authorities to provide the required services to children, regardless of their nationality or migratory status, since the rights of children and adolescents travelled with them and should be respected.

71. Children had felt the impact of multiple global crises, including the crisis in education, which had affected their fundamental right to development and empowerment. The health crisis and its repercussions had left many children without access to education and had increased their risk of becoming victims of violence. The situation had been exacerbated by rapid technological developments, and online learning had increased children's exposure to online dangers such as cyberbullying, sexual exploitation, trafficking in persons and hate speech, making the integration of digital learning resources into school curricula a critical element for preventing such forms of violence. Gender equality and the rights of girls were also priorities for Mexico, and access to education, including to comprehensive sexual education, needed to be guaranteed, without discrimination.

72. The social and economic potential of each nation depended on the well-being of its inhabitants and especially of its children, who accounted for approximately one third of the Mexican population. For that reason, Mexico considered it essential to adopt a comprehensive, cross-cutting approach, with a human rights and gender perspective, when designing and implementing policies and programmes to improve living conditions.

73. **Mr. Sharma** (India) said that millions of children worldwide continued to live in extreme poverty while facing inequality, exploitation, violence and abuse. In keeping with their common responsibility to protect children and provide them with a safe and enabling environment, Member States needed to adopt efficient and effective legal frameworks for protecting and promoting the rights of the child, with a special focus on nutrition, education and safety. Children occupied a privileged place in society and the legal system in India,

and the Constitution guaranteed their fundamental rights and empowered the State to make special provisions for them in their best interest.

74. India had set up a national commission for the protection of children's rights to ensure that laws, policies, programmes and administrative mechanisms were in alignment with the national Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Its national plan of action for children focused on the priority areas of health and nutrition; education and development; and protection and participation. Access to education was fundamental to building a peaceful and civilized society, and the Constitution provided for free and compulsory education for children until the age of 14 years. A midday meal scheme, covering more than 118 million children, was aimed at achieving universal enrolment and retention. Private schools reserved 25 per cent of their places for children from poorer homes. A programme highlighting the need to educate girls had been established to comprehensively address imbalances in the child sex ratio. Water, sanitation and hygiene facilities were being provided in schools with the aim of improving school attendance.

75. The digital sphere had opened up enormous opportunities for children to learn and connect to the world, but it had also brought about serious challenges and forms of child abuse, such as cyberbullying. Measures were therefore needed to strengthen digital literacy and safety, and a stronger framework was required to ensure that children could enjoy the benefits of digital technologies without compromising their well-being. His Government had put in place effective measures to prevent and protect children against cyberstalking, cyberbullying, child marriage, sexual harassment, pornography and trafficking in persons.

76. The rights of children and juveniles alleged to be in conflict with the law, and those of children in need of care and protection, were safeguarded, with the Government and civil society working together within a robust legal and administrative framework under the active supervision of the judiciary. There was a dangerous and worrying trend in global terrorism whereby an increasing number of children were being recruited for terrorism-related activities. School closures during the COVID-19 pandemic had allowed terrorist groups to target even more children, including through online platforms, for radicalization and indoctrination. Member States needed to show greater political will to hold the perpetrators of terrorism and their sponsors accountable and to fulfil their child protection obligations.

77. **Ms. Egan** (Ireland) said that the subject of the rights of the child was a key priority for her delegation in all its bilateral and multilateral engagements across the United Nations system and in its work as a member of the Security Council. Her delegation was therefore deeply concerned that children continued to face the gravest of human rights violations in situations of armed conflict worldwide. Ireland had been proud to serve on the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict during its term on the Security Council, since peace was key to protecting children affected by conflict.

78. While every child had the right to education, attacks on schools continued to undermine children's access and right to education, endangering both them and their teachers. The deliberate targeting and use of, and attacks against, schools and hospitals by armed groups needed to end. All States should sign and implement the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Safe Schools Declaration. It was particularly appalling that girls in Afghanistan continued to be denied their right to secondary education, and the Taliban was urged to reverse that decision.

