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- Chair:* Mr. Marschik (Austria)
- later:* Mr. Grünwald (Vice-Chair) (Slovakia)
- later:* Mr. Marschik (Chair) (Austria)

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

Agenda item 67: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/78/137, A/78/214, A/78/247, A/78/284 and A/78/366)

1. **Ms. Skelton** (Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child) said that the Committee remained seriously concerned about the continued high rates of poverty, inequality and social exclusion affecting children around the world. The Sustainable Development Goals Summit in September 2023 had shown that children were being left behind in many areas of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Nevertheless, the Convention on the Rights of the Child offered a way to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for all children.

2. The Committee welcomed the finalization of the guidance note of the Secretary-General on child rights mainstreaming and had established a working group to work with entities across and beyond the United Nations to push forward on the opportunity that the guidance note offered. As a child from Lebanon had emphasized in a recent consultation with the Committee, it was necessary to create spaces for conversations between young people and Governments.

3. Ratification of the three optional protocols to the Convention had been slow, with only three new ratifications in the past year. The Committee called for universal ratification and implementation of the Convention and its optional protocols to ensure that all children's rights were upheld. The Committee urged States to ratify the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure, especially as the tenth anniversary of its entry into force of approached, to ensure that children had access to justice and remedies for rights violations.

4. The Committee had reviewed the reports of 22 States parties in 2023, bringing the number of reports in the backlog to 67 pending consideration. During its ninety-second session, the Committee had adopted a decision to apply the simplified reporting procedure as the standard reporting procedure for periodic reports under the Convention. The decision would be implemented as of 1 January 2024, and nine States had decided to opt out. To address slow reporting, the Committee had also adopted a decision to apply the simplified reporting procedure as the standard for initial reports submitted under the optional protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. In 2023, the Committee had adopted 22 decisions under the Optional Protocol on a

communications procedure, finding a violation of the Convention in 6 of them. The Committee was working on four inquiries and, although it welcomed improved cooperation with the States under inquiry, reiterated its appeal to States parties to provide specific funding for the effective operation of the inquiry procedure.

5. During its ninety-fourth session, the Committee had launched its general comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change which had been motivated by children's efforts to draw attention to environmental crises. More than 16,000 children from 121 countries had contributed to the development of the general comment, and there had also been more than 170 written submissions from other stakeholders, such as States and United Nations entities. In the general comment, the Committee highlighted the right of children to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, which was embedded in the Convention, and called on decision makers to recognize the contributions of child human rights defenders to human rights and environmental protection and to involve children proactively and meaningfully in all environmental decision-making processes. The Committee invited all stakeholders to contribute to disseminating the general comment and to ensure its effective implementation. As a first step of implementation, the Committee had created a new cluster on children's rights and the environment to be used in dialogues with States parties and the Committee's concluding observations.

6. During the ninety-fourth session, the Committee had also adopted a statement on article 5 of the Convention, to clarify the concepts of parental guidance in respect of the exercise of children's rights and evolving capacities of the child. The Committee had continued interaction with entities within and outside the United Nations and had held an event in September 2023 on the first anniversary of the joint statement on illegal intercountry adoptions.

7. During the ninety-third session, in order to assess proposals for treaty body strengthening, the Committee had undertaken a pilot project to review Sao Tome and Principe in a back-to-back review with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Another back-to-back review would be held in May 2024. At the thirty-fifth meeting of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies in June 2023, the Chairs had concluded that they wished to facilitate greater participation of stakeholders, including children. While progress had been made on treaty body strengthening, the system would not work optimally without the financial, technical and human resources required to undertake current mandates, to have additional meeting

time to address backlogs and to support effective implementation of planned reforms. Member States had a particular role to play in securing the necessary financial resources.

8. **Ms. Mudrenko** (Ukraine) said that, due to Russian aggression against Ukraine, millions of children had been deprived of their right to grow up in a safe and healthy environment. Since February 2022, at least 1,633 children had been killed or injured, and more than half of the estimated 7.5 million children in Ukraine had been displaced, separated from their families and put at risk of physical or sexual violence.

