



International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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Summary record of the 3004th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 22 August 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Shepherd

Contents

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under
article 9 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined twelfth and thirteenth reports of Turkmenistan (continued)

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

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention *(continued)*

Combined twelfth and thirteenth reports of Turkmenistan (continued)
([CERD/C/TKM/12-13](#); [CERD/C/TKM/Q/12-13](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Turkmenistan joined the meeting.*
2. **Ms. Chung** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would like to know what specific constitutional provisions protected the rights of ethnic minorities in Turkmenistan. It would be interesting to learn about individual cases where the courts had applied such provisions. She would welcome specific examples of when article 61 of the Constitution – under which all citizens had the right to seek redress for damage caused to them by illegal actions of State bodies, among others – had been invoked in the courts in discrimination cases.
3. She asked how the State ensured that members of ethnic minorities could receive an education in their native language and whether textbooks in minority languages were available. It would be helpful to have updated information on that topic – relating to all minorities, rather than solely the Russian minority – for 2019–2022. It would also be useful hear about the print and broadcast media in ethnic minority languages in Turkmenistan and the opportunities available to students from Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran who wished to pursue an education in the country but did not speak Turkmen.
4. She wished to know whether article 44 of the Constitution, which prohibited political parties established on ethnic or religious grounds, and similar restrictions under the Political Parties Act affected the political representation of ethnic minority groups. It was difficult to understand why the Voluntary Associations Act of 2014 placed such excessive restrictions on freedom of association, as they made it harder for minority groups to express their opinions. It would be helpful to know why no judges and only 3.61 per cent of judicial staff were from ethnic minorities and what measures were in place to ensure the rights and participation of ethnic minorities in public and political life. Additional information on ethnic minority representation among lawyers and law enforcement officers would also be useful.
5. Given reports of harassment, raids and house searches of members of Christian organizations, often when gathering for religious worship, she asked what measures had been taken to protect the rights of minorities, particularly to freedom of religion, without any discrimination. She would be interested in hearing about the impact of implementation of the Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations Act of 2016.
6. She wished to know what measures had been taken to ensure respect for the right to a fair trial and freedom from torture. In particular, she wondered what measures had been taken to release Mansur Mingelov, who had been sentenced to 22 years' imprisonment after exposing alleged torture and ill-treatment of members of the Baluchi community. She would also appreciate information on the steps taken to investigate allegations of human rights violations committed by law enforcement, judicial or prison officials against minority groups, particularly on the grounds of ethnic affiliation or the defence of fellow community members, and to bring those responsible to justice.
7. Noting reports of arbitrary restrictions on ethnic minorities' access to information on the Internet and censorship of foreign reporting on the human rights situation in Turkmenistan, she failed to understand why ethnic minorities were denied access to satellite dishes, which had been used to watch television programmes in their native language, while the authorities were purportedly able to bypass such censorship.
8. She would be grateful if the delegation could comment on reports that the Soviet-era *propiska* system of mandatory registration was being enforced in ways that limited freedom of movement and other fundamental rights of residents, including members of ethnic minorities, and that travel bans had been imposed on ethnic minority leaders, while relatives of dissidents, journalists and minority rights activists had been forced to flee the country.
9. She asked what measures had been taken to punish and prevent reported intimidation and harassment suffered by Baluchi, Persian and Afghan communities. She would appreciate

information on the situation of the Uzbek community following the failed coup attempt of 2002 and forced relocation of Uzbek families to desert regions by the Government. Further information on the situation of Lyuli and Roma minorities in Turkmenistan would also be helpful.

10. As Turkmenistan had a system of compulsory military service but did not recognize the right to conscientious objection, she would be interested in having statistics on persons imprisoned because of conscientious objection, disaggregated by ethnicity. She wished to know whether there were any planned or existing measures aimed at safeguarding the right to conscientious objection for religious and ethnic minorities and offering alternatives to military service.

11. So-called Turkmenization policies were assimilation policies that infringed ethnic minority rights. What plans did the State have to maintain or revise such policies?