79. Ireland was very proud of its domestic record on children's rights. It had been the first country in the world to publish a national strategy on the participation of children and young people in decision-making. Its national youth strategy for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons sought to ensure a cross-governmental approach to enhance the lives of, and address the key challenges faced by, children and young people belonging to that community. A new national framework for the participation of children and young people in decision-making had been launched in 2021.

80. Her Government had held consultations with children and young people on the enjoyment of their rights as part of its preparations for reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and for the universal periodic review. It had also established a youth advisory panel, which had published a children's report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and was preparing for a forthcoming review under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All States were encouraged to engage with the treaty bodies to ensure best practices in their domestic efforts to promote children's rights.

81. **Ms. Banaken Elel** (Cameroon) said that her Government placed particular importance on issues relating to children in its projects and programmes, by focusing on their formal education and their well-being

within their families. While children bore the same inherent dignity as adults, they did not bear the same responsibilities, which explained why all countries had condemned child labour and called for its worst forms to be combated. In the same vein, children were not to be treated as adults; her Government was therefore committed to establishing a juvenile criminal justice system to ensure that no child would ever be sentenced to death or tried as an adult by the courts. While children deserved to be consulted, they should not take part in the political, ideological or social fights of adults, whether with guns as soldiers, with signs as protesters or with a microphone from a United Nations podium. Presenting them as agents of change or human rights defenders and corrupting their innocence with comprehensive sexuality education were admissions of failure and resignation on the part of adults, parents and nations.

82. In the lead-up to the Summit of the Future, thought should be given to building a future world where children could live happily, educated, in good health and sheltered from the ideas that they would have time to ponder in their adult years. The Summit should be an opportunity for reflecting on the role children were being made to play and the battles they were being made to fight in the so-called modern world. The only battles they should be fighting were those to successfully complete their studies to enable them to participate meaningfully in the social development of humankind; to develop the fundamental values of peace and solidarity; and to enjoy the carefreeness and innocence of their age, in the comfort of their families and under the authority of their mothers and fathers.

83. **Mr. Kovacevic** (Serbia), speaking as a youth delegate, said that, although much had been said about the issues of homeless children, child soldiers and victims of trafficking in persons, sexual violence and domestic abuse, much more remained to be done. Notwithstanding the efforts led by the United Nations, including under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the well-being of children and their safety from physical harm, hunger, disasters, poverty and climate change still required attention. The United Nations needed to ensure that children and young people would inherit a world that was safer and better than the one into which they had been born. One way of doing so was to guarantee the quality and accessibility of their education. The COVID-19 pandemic had had a significant impact, and it had been encouraging to see a swift reaction in the form of the Transforming Education Summit. The current generation had been denied a normal childhood and education, and all efforts should

be made to get their lives back on track and make up for lost time.

84. **Ms. Stojkovic** (Serbia), speaking as a youth delegate, said that Serbia was creating a favourable institutional, legislative and strategic framework for the full respect of children's rights through the introduction and implementation of laws, policies and practices aimed at safeguarding the rights and well-being of children, and contributing to their active participation in society. A general protocol for the protection of children from violence had been adopted, and significant attention was being paid to the issues of online safety and virtual violence. Physical violence continued to be a cause for concern, since children under the age of 18 years constituted more than 50 per cent of the population in countries afflicted by war. In addition to putting the lives of children in danger, armed conflict also denied them access to education, health care and social development. The United Nations and many of its Member States deserved praise for the work they were already undertaking, but youth leaders were also working towards productive change and could help to find new solutions to existing challenges.

85. **Ms. Flores Tello** (Panama) said that children in all countries continued to live in alarming and unfortunate situations as a result of poverty, migration, conflict, climate change and natural disasters. Attention should be drawn to their reality and to the legacy being passed down to them. The international community should take joint action to strengthen collaboration and create partnerships with the aim of addressing those issues.

86. Panama had strengthened its institutional framework in favour of children by passing a law on early childhood for the benefit of children under the age of 9 years. Under that law, an early childhood comprehensive care pathway had been established for developing and implementing programmes, public policies and standing budgets aimed at recognizing and protecting the rights and overall development of children, at all ages and developmental stages. The network of early childhood care centres had been expanded throughout the country to provide a wide range of services to children under the age of 5 years. A law had been passed to establish a system of guarantees and comprehensive protection of the rights of children and adolescents, which comprised a mechanism for the prevention of all forms of violence against minors. That law served to further align national regulations with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, while also raising existing standards in terms of the respect of children's rights and promoting their growth and development within their families, communities and societies.