9. Since 2014, Russia had pursued a policy of the forcible abduction and indoctrination of Ukrainian children in the temporarily occupied areas of the country. The affected children were illegally given up for adoption and exposed to so-called re-education, which was nothing more than an aggressive attempt at brainwashing, designed to erase their Ukrainian identities and prepare obedient soldiers for the Russian army. She asked how the Committee could help to address the issue and facilitate the timely and safe return for all Ukrainian children who were currently being unlawfully held by Russia. It was the common duty of Member States to prevent and respond to violence against children in all settings and create conditions from them to grow up free from violence.

10. **Ms. Schuller** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer) said that the meaningful participation of children in the work of the United Nations was a priority for the European Union. Its member States welcomed the high level of child participation in the development of general comment No. 26 (2023); the collection of contributions from 16,000 children, in particular, was an important achievement. The report of the Secretary-General on the Status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (A/78/366) had highlighted the usefulness of digital technologies in fostering children's participation at the local, national and international levels. She wondered what digital methods had been used by the Committee to increase children's participation.

11. The guidance note of the Secretary-General on child rights mainstreaming highlighted that the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration in all decisions and actions likely to affect them. The United Nations should therefore include the best interests of the child in all system-wide initiatives and internal operations. She wished to know how the Committee incorporated into its working methods the call of the Secretary-General for child rights impact

assessments and evaluations to be conducted continuously.

12. **Mr. Reza Bautista** (Mexico) said that general comment No. 26 (2023) had shown the need to tackle challenges such as climate change and to include children in decisions that would impact their future. He wished to know what specific strategies the Committee proposed for promoting the effective integration of children's participation in the development of national and local policies relating to the environment.

13. **Ms. Wagner** (Switzerland) said that her country welcomed the contributions of children during the development of general comment No. 26 (2023). She wondered how the Committee envisaged the tangible implementation of the recommendations contained in the guidance note on child rights mainstreaming for strengthening a child rights-based approach to all actions within the United Nations. She also wished to know how the effective, active and meaningful participation of young people in environmental forums and decision-making within the United Nations could be coordinated in practice, particularly given the role of the new United Nations Youth Office in contributing to participatory and decision-making processes.

14. **Ms. Monica** (Bangladesh) said that Bangladesh had been one of the first countries to ratify the Convention and two of its Optional Protocols, and its national legislation provided for a number of institutional mechanisms for the promotion and protection of children's rights. The Government was working with the National Human Rights Commission to establish a separate child rights commission and taking legal, administrative and policy measures to eliminate child labour and violence against children and to promote and protect child rights and welfare.

15. Despite her country's strong and regular engagement with the Committee, the reporting cycle had been disrupted for Bangladesh due to factors beyond its control, such as the influx of over 1 million Rohingya persons from Myanmar and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. She wished to know what the Committee could do to support States parties, particularly those with capacity constraints, to overcome such challenges. She also wondered what the Committee could do to ensure that child rights were protected across all three pillars of the United Nations, in line with the guiding principles of the guidance note on child rights mainstreaming, particularly in the context of the upcoming Summit of the Future.

16. **Mr. La Haozhao** (China) said that, with one of the largest populations of children in the world, at some 298 million, China attached great importance to children's

rights and was taking measures to implement the Convention and the 2030 Agenda. His country highly valued international cooperation in the protection of children's rights and, earlier in 2023, had submitted its combined fifth and sixth periodic reports to the Committee. China looked forward to using the constructive dialogue with the Committee and other mechanisms to strengthen its international cooperation. Each State party bore the main responsibility for ensuring the protection of children's rights in its territory in line with its national situation. China called on the only country which had not yet ratified the Convention to do so and to take greater steps to promote and protect children's rights.

17. **Mr. Seguirá Aragón** (El Salvador) said that the protection of children's rights largely determined children's futures and, therefore, the sustainable development of populations. El Salvador had undertaken an unprecedented reform of its legislation, public policies and interinstitutional frameworks so as to fully protect children in the country, and, under a comprehensive reform of education that had taken place since 2022, had implemented a programme to close the digital divide and facilitate access to technology and the Internet for all students in the public education system.