12. She wished to know how the State responded to the dire situation faced by many Turkmen migrants abroad, including killing, kidnapping and forced returns. She would be grateful if the delegation could comment on reports by human rights organizations that relatives of dissidents had been threatened and that the State had refused to renew passports for citizens residing abroad and had called for an end to visa exemptions for its citizens in Turkey, thus exposing Turkmen nationals abroad to human rights violations and the risk of deportation.

13. In the light of the mass raids and violence against domestic migrant workers by police in Ashgabat in April 2023, with one man sustaining a fractured jaw, and the expulsion of nearly 250 internal migrant workers from Ashgabat and Akhal Province on the grounds that they lacked special permits, it would be helpful to have a full account of the situation for undocumented migrant workers in the country.

14. The Conference Committee on the Application of Standards of the International Labour Organization (ILO) had reported on forced labour organized by authorities in Turkmenistan in 2023. She asked whether migrant workers were also mobilized for forced labour and, if so, how many. What measures had the Government taken to prevent forced labour and punish perpetrators? It would be interesting to learn how the new law on civil status acts was being implemented to ensure the birth registration of all children born in the country, including those with undocumented parents.

15. Although the memorandum of understanding to cooperate on the national programme for socioeconomic development signed between the Government of Turkmenistan and the United Nations in 2022 was welcome, Turkmenistan had very limited engagement with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, with only the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief having visited the country. She would be grateful if the delegation could share information about any updated policies aimed at enhancing engagement with international human rights mechanisms.

16. **Mr. Guissé** (Country Task Force) said that the Committee would like further information on the legislative and policy frameworks relating to asylum-seekers and refugees, including updated information on measures to prevent the refoulement of asylum-seekers. It would be useful to have more detailed information from the Ombudsman on the investigation process for complaints from citizens, foreign nationals and stateless persons, including the number of cases reviewed that had been found to involve violations. Did the Government have any other mechanism for investigating violations of non-citizens' rights? He also wished to know: how many asylum-seekers entered the country each year; what the total number of asylum-seekers was as of 2022; how many applications had been rejected by the authorities; how the 2017 Refugee Act guaranteed rights for refugees and how it was enforced; how many refugees came to the country each year; what measures had been taken to protect people from statelessness, including through the statelessness determination procedure and the removal of obstacles to birth registration; and what measures were being taken to ensure that non-citizens had equal access to education, employment, housing and health services.

17. He also wondered: what measures were in place to promote human rights education and to combat racial discrimination in all school and university curricula and in teacher

training courses, as well as to raise awareness of the importance of cultural diversity, tolerance and inter-ethnic understanding; how the law enforcement sector had been promoting cultural diversity and combating racial discrimination; whether specialized training programmes or protocols existed to ensure law enforcement officials were adequately equipped to handle diverse communities sensitively; and whether the State was taking any measures to observe the International Decade for People of African Descent.

18. **Ms. Misnad** said that less than 40 per cent of girls entered higher education and that the rate was lower than in other countries in the region. Furthermore, women from ethnic minorities experienced double discrimination and faced barriers such as the perception that they were not truly Turkmen and the imposition of dress restrictions. She wished to know why most schools teaching minority languages had been closed and why religious education was restricted, with theology courses reportedly falling under the topic of history and women not being permitted to attend such courses.

19. **Mr. Diaby** said that he would like the delegation to provide more information on the “third generation” test to prove that candidates for civil service roles were of Turkmen origin and on how African migrants and students were perceived and any anti-discrimination measures in place for them. As the death penalty was still in force, he wished to know how many death sentences had been handed down and whether the State party intended to introduce a moratorium on the death penalty. He wondered how minorities were represented in school textbooks, how the legacy of the Soviet Union was reflected and, in relation to tackling statelessness, what the situation was for residual cases following the termination of the agreement with the Russian Federation.

20. **Mr. Amir** asked whether, given that Turkmenistan had good relations with the Russian Federation, the State could intervene in relation to the Russian Federation-Ukraine war and send the message that peace was an absolute necessity.

The meeting was suspended at 10.40 a.m. and resumed at 11 a.m.

21. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the Ombudsman undertook regular visits to correctional facilities. During the reporting period, such visits had included a women’s prison and a juvenile detention centre. Detention facilities also received visits from diplomats. For example, in July 2023, representatives of several European Union countries and the United States of America had visited prisons in Tejen.