87. Panama had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure through Act No. 61 of 2016, which ensured children's access to information and was aimed at promoting their social, spiritual and moral well-being, and their physical and mental health. Member States that had not yet ratified the Optional Protocol were encouraged to do so. A Panamanian independent expert had been elected to the Committee on the Rights of the Child for the period 2023–2027. Her Government remained committed to working towards the protection of children's rights, without discrimination and in the best interest of each child. It would maintain its efforts to provide an efficient education system, access to decent health care and support for early childhood, while also strengthening its legal framework and ensuring that all the human, civil, political, social and cultural rights of children were taken into account in public policies.

88. **Mr. Croker** (United Kingdom) said that his Government was committed to the promotion, protection and realization of the rights of all children. Disparities between children were growing, and efforts were needed to ensure that no child was left behind. Those efforts had become even more urgent in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had led to an increase in violence against children and a disruption of normal prevention and response mechanisms, leaving many children without vital support networks. Those challenges illustrated the critical importance of strong child-sensitive and gender-sensitive systems as a basis for effective responses. The pandemic was likely to lead to higher numbers of child brides in the ensuing years, particularly in poorer households and rural areas, and the United Kingdom had pledged £18 million in funding through the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage.

89. His delegation was deeply concerned by the impacts of conflict and humanitarian crises on children's rights, safety and well-being. Cases of sexual violence and abduction, in particular abduction of girls, had increased significantly. Protecting children from the impact of armed conflict was a moral, legal and strategic imperative and an essential element for breaking the cycle of violence. Tackling sexual violence in conflict was a top priority for the United Kingdom, which would host a conference on that topic in November 2022. The previous year, his Government had launched a call to action to ensure the rights and well-being of children born of sexual violence in conflict, which had been a first step in galvanizing international action to support the thousands of children who were marginalized and stigmatized by their families and communities. Since

then, the United Kingdom had been collaborating with experts and persons born under those circumstances to develop a platform for action. All Governments were encouraged to formally endorse the call to action and develop their own commitments under the platform to support that vulnerable group.

90. Online threats to children were growing and evolving at an alarming rate. The United Kingdom had been identified as a global leader in tackling all forms of child sexual exploitation and abuse, and had led a United Nations resolution recognizing the role of the private sector and robust, coherent regulations in protecting children from sexual abuse online.

91. **Ms. Pereira Portilla** (Colombia) said that, in keeping with the premise that peace was the basis for promoting life opportunities, her delegation strongly condemned violence against children and all forms of child exploitation, which were serious threats to the rights of children and could cause irreparable harm. Her Government had therefore made it a priority to promote free high-quality education as a means of achieving total peace and democratizing culture and knowledge. The strategies adopted by Colombia to prevent the recruitment and exploitation of children, and sexual violence against them, had been recognized for their positive impact. That approach had enabled children separated from armed groups to benefit from the protection of a programme run by the national institute for family welfare, which had also provided training on children's rights to the Colombian armed forces.

92. Her Government had adopted a strategy for preventing recruitment that was based on strengthening national institutions and developing policies, actions, plans and projects aimed at guaranteeing and protecting the rights of the child. One such example was the work being done by the intersectoral commission for the prevention of the recruitment and exploitation of children and sexual violence against them. At the same time, Colombia was pursuing cooperation and collaborative efforts with organizations such as UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration, and had joined the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children with a view to benefiting from best practices and technical assistance in that domain.

93. There was an established link between environmental degradation and the guarantee of children's rights. In an effort to help children to know their rights in order to exercise them, Colombia had been providing environmental education. Children had begun to use the justice system to demand climate justice, with a focus on more ambitious emissions cuts

to safeguard their future. They were also demanding an assessment of the impact of fossil fuel extraction and a halt to deforestation.