18. In digital settings, children faced different forms of violence, such as cyberbullying and sexual abuse. His country had therefore enacted a special law against computer and related crimes, which included a specific section on the protection of children. He wished to know how States could guarantee that children's rights, such as the rights to privacy, safety and technological access, were protected in a digital world, and what role Governments, parents and technology companies played in that regard.

19. **Mr. Mohamed** (Egypt) said that, in cooperation with civil society organizations, his Government had recently launched an initiative to empower Egyptian children and to strengthen their skills and capacities through collective and voluntary work. A similar initiative was designed specifically to empower Egyptian girls. Technology could play a positive role in developing children's skills and advancing their education, and international cooperation was essential for providing the best technological means to support children, particularly in developing countries, to ensure that they could benefit from scientific advancements. He wished to know how international cooperation could be strengthened in that regard.

20. The report of the Secretary-General on the Status of the Convention of the Rights of the Child ([A/78/366](#)) contained recommendations regarding the creation of

new characteristics in data collection that went beyond States parties' obligations under the Convention. It was important to adhere to definitions set out in the Convention that had been agreed upon.

21. **Mr. Aryal** (Nepal) said that, under the Constitution of Nepal, children's rights were fundamental rights and children's holistic development was guaranteed by ensuring their safety, protection and participation. Nepal was committed to upholding children's rights to health, well-being, education and development, including through its legislation and development plans and policies. A national child rights council provided policy advice and capacity-building programmes and helped to rescue, protect and manage child victims of violence through a child helpline and missing child response services. A long-term national strategy for early childhood development aimed to produce competent and skilled persons by ensuring the holistic development of children. He wished to know how the Committee could collaborate with Member States and relevant international stakeholders to guarantee the rights of children in the context of climate change.

22. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that article 44 of the Convention required States parties to submit periodic reports every five years, so that the Committee could review progress in fulfilling their obligations under the Convention. However, States which complied with that requirement were held hostage by the slow pace of work of the Committee and, after submitting a report on time, were forced to wait for up to four years for the Committee to consider it, by which time the information provided was outdated. Although the simplified reporting procedure might help to reduce the serious backlog of State party reports pending consideration by the Committee, his Government considered that the main reason for delays were excessive activities that went beyond the Committee's mandate, such as the issuance of general comments. The Russian Federation did not consider that work on general comment No. 26 (2023), which had begun in early 2020, had been a rational allocation of time and requested the Committee to devote more attention to its core task.

23. The Committee's calls for the active and independent participation of children in decision-making was a distortion of the provisions of the Convention. Under article 12, the right of a child to express his or her views in accordance with his or her age or maturity and to be heard in judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child was guaranteed, but not universally. Article 5 on the guidance role of parents and legal guardians in the

exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the Convention was also important in that connection. The Russian Federation called on the Committee to be more balanced and to avoid arbitrary interpretations of the provisions of its founding instrument.

24. *Mr. Grünwald (Slovakia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

25. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) asked what measures were taken by the Committee to facilitate the participation of children in its interactive dialogues with States parties and how such participation could be strengthened. Were there any human or technological resources that could allow those dialogues to be held in language understood by children?

26. **Mr. Van Schalkwyk** (South Africa) said that the impact of digital technology on children and the protection and fulfilment of their rights and fundamental freedoms could not be overestimated. Children now accounted for one third of Internet users worldwide and used online platforms and digital tools to access education, communicate and express their concerns about children's rights and issues. However, South Africa was concerned that the digital environment could expose children to various forms of violence.

27. He wondered how States could ensure that children had meaningful access to digital technologies to support the realization of their civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights while also ensuring that threats of harm and danger were curtailed. He also wished to know how the ability to do so was affected by the inequality of access to digital technologies experienced by children and young people in developing countries.

28. **Ms. Skelton** (Chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child) said that Ukraine had recently reported to the Committee and that the issue of facilitating the return of children to Ukraine had been discussed.