22. Mansur Mingelov had been convicted of serious crimes, including drug trafficking, and was serving a prison sentence handed down by a court. None of his rights had been violated and he had been visited more than 40 times by family and friends, most recently in May 2023. He had also received a number of packages while in prison. The matter of granting him a pardon was under consideration by a special pardons commission.

23. The Ministry of Internal Affairs organized regular training courses for law enforcement officials, including police officers, on the prevention of racial discrimination and upholding of the rights enshrined in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Between 2019 and 2022, some 10,000 officers had attended the 1,400 training sessions that had been held.

24. He would look into the allegation that a migrant worker’s jaw had been broken by a police officer in Ashgabat. Police work was risky, and incidents did sometimes occur.

25. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the appointment and dismissal of judges were governed by constitutional provisions and the Courts Act, which also set out the broader legislative framework for their activities. They were appointed by an independent qualification board for a five-year term. The Chair of the Supreme Court submitted proposals to the President on the appointment and dismissal of judges.

26. Judges could be dismissed if they were found to have broken the law or carried out activities that were incompatible with judicial office or sentenced for committing a crime. During the reporting period, no criminal cases had been opened that could have led to the dismissal of a judge, but 192 judges had faced disciplinary action between 2018 and 2022. Judges could be released from duty early for health reasons, apply for a transfer or leave their post for personal reasons. Upon reaching the pension age of 62 years, they could opt to

continue in post until completion of their term. Consideration was being given to the possibility of appointing judges with security of tenure.

27. The State guaranteed the independence of judges under all circumstances. Interfering in the work of the courts, making threats against judges or other judicial officers and failing to respect court proceedings were considered to be criminal offences and, if such activities also involved abuse of office, that was considered to be an aggravating factor. Acts such as contempt of court could result in administrative proceedings. Fewer than 20 persons had been prosecuted for that offence in 2022 and more than 30 so far in 2023.

28. The Ethics and Official Conduct of Public Servants Act was used to combat corruption among judges. Public officials were prohibited from using language that was discriminatory on grounds including ethnicity, origin, race, language and religion. The first Conference of Judges in Turkmenistan, which had been held in 2019, had introduced the Code of Judicial Ethics. It set out requirements that included maintaining high standards of behaviour in order to protect the credibility of the legal system and respecting cultural differences. Over the past five years, no complaints relating to racial discrimination by judges had been lodged.

29. The Ministry of Justice currently had 32 employees belonging to ethnic minorities in positions that required a law degree; 23 persons belonging to ethnic minorities were employed as lawyers; and ethnic minorities were also represented in the police.

30. The Criminal Code provided that violations of equality on the basis of ethnicity, incitement to racial hatred, spreading of propaganda advocating war or religious hatred and, as of January 2023, hatred based on birth, race or national origin, were all crimes. The Code of Criminal Procedure specified that the provisions of the Convention could be applied directly and the Code of Administrative Offences set out responsibilities relating to the direct or indirect violation of citizens' or non-citizens' rights on grounds including nationality, race, place of residence and religion. Seeking to violate or restrict citizens' rights by promoting war or national, racial or religious hostility, setting up political parties founded on national or racial grounds and participating in their activities were all offences. No cases had been considered for such violations in recent years.

31. Twice a month, various ministries, the Supreme Court, the Procurator General and lawyers received citizens for consultations, providing them with free legal advice. On average, more than 1,000 people had been assisted in that way each year between 2019 and 2021. Turkmen, foreign citizens and stateless persons all had the right to appeal to the courts in the event of material or moral harm, irrespective of race, ethnicity, sex or origin.

32. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that a fifth of members of voluntary associations and registered religious organizations belonged to ethnic minorities. He was not aware of any cases of intimidation of members of religious organizations. However, unregistered religious organizations were banned in Turkmenistan and, given the country's geographical location, the competent authorities carried out awareness-raising work and preventive actions to safeguard public security and prevent acts of radicalism, terrorism or extremism.

33. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that one of the priorities of the 2021–2025 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework was to improve and expand the provision of human rights education in the country. The Institute for State, Law and Democracy was currently implementing a joint project with the United Nations Development Programme designed to enhance the protection, promotion and realization of human rights in accordance with the country's international obligations and to raise awareness of the subject among government and law enforcement officials, judges, lawyers, students and schoolchildren. As part of efforts to implement the National Plan of Action on Human Rights for the period 2021–2025, the project had involved setting up a special working group which, with input from representatives of all levels of the education system and international experts, was now designing the country's first course for schoolchildren focusing specifically on human rights. The road map for the action plan was expected to be finalized by October 2023 and would pave the way for human rights education to be incorporated into educational curricula from primary through to tertiary level. Academics and government officials would also receive training on the subject. Ensuring a comprehensive approach and promoting intersectoral participation was a time-consuming

process but it was hoped that human rights courses would be introduced at bachelor's and master's degree level by early 2025.

34. Human rights education initiatives also included a course for civil servants on gender-responsive governance that was being developed in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund and manuals for lawyers and judges covering areas including human rights mechanisms. A national team of human rights trainers had been set up and given appropriate training, and international experts frequently visited the country to provide human rights training to specialists in that area. Round tables and workshops on the subject of human rights were held on a regular basis at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

35. Documents containing information about human rights legislation in Turkmenistan and the international treaties it had ratified were published in different formats – including a recent compendium of international legal instruments in force in the country – and made available at public libraries, universities and workshops. The *Democracy and Law* journal was published in Turkmen, English and Russian, and other print publications and television programmes were produced in Russian, which was the lingua franca in much of the region.

36. A national forum to promote the World Programme for Human Rights Education had been held with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to mark Human Rights Day in 2019.

37. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that, under the provisions of the country's legal codes and legislation and on a practical level, non-citizens enjoyed equal rights on an equal footing with Turkmen in all areas of life apart from the right to vote in elections. Domestic laws and codes also contained provisions on the prevention of refoulement and expulsion of asylum-seekers, as well as commitments originating from the country's international obligations to protect stateless persons. There had been no reports of forced expulsion of asylum-seekers from Turkmenistan, and refugees and asylum-seekers could not be expelled for committing administrative offences.

38. Implementation of the Refugees Act would include providing a long-term solution for the country's six remaining mandate refugee families. Turkmenistan would consult with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and provide them with citizenship or define their next place of residence, depending on their wishes. The country had successfully completed all of the actions it had undertaken to end statelessness under the global campaign to end statelessness within a decade. As such, it had simplified the procedure used to define the status of stateless persons, improved the system for registering members of that group and maintaining comprehensive statistics about them, conducted a census and now certified all births in the country, including the children of stateless persons. Electronic birth registration was on the horizon. Turkmenistan now had a register of all stateless persons in the country and intended to provide them with citizenship in 2024, which would bring down the number of stateless persons to zero.

39. All measures provided for by law were implemented in practice. Children were registered at birth and provided with the right to access to education, health care, employment and other opportunities.

40. Family visas were processed within 10 days, within 3 days for expedited requests and within 3 hours for urgent expedited requests.

41. In collaboration with UNHCR and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Migration Service offered financial support to non-nationals for the purpose of acquiring documents relating to their status as non-nationals.

42. Under the Education Act, Turkmen citizens were guaranteed access to quality education throughout their lives irrespective of nationality, colour, sex, origin, property or official status, place of residence, language, religious beliefs, political views, age or state of health. The State provided all school-age children living in Turkmenistan with access to education. As at 2023, 1,407 foreign students of 16 different countries were studying in universities in Turkmenistan and some 56,000 Turkmen students were studying in universities abroad in 62 countries for the 2022/23 academic year.