94. **Ms. Nkombo** (Zambia) said that her Government remained committed to protecting and promoting children's rights, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other related human rights treaties. It had adopted legislation and policies for the advancement of children's rights, including the Children's Code Act, which was aimed at ensuring that all child-related legislation was aligned with the provisions of the Convention and strengthening the protection of children, including through the eradication of child marriage and teenage pregnancy, and their direct and indirect consequences. Her Government had embarked on a review of the Marriage Act to ensure that the definition of the child was consistent with statutory laws.

95. Zambia was 1 of 12 priority countries committed to ending AIDS among children, in accordance with the objectives of the Global Alliance for Ending AIDS in Children by 2030. In its quest to attain universal health coverage by 2030, her Government had launched a campaign to resolve human resource challenges in the health sector through the recruitment of thousands of health-care workers. In recognition of the important role of education and skills development in socioeconomic growth, her Government had recruited thousands of teachers in a single year to improve the quality of education and had introduced free education in public schools, from early childhood to the secondary level.

96. Education was a powerful tool for the prevention of harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage. The COVID-19 pandemic had increased the vulnerability of girls to such practices owing to the disruption of their schooling. In that regard, her Government had committed to expanding support through a programme focused on keeping girls in school, which had been scaled up by more than 100 per cent. The programme would increase access to education for girls while promoting equal opportunities for girls, learners with disabilities and other vulnerable children. Zambia recognized the fact that children were increasingly exposed to different online dangers, including cyberbullying. The Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Act had been enacted in 2021 and was being implemented through a new online child protection strategy aimed at strengthening the protection of children online.

97. **Ms. Rivera Reyes** (Honduras) said that a critical situation of violence against children, adolescents and young people had been developing in Honduras as a

result of policies implemented by previous Governments, which had militarized Honduran society, criminalized public protest, entrenched organized crime in government structures, encouraged public corruption and institutionally weakened the State entities responsible for protecting the rights of children, adolescents and young people. The country was being rebuilt with education as its foundation, and a process of transformation was under way to provide children and young people with high-quality health care and education, as well as food security and food sovereignty. With the clear objective of advancing the rights of children, her Government was working with local authorities to provide a comprehensive response to the issues faced by children, through initiatives such as a school feeding programme, paediatric vaccination drives and the reconstruction of educational centres.

98. Her Government was developing violence prevention strategies that would help to improve the lives of young Hondurans and encourage public discussions on the responsibility borne by society for children and young people living in violent contexts as a result of poverty and stigmatization, and on the need for timely interventions in sectors where the risk was imminent. Emphasis was being placed on providing children, adolescents and young people with access to health care, formal and non-formal education, science and technology, culture, art and food security, thereby enabling them to fully play their roles as citizens and entrepreneurs.

99. **Mr. González Behmaras** (Cuba) said that, while the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognized that children should grow up in an environment conducive to the full development of their personalities and potential, both developed and developing countries were falling short in promoting and protecting children's rights and in ensuring access to high-quality health and education services for all children. Millions of children were undernourished, illiterate and falling into poverty each year. The limited progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals relating to children and adolescents had been severely set back by the COVID-19 pandemic. As always, owing to the unjust international order, developing countries would pay the highest price, and that reality would jeopardize the future and the well-being of millions of children unless all countries, especially the wealthiest ones, strengthened their political will and commitment to multilateralism and international cooperation.

100. Unilateral coercive measures continued to be imposed on countries of the global South, with serious repercussions for children and adolescents. No Cuban child could escape the impact of the economic,

commercial and financial blockade imposed on his country by the Government of the United States for over six decades. The pressure, hostility and suffocation to which Cuba was being subjected violated the Charter of the United Nations and international law, constituted the main obstacle to the country's development and directly affected the human rights and quality of life of the Cuban people, including children and adolescents. While the United States blockade had a direct impact on the ability of his Government to provide better health services, education and comprehensive care for all children and adolescents, including those with disabilities, it could not stifle the will to continuously improve results in those areas. In fact, despite the blockade and its devastating financial consequences, Cuba had achieved undeniable results in the promotion and protection of children and adolescents, as recognized by UNICEF.