29. An increase in children's participation was part of the digital uplift that the Committee hoped to see in the near future. Treaty body meetings that were fully online or had an online component lasting longer than 30 minutes received only two hours of interpretation, rather than the usual three, resulting in reduced meeting time. The Committee therefore usually met with children in person for an hour before ordinary meetings began, so as to give children the time and space they needed to talk. The Committee would welcome any solutions for how to give the same time and space to children who would be unable to travel to Geneva and could only meet with the Committee online, such as children from

disadvantaged communities or developing countries. The Committee asked States parties questions related to child rights impact assessments and engaged with children as much as possible in its own work, within the restrictions that applied to the treaty body system.

30. The involvement of children in policy decisions related to the environment would be most effective at the national and local levels. For example, city planning would be greatly enhanced by engaging with children about safe places to play and safe ways to travel. Children could also be consulted on more complex and higher-level decision-making through civil society partners working with children. A child rights-based approach to such participation would include consideration of the impact of decision-making on children.

31. States parties which had experienced disruptions to their reporting schedules could coordinate directly with the secretariat of the Committee and could receive assistance from a capacity-building unit within the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The simplified reporting procedure would also help in that regard. The Summit of the Future would be an opportunity to advance issues, such as digital technologies and the environment, that the Committee had been addressing.

32. In general comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, the Committee described how children's rights could be protected in a way that balanced the roles played by Governments, parents and businesses; it could also be a valuable resource for Member States working on the resolution on the rights of the child and the digital environment. The general comment provided solutions for how to ensure both access to the Internet and adequate protection for children. Regulation was required, but it was also important to maintain discussions on how international cooperation could ensure improved Internet access for children globally.

33. The Committee asked States parties questions on the strengthening of international cooperation in relation to the empowerment of children, particularly girls. The interactive dialogues held with States parties through the treaty body reporting process were already useful in ensuring that children's rights were clearly understood, and the treaty body strengthening process would help to alleviate current constraints and backlogs.

34. States parties usually had to wait two years to have their periodic reports reviewed, rather than four years as the representative of the Russian Federation had stated, but the backlog was nevertheless a concern to the Committee. The simplified reporting procedure and the

treaty body reform process would help in that regard, and some extra meeting time might be required. However, States were in a strong position to make the budgetary commitments needed to resolve some of the challenges faced by the treaty bodies. The Committee had a mandate to issue general comments under article 45 of the Convention. It had previously held separate days of discussion for the development of general comments but had streamlined its work, and general days of discussion were now used for that development.

35. **Ms. Singhateh** (Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children), introducing her report (A/78/137), said that huge strides had been made to protect children within the travel and tourism sector, notwithstanding the fact that their vulnerability continued to grow alongside the continuing expansion of the sector. In the past 30 years, global travel and tourism had more than doubled, and there had been an unprecedented growth in technological advancements and new forms of tourism and travel products, such as voluntourism, which put children at risk of exploitation. The global growth of the travel sector had outpaced response efforts at the national and international levels, leaving child protection regulations lagging behind.

36. Voluntourism – short for volunteer tourism – was a form of tourism in which travellers participated in voluntary work, usually for charity, and which revolved around products offered through travel and tourism markets as an alternative to mass tourism, usually for unskilled volunteers, with no supervision and no criminal background checks required. In that context, her report highlighted the prevalence, characteristics and adverse effects of voluntourism by underscoring that, while the concept of volunteering was premised on noble intentions, the exploitation and sexual abuse of children within that sector was well acknowledged. Children were increasingly vulnerable, particularly in settings where legal protection was weak and child protection systems were inadequate or had loopholes. As child safeguarding measures varied significantly across volunteer sending and receiving countries, gaps arose with respect to the applicability of such measures, thereby making children vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse.

37. Over the past decade, the adverse effects of voluntourism had been recorded as a recurrent problem across several countries, especially in the global South. The phenomenon had outpaced response efforts at the national, regional and international levels, with gaps in legal frameworks, the transnational nature of the issue and the lack of capacity, data and information presenting some of the many challenges. Nevertheless, various

stakeholders had taken steps to address the exploitation and sexual abuse of children in the context of voluntourism, including through the formulation, strengthening and implementation of child safeguarding standards, the scaling-up of awareness-raising and information-sharing, the development of guidelines, the coordination of multi-stakeholder programmes, and the vetting and conduct of background checks of volunteers. Additional good practices included the development of a robust database to collect information on voluntourism, the empowerment of communities, investment in capacity-building and ensuring sustainable child support.