43. The Language Act provided for the use in Turkmenistan of Turkmen, the official language; Russian, the lingua franca; and the languages of the peoples living in Turkmenistan. Languages were compulsory subjects in educational and professional training programmes. Russian and English were core subjects in all schools in Turkmenistan. In the 2022/23 academic year, 1,883 schools offered instruction in Turkmen, Russian, Turkish and, for some subjects, English. A total of 7,302 schools offered instruction in Russian only and 131 schools specialized in foreign languages. Teaching at the International University of the Humanities was delivered in English. In some schools, lessons were given in Turkmen but representatives of ethnic minorities had the right to use and study their native languages. The lack of schools offering first-language instruction for small ethnic minorities was attributable to difficulties in finding teachers and teaching materials, economic viability and other factors. Learning activities outside the classroom were not prohibited, but rather subject to licensing by the Ministry of Education. Since the country had gained independence, there had been no requests for the introduction of training courses in any of the ethnic minority languages. A total of 17,433 members of ethnic minorities worked in the education system.

44. It was not true that limits were imposed on access to the Internet in Turkmenistan. Access to the Internet was available to all users across the country. The cost of unlimited home Internet access varied, depending on connection speed, from 150 to 280 manat. Internet set-up costs continued to fall, which was contributing to the increase in the number of users. High-speed Internet access was available to legal entities and educational institutions at a reasonable price. Online tools for remote work were widely used. Internet Protocol television was available in Turkmenistan, providing high-quality news and entertainment content to a wide audience through online platforms. The number of social media platform users was increasing.

45. Turkmenistan continued to work with international organizations on the protection of human rights. Representatives of such organizations were in direct contact with and invited to the meetings of the Interdepartmental Commission on Compliance with the International Obligations Undertaken by Turkmenistan in the Field of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law. In addition, the Commission met annually with such representatives to organize joint events, a number of which had been planned for 2023. The Government had shown support for the increased representation of international organizations in Turkmenistan by, for instance, suggesting that the International Labour Office should open an office in the country. The Government also supported efforts to raise awareness about human rights among young people. National and international experts had given lectures and seminars to children and university students in 2023 on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2021, the Ministry of Education signed a memorandum of understanding with the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for cooperation on matters relating to linguistic and cultural diversity in Turkmenistan. Under that memorandum, the High Commissioner provided support to the Ministry in developing and promoting programmes on first-language instruction, developing learning materials and encouraging the participation of educational body representatives, national education specialists and teachers in relevant events. Lastly, the Government was currently considering the possibility of declaring that it recognized the competence of the Committee to receive and consider communications under article 14 of the Convention.

46. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that legal proceedings were conducted in Turkmen and that parties to legal proceedings who did not speak Turkmen were entitled to the services of an interpreter to understand the facts of the case and had the right to speak in court in their native language. Under the Political Parties Act and the Voluntary Associations Act, citizens had the right to establish voluntary associations through which they could freely express their political will, participate in votes and referendums and represent the interests of citizens in national and local Government bodies. The Political Parties Act did not impose limitations on the rights of ethnic minorities.

47. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that Turkmenistan had become the first State in Central Asia to abolish the death penalty in December 1999. His country intended to put forward a proposal for the drafting of a regional treaty on the abolition of the death penalty

in Central Asia and Mongolia to make the region the first in the world to have abolished the death penalty.

48. Following the ILO high-level missions to Turkmenistan in September and November 2022, a road map for ILO-Turkmenistan cooperation in 2023 had been finalized. That road map included action to monitor and examine recruitment practices for the cotton harvest and improve labour inspection standards. Migrant workers had not been mobilized for forced labour in the cotton harvest.

49. Data showed that existing labour and employment supervision bodies were effective: in 2021, more than 3,600 natural or legal persons had been found to have violated labour legislation; and that number had dropped to 2,600 for 2022. Violations of labour legislation in connected with forced labour were punishable under article 306 of the Code of Administrative Offences.

50. As to his Government's engagement with the special procedures of the Human Rights Council, he said that arrangements were currently being discussed for a visit to Turkmenistan by the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights.

51. **Mr. Hajiye**v said that ethnic minorities in Turkmenistan were not prevented from using or enjoying access to their native languages, including online. Russian served as a helpful means of communication in the post-Soviet space and its use was optional, not mandatory.

52. As to education for Afghan nationals, 46 were currently studying in universities in Turkmenistan and more than 300 had graduated over the previous 15 years, chiefly with degrees in electrical engineering, petroleum engineering and teaching. Upon arrival in Turkmenistan, Afghan nationals took a year-long Turkmen language course before beginning university courses, which were taught in Turkmen and English.