101. The provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been incorporated into national policies and programmes in the areas of health, education, services for persons with disabilities, sport, culture and social development, and the principle of the best interests of the child had been incorporated into the Constitution and various laws and national practices. Health and education indicators for children in Cuba were on a par with those of developed countries in spite of the United States blockade. Furthermore, by popular referendum, with the participation of 74 per cent of the electorate, Cuba had adopted a new Family Code, which recognized a wide range of children's and adolescents' rights in the family setting and would allow the country to continue to achieve excellent results in terms of their protection.

102. **Ms. Anjani** (Indonesia) said that the protection of children was of the utmost importance to her Government, which had pushed forward the implementation of key policies and legal frameworks to protect and promote the rights of children. The institutions needed to effectively address cases of violence against children had been strengthened. Integrated women and children empowerment service centres had been established across the country, staffed with legal and mental health counsellors, who could immediately respond to reported cases of violence against children. A national domestic violence hotline had been launched in 2021 to provide victims, including child victims, with easier access to much-needed help. A national strategy on the elimination of violence against children had been adopted to ensure the participation of all national and local institutions in protecting children from all forms of violence and discrimination.

103. Indonesia had achieved notable progress in removing children from situations that were not conducive to their growth and development, such as the worst forms of child labour, and early and child marriage. A child labour reduction programme that had been established in 2008 had successfully helped thousands of child workers to return to school. Key legislative changes had been adopted in 2019 to prevent child marriage, with the minimum age for marriage set at 19 years for both men and women. The Supreme Court of Indonesia had that very week signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection to ensure stronger implementation of the new minimum age for marriage nationwide.

104. Her Government had placed the fulfilment of children's basic rights at the forefront its public policy goals. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it had provided free vaccines to all residents of the country, including children aged between 6 and 17 years. In addition, significant attention had been placed on accelerating efforts to reduce stunting, with significant funding from the national budget allocated to programmes to that effect. Children's access to education continued to be guaranteed through the increased reach of school operational assistance programmes, with the country attaining a school enrolment rate of over 99 per cent. There was a zero-tolerance policy on violence, including sexual violence, in school settings.

105. **Mr. Salini** (Slovakia), speaking as a youth delegate, said that unprecedented global challenges had exacerbated the situation of the most vulnerable children and had intensified discrimination against children and the violation of their human rights. Progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals was behind schedule, and efforts in that regard could be accelerated by guaranteeing access to justice. Accordingly, in collaboration with Czechia and UNICEF, Slovakia had organized an event to raise awareness of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure. All States that had not yet done so should ratify the Optional Protocol without further delay. The promotion and protection of children's rights were long-standing priorities for Slovakia, and the recent election of the representative of Slovakia as Vice-President of the UNICEF Executive Board confirmed that approach.

106. **Mr. Grünwald** (Slovakia) said that climate change was negatively affecting the lives of all people, including children, and concrete measures needed to be urgently adopted before it was too late. The recent loss of lives and widespread destruction caused by monsoon

rains in Pakistan served to reinforce the urgency of the situation.

107. Slovakia was deeply concerned about the targeted attacks by the Russian Federation against Ukrainian schools, hospitals and orphanages. The violation of the rights of millions of children, including their right to education, was unacceptable, given that access to safe and high-quality education was the fundamental right of every child and an enabling factor for personal development, prosperity, protection and hope for the future. His delegation welcomed the support provided to Ukraine by the United Nations and its entities, both in the area of education and elsewhere. Slovakia had welcomed thousands of child refugees from Ukraine and had adopted several legislative and administrative measures to integrate them into its education system and provide them with the required assistance. Through its war in Ukraine, the Russian Federation was solely responsible for aggravating the global food security crisis, leaving millions of children worldwide in a situation of acute food insecurity. The Russian Federation was urged to cease its military activities and immediately and unconditionally withdraw all its troops, military equipment and occupation administration structures from Ukraine.

108. **Mr. Arbeiter** (Canada) said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child was the most widely adhered to human rights treaty and had reshaped the general approach to the role of children in decision-making. The transition to recognizing children as active rather than passive members of society required reflection and a willingness to acknowledge shortcomings in the shared responsibility to ensure the safety, uphold the rights and act in the best interests of children, both at home and abroad.