38. In her report, she recommended that States and other stakeholders demonstrate a strong political commitment by funding and applying comprehensive legal standards and frameworks to prevent and combat the exploitation and sexual abuse of children through voluntourism. Furthermore, Governments should put in place measures that prohibited the use of unskilled and untrained volunteers in childcare institutions and facilities; regulate the private sector within the travel and tourism industry to ensure compliance with business and child rights obligations; apply the “do no harm” principle to all policy-making and actions; and penalize such entities as agencies, tour operators and tourism companies that provided voluntourism services for profit without putting in place requirements for the screening and vetting of volunteers. In addition, Governments working with other stakeholders could promote alternative solutions that provided meaningful support to children, strive for the deinstitutionalization of children and provide services that would prevent the separation of children from their parents or families.

39. To effectively meet the targets under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Governments working with businesses and other stakeholders must ensure that the business and human rights principles of “protect, respect and remedy” were at the heart of any business activities. Those principles must serve as a benchmark for all stakeholders to tackle and respond to the exploitation and sexual abuse of children within the tourism and travel industry. Furthermore, Governments must take steps to regulate and monitor how funding for childcare institutions was sourced and received so as to better protect children and their families from exploitation.

40. **Ms. Keller** (United States of America) said that her delegation shared the concern of the Special Rapporteur regarding the sale and exploitation of children. All Member States should adopt multidisciplinary approaches that prioritized the safety, health and well-being of survivors and held perpetrators

accountable. Moreover, they should consider policy changes aimed at protecting the next generation and addressing the systemic root causes of the sale and sexual exploitation of children. In that regard, she asked what best practices could be implemented by Member States to combat voluntourism's role in the sale and sexual exploitation of children.

41. **Ms. Guevarra-de Dios** (Philippines) asked which specific avenues for increased cooperation and support the Special Rapporteur would recommend so as to enhance collaboration to combat the sale and sexual exploitation of children. While the concept of voluntourism was grounded in noble intentions, it was crucial to acknowledge and address its negative impact on child protection. The Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency was responsible for promoting and coordinating volunteer programmes and services in her country and played a pivotal role in maintaining a comprehensive database on all local volunteers. It was important that volunteers were qualified and trained to do no harm and to uphold the best interests of the child. In that context, Member States must work collectively to bridge the gaps in safeguarding measures, strengthen legal protections and reinforce child protection systems worldwide.

42. **Ms. Carmeli** (Israel), speaking as a youth delegate, said that her country attached great importance to preventing and eliminating all forms of sale and sexual exploitation, especially in relation to volunteering, both nationally and abroad. Moreover, Israel was strongly committed to the report's recommendation to formulate and put in place measures that provided rehabilitation support to child victims both in the short and long term. In that regard, she asked what steps should be taken beyond legislation to prevent sexual abuse in voluntourism. She also asked how Member States should educate future generations to ensure the elimination of sexual abuse in all its forms, especially of children.

43. **Ms. Monica** (Bangladesh) said that it was alarming that children were increasingly falling victim to sale, trafficking and sexual exploitation worldwide, especially in the context of travel, tourism and voluntourism. In addition to the recommendations in the report, it was important to shine a spotlight on the root causes of exploitation and abuse in the travel and tourism sector and to redouble efforts to address them. In most cases, the victims of such abuse came from underprivileged segments of society. She wished to know how the Office of the Special Rapporteur was planning to engage with Member States in order to increase the use at the national level of the Code of Conduct for the Protection of Children from Sexual

Exploitation in Travel and Tourism. Moreover, she asked what steps could be taken to enhance collaboration between business entities, civil society organizations, the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and State mechanisms to prevent marginalized children from falling victim to sexual exploitation and to provide assistance to victims and survivors.

44. **Ms. Banaken Elel** (Cameroon) said that her Government attached the utmost importance to combating all forms of child exploitation and abuse, including paedophilia and child pornography. To that end, it was essential to identify the root cause of the phenomenon, which, for Cameroon, was family poverty. She asked what measures donor countries could take to ensure that their development aid was not used directly or indirectly to violate human rights and exploit children, especially when such aid was not delivered through government channels.