53. Under national law governing religion, citizens were fully entitled to practise their religious beliefs. Members of unregistered religions organizations were entitled to do so at home and in other private spaces.

54. Regarding Mr. Mingelov, the self-proclaimed human rights defender, he wished to recall that his most recent conviction had been for trafficking in a significant quantity of drugs.

55. In response to the allegations raised that access to foreign news online had been blocked, he said that Internet Protocol television was a service that was available in Turkmenistan and provided access to foreign news channels in many languages.

56. The Committee had wrongly associated the resettlement of Uzbek persons to desert regions in 2003 with the coup attempt the year before. He wished to clarify that an agreement had been signed in 2000 by Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on the delimitation of the boundary between the two countries. The subsequent demarcation required both sides to establish a special area along the border. The fact that people from the ethnic Uzbek community there had been resettled at that time was not connected with the failed coup.

57. More work was yet to be done to provide alternatives to military service. Currently, Jehovah's Witnesses were the only persons to insist on alternatives. After being granted a postponement of military service, some went abroad and others were provided with opportunities to serve in non-military bodies in Turkmenistan, such as the Migration Service.

58. Turkmen citizens residing abroad, who currently numbered some 200,000, were entitled to return to Turkmenistan to renew their passports before returning abroad. That entitlement was valid under a special regulation that was introduced following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and would expire at the end of 2023.

59. As to the request submitted by his Government to the Government of Turkey to abolish the visa exemption regulation for Turkmen nationals, that had been done with the aim of regularizing labour migration. Under that regulation, Turkmen nationals had been subjected to poor labour conditions in Türkiye. Now, Turkish employers were obliged to meet the visa requirements and, accordingly, respect Turkmen nationals' labour rights.

60. Regarding the situation of domestic migrant workers, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Migration Service had drawn up rules requiring employers to respect the rights of workers hired from other provinces. Employers were obliged to provide domestic migrant workers with accommodation and to pay their salaries and social benefits. Such workers must be temporarily registered upon arrival with the provincial authorities so that law enforcement and the Ministry of Internal Affairs could monitor the realization of their rights and uphold occupational safety standards.

61. On the subject of religious education, the country had seven madrasas which, to his knowledge, did not impose restrictions on girls – boys and girls alike could study there. The requirement by universities for male and female students to wear uniforms was no different from the practice in many other countries, and did not violate the right of members of ethnic minorities to wear traditional dress. The dress code applied only to study time, and students could wear what they pleased at home or in the street.

62. Candidates for civil service posts did not have to prove their Turkmen origin in order to be recruited. There was, however, a list of documents that they were required to provide. For historical and geographical reasons, no persons of African descent were currently living in Turkmenistan.

63. **Ms. Chung** said that she would be interested to know whether parents who were stateless or had irregular migration status and who wished to register the birth of a child would be able to do so without risking deportation. It would be useful to know whether any assistance was provided to individuals who were unaware of the birth registration procedures, and how Turkmen nationals residing abroad could register the births of their children.

64. Given that, according to statistics provided by the State party, Uzbeks accounted for more than a tenth of the population, she would be grateful for information on access to education for minorities. She would be interested to know the reasons for the low representation of members of ethnic minorities in the judicial system and law enforcement agencies, and why there were no judges belonging to ethnic minorities.

65. **Mr. Hajiyeu** (Turkmenistan) said that there had been no cases of stateless persons or non-citizens being deported after registering their children in Turkmenistan. As had been stated previously, non-citizens were equal before the law and had the same rights as citizens of Turkmenistan. Parents who wished to register a child born in another country had to provide a birth certificate or hospital records, together with their passports, to the competent authorities in Turkmenistan, who would then register the child and issue a birth certificate.

66. Turkmen and Uzbeks shared a common history and spoke similar languages. Most Uzbeks in Turkmenistan lived in the northern and eastern provinces. The Turkmen education system was well suited to Uzbek students, while over 7,000 Turkmen citizens, mostly of Uzbek ethnicity, were studying in Uzbekistan.

67. **Mr. Diaby** said that he was curious to know how the Afghan, Russian, Uzbek and other minorities were portrayed in school textbooks.