109. Intersecting global crises had resulted in a regression on child rights globally, including on the prevention and elimination of child, early and forced marriage. Data and emerging trends showed that, while some gains had been made in reducing the practice, progress had been uneven both between and within countries and regions. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could lead to greater delays in eliminating that harmful practice, since 10 million additional girls would be at risk of child marriage in the following decade. Efforts needed to be accelerated to reach the poorest and most marginalized girls and women, and Canada would continue to play a leading role on the matter.

110. **Mr. Kunjara Na Ayudhya** (Thailand) said that children were a valuable part of national, regional and global communities, and would shape the course of the future. It was therefore imperative for their rights to be

respected and upheld. All countries should place strong emphasis on the promotion and protection of children's rights by making coordinated efforts to provide children with appropriate resources and guidance for their development.

111. Thailand remained committed to promoting and protecting the well-being of future generations and had adopted a multidisciplinary approach involving a range of legislative improvements in accordance with its core commitments under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. His Government had passed an Act regulating the promotion of food for infants and young children in line with WHO guidelines and had extended a child support grant scheme to assist poor families throughout the country. His Government had also amended existing laws to modernize child protection structures and reflect the evolving nature of discrimination and violence against children, including child labour and child pornography. Thailand strongly believed that proper prenatal care and early childhood support were critical for setting a positive trajectory and was proud to have been validated by WHO for becoming the first country in the Asia and Pacific region to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis. It stood ready to share its experience at all levels and had already done so within the framework of South-South cooperation.

112. With the rapid advent of digital transformation, the protection and promotion of children's rights should also be extended to the digital environment, since, in addition to providing new opportunities, technological progress posed novel risks of violation and abuse. Thailand was committed to ensuring that the digital environment offered a secure and equitable space for virtual engagement and learning by children and had introduced several plans and strategies that reflected the everyday challenges faced by children online, taking into account the concerns of both parents and children. An action plan for preventing and mitigating the impact of online gambling on children and young people had been implemented for the period 2020–2022, together with an action plan for building shared social responsibility for e-sports for children. Furthermore, a regional conference on child online protection had been held in 2020, under the auspices of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and in collaboration with UNICEF, ITU and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

113. States needed to work towards providing children with equal and effective access to the digital environment by bridging the digital divide in educational settings, communities and homes. Children's rights could not be completely fulfilled if their right to education was not guaranteed, and no child

should be excluded from the education system. Basic education was therefore available to all children in Thailand, irrespective of nationality. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his Government had worked with all stakeholders to enable students to continue their education with minimal interruptions and to provide free Internet connectivity to those in need.

114. **Mr. Riva Grela** (Uruguay) said that the promotion and protection of children's rights should be a priority for all Member States, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda should be consistent with the child rights obligations of States. Uruguay attached great importance to that issue, as reflected in both its domestic policies and its international leadership on the subject, and was concerned that children's vulnerability to violence was being exacerbated by multiple overlapping crises, such as increasing poverty, social and economic inequalities, forced displacement, conflict, climate change, environmental degradation, natural disasters and food insecurity. In fact, the COVID-19 pandemic had led to a significant rise in the number of children living in poverty, which had increased their vulnerability to various forms of violence, including child labour, child marriage, child trafficking, child sexual exploitation and recruitment into criminal groups.

115. In such a context, the best way to empower children was through education, but poorer households spent less on their children's education and were more likely to temporarily withdraw children from school in times of crisis, with less learning time at home, causing major disruptions in their education. Uruguay took pride in its robust free public school system, which had been a long-standing but continuously updated tool for social advancement. Early education coverage for children aged between 3 and 5 years had grown exponentially in recent years, allowing socioeconomic gaps to be bridged. The Transforming Education Summit had highlighted the need to ensure that education was equitable, accessible to boys and girls and non-discriminatory to ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and people in protracted crises. Investment in education should leave no one and no community behind. Uruguay would continue to advocate for all children to benefit from the implementation of cross-cutting programmes focused on not only education but also health, gender equality, the defence of strong and fair institutions and efforts to combat climate change.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.