45. In Cameroon, the primary responsibility for educating and protecting children lay with the family, which must be protected and supported by public policies to enable it to provide a framework conducive to the development of the child. Her country therefore welcomed the recommendation to promote alternatives to voluntourism, including support for the deinstitutionalization of children and the provision of services for family care and family-based services that prevented separation. In that connection, she asked the Special Rapporteur to give examples of family-based services that could help combat the exploitation and abuse of children in general, and some good practices in the context of voluntourism in particular.

46. **Ms. Keogh** (European Union) asked for some examples of ethical and culturally appropriate alternatives to voluntourism, and whether the Special Rapporteur had encountered good examples of child engagement in the development of tourism and volunteering programmes.

47. It was alarming that unregulated and unmonitored volunteering exposed children to the risk of exploitation, and that regulations at all levels did not adequately protect children from harm in the context of travel and tourism. Both the public and private sectors were responsible for the existing gaps in effective implementation of international frameworks on ethical tourism. Efforts should focus on prevention by improving the screening and vetting of volunteers; enacting and enforcing regulations, early warning and monitoring systems in the tourism sector; ensuring the accountability of perpetrators; providing alternatives to

voluntourism; and offering rehabilitative services for child survivors of abuse and exploitation.

48. **Mr. Mohamed** (Egypt) said that his country's vision for sustainable development included specific targets for eliminating violence against children and such harmful practices as female genital mutilation and child marriage and preventing the exposure of children to extremist ideology. In that regard, Egypt reaffirmed the role of family as the first buffer against attempts to exploit children. More needed to be done to guarantee the protection and promotion of children's rights and to ensure that children were provided a nurturing environment that enabled them to have a prosperous life and fulfil their potential. Quality education must be provided, especially to children in developing countries, in order to promote efforts to end violence against them and to strengthen cooperation in combating smuggling and trafficking in children. Moreover, international cooperation should lead to greater training opportunities and skills development to ensure that children did not fall prey to smuggling and illegal migration.

49. **Ms. Mudrenko** (Ukraine) said that the Russian crimes against Ukrainian children were one of the most horrible markers of its war of aggression, the genocidal nature and brutality of which was horrifying. Prosecutors were currently investigating 13 cases of sexual violence committed by the Russian military against children, the youngest of which had been 4 years old. However, owing to the lack of access to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, that terrifying number was not definitive. The same could be said for the number of Ukrainian children forcibly deported to the Russian Federation, as that country continued to neglect any constructive dialogue with relevant United Nations bodies and international organizations and had refused to provide a comprehensive list of the names and whereabouts of the children. As a signatory to all fundamental international agreements, Ukraine was determined to bolster the protection of children, especially in the face of the severe impact exerted on them by the war of aggression by the Russian Federation. Her delegation would appreciate it if the Special Rapporteur could pay particular attention to that issue.

50. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that his county shared the view that there was a need to introduce requirements at the national level for persons who would be allowed to work with children. In that regard, it was important to highlight the role of the family environment in the full and harmonious development of a child's identity. The Russian Federation supported the introduction of measures aimed at preserving the unity of families and

communities, an important aspect of which was the leading role of parents in the child's exercise of his or her rights. As children could be susceptible to manipulation by unscrupulous volunteers by virtue of their level of intellectual and psychoemotional development, tourism or recreational organizations working with children should be in constant contact with parents.

51. **Ms. Samai** (Algeria) said that the State bore primary responsibility for the protection of children from all forms of mistreatment, exploitation and physical, sexual or psychological harm. In that context, she asked how Member States could balance the need to promote tourism, including voluntourism, and achieve development goals with the need to protect children from mistreatment, especially as the development of the tourism sector could sometimes have harmful consequences for children.

52. **Mr. La Haozhao** (China) said that China placed great importance on the protection of the rights of children and had taken a strong stance against trafficking in children and child sexual exploitation through legislative, administrative and judicial measures. Through continuous efforts, China had further improved its relevant laws and regulations, enhanced interdepartmental coordination mechanisms and strengthened international cooperation.