68. **Mr. Hajiyeu** (Turkmenistan) said that written information on the number of non-citizens enrolled in education would be provided to the Committee following the meeting. School textbooks were available in Turkmen, Russian and English.

69. **Mr. Guissé** said that the Committee would appreciate clarification regarding the identity of the refugees on the State party's territory. Recalling that there had been a large outflow of refugees from Afghanistan following the fall of its Government in 2021, he wondered why only six Afghan families were registered in Turkmenistan.

70. **Mr. Hajiyeu** (Turkmenistan) said that the only refugees in Turkmenistan were the six families who had arrived in the country in the 1990s and had remained there, while other refugees had departed for other countries. In 2014 and 2015, following an outbreak of hostilities in Afghanistan, Turkmenistan had granted asylum to about 150 Afghan nationals, who had subsequently returned to their homeland following an improvement in the situation. There had been no new influx of refugees from Afghanistan.

71. **Mr. Yeung Sik Yuen** said that he wished to know whether any Supreme Court judges, having served a five-year term, had been reappointed for a further five years. He would be

interested to know whether provincial, district and city court judges were also limited to five-year terms.

72. **Ms. Chung** said that the Committee would appreciate additional information on the mandate of the Ombudsman to visit detention facilities, including the maximum security Ovadan Depe prison. She wondered whether the State party planned to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

73. **Mr. Hajiye**v (Turkmenistan) said that all judges, including Supreme Court, provincial court and district court judges, were appointed for a five-year term and could be reappointed for subsequent terms. In order to visit a correctional facility, the Ombudsman first had to submit a request to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The visit would then be organized based on the Ministry's schedule and that of the facility in question. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had raised the possibility of a visit to Ovadan Depe prison with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and he believed that such a visit would be organized soon.

74. **Ms. Chung** said that the dialogue had been fruitful, although not all questions had been answered. The Committee would be grateful if the delegation could provide additional information in writing, including up-to-date statistics.

75. **Mr. Guissé** said that it was unfortunate that the Committee had been unable to hold a dialogue with NGOs. The Committee's usual practice was to compare information received from NGOs with that received from States parties and international organizations. In so doing, the Committee gained a comprehensive overview, which informed its recommendations and ultimately benefited the State party concerned.

76. **The Chair** said that the United Nations asked all Member States to observe International Decade for People of African Descent, regardless of whether people of African descent lived in their territory. The idea of the Decade was to raise awareness about anti-black racism and the harmfulness of racial discrimination and to educate people about the need for tolerance and understanding. The State party should be vigilant in its efforts to combat not only direct discrimination, but also indirect and structural discrimination.

77. **Mr. Hajiye**v (Turkmenistan) said that he was grateful to the Committee for an open, constructive and frank dialogue. His Government attached great importance to cooperation with the United Nations and its specialized agencies, which it recognized as strategic partners. Upon returning to Ashgabat, the delegation would conduct a detailed analysis of the Committee's questions and recommendations, and would submit proposals on their implementation to the Interdepartmental Commission on Compliance with the International Obligations Undertaken by Turkmenistan in the Field of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law.

78. **The Chair** had rightly drawn attention to the need for education on racial discrimination. In that regard, the Government would certainly implement the relevant provisions of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Although no people of African descent lived in Turkmenistan, tolerance of people of different colours, races and religions was very high.

79. Regarding the prospect of bringing peace to Ukraine, he said that, while Turkmenistan had declared itself a neutral State in 1995, that did not mean that it considered itself immune from the problems of other countries. In the past, Turkmenistan had hosted talks and negotiations with parties to the conflicts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, which had yielded peace agreements. The Government's policy was to promote peace both in the country and in the wider region, and to strike a balance between the interests of the major actors.

80. Turkmenistan provided Ukraine with regular humanitarian assistance, which was particularly targeted at children. Ukrainian companies had been awarded additional contracts to carry out projects in Turkmenistan. The Government was troubled by the situation and had conveyed to both Ukraine and the Russian Federation its view that they should make peace as soon as possible. Unlike some of its neighbours, Turkmenistan had not been involved in scandals linked to the re-export of certain products.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.