53. The number of cases related to trafficking in children in China had significantly decreased. China had established a rapid search mechanism for missing children and an information database for combating trafficking in children, as well as an emergency platform for the dissemination of information regarding missing children.

54. Each statistic in the report represented an abuse of the fundamental rights of children. China was ready to continue its efforts, working with the international community to prevent and combat trafficking and sexual offences against children.

55. **Ms. Moutchou** (Morocco) said that, although there were many advantages to voluntary work, it could have harmful and far-reaching consequences for children, including the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation if not regulated and monitored. As mentioned in the report, Morocco had launched an integrated public policy for child protection, which included all key stakeholders in society, including the private sector and civil society, as part of a comprehensive, integrated, inclusive and multidimensional approach that focused on prevention, among other aspects. In that connection, she asked

whether there were other good practices that were worth sharing.

56. **Mr. Altarsha** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, while his delegation did not question the importance of the Special Rapporteur's report, it could not help but notice that the subject of the report was more or less the same as the subject covered by the annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (A/78/214). As the Third Committee had many important issues to address, it should not waste time addressing the same subject twice. Mandate holders should therefore coordinate more closely when choosing the content of their reports.

57. **Ms. Singhateh** (Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children) said that the specific issue of voluntourism had become very relevant since the skies had reopened after the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and tourism was booming again. While it was important to highlight the importance of volunteering as a means of giving back to society, voluntourism involved unregulated, untrained and unskilled volunteers who were provided with an opportunity to serve within communities and who were given unsupervised access to children.

58. In terms of good practice, regulation was key. Laws should be in place to guide and regulate the voluntourism industry and to keep in check businesses that encouraged and received payment from tourists to come into a country and provide services within orphanages or alternative institutions, especially where there was contact with children. Awareness-raising on that subject was also important. With regard to the question concerning avenues of cooperation for combating the sale, sexual abuse and exploitation of children, she said that bilateral cooperation, especially among stakeholders and law enforcement agencies, was one of the best practices that could be considered. The training of frontline workers was also important as they needed to be able to understand the issue, recognize the problem and manage complaint mechanisms when the issue was brought to their attention.

59. With regard to collaboration, it was important for Governments to work with and provide grants and financial support to civil society organizations and especially community-based non-governmental organizations, as they were the ones that were the closest to communities and that recognized the problems that existed. With the proper support, such organizations would be able to effectively conduct activities aimed at preventing sexual abuse and exploitation.

60. Regarding the measures that could be taken, especially by sending countries, to ensure that

volunteers did not violate laws, the report provided a number of examples in which countries vetted and trained volunteers before they were allowed to visit a certain country, which would serve as a deterrent and ensure that children were protected. In that regard, she highlighted the Philippine National Volunteer Service Coordinating Agency, which supervised and coordinated volunteer services where volunteers would be conducting activities in other countries.

61. When addressing sexual abuse and exploitation in any context, political will was key. In addition to adopting relevant laws, Governments had to allocate adequate financial resources to fund the implementation of those laws, as well as the training of law enforcement officers and community training. All Member States must fund the implementation of their laws and activities to ensure that children were kept safe and protected from sexual abuse and exploitation.

62. In terms of addressing the root causes of voluntourism, it was essential to invest in poverty reduction strategies. Children from marginalized and poor communities were often recruited and placed in orphanages to make the product being advertised for volunteering more attractive. In order to address that issue, States must ensure that families were economically empowered to provide education for their children and keep them within the home instead of placing them in orphanages where they were exploited or exposed to exploitation. It was also important to provide communities, especially marginalized and poor communities, with food security. In addition, sexual and reproductive health services were crucial for raising awareness about keeping children safe.

63. **The Chair** invited the Committee to continue its general discussion of agenda item 67.

64. **Mr. Ladeb** (Tunisia), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the well-being of Africa's children depended on the well-being of their families and communities. In that context, the Group welcomed and recognized the importance of celebrating the anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2024. African States were convinced that children's rights, welfare and protection were at the core of human social development, and they were committed to ensuring the protection, survival and development of children in conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

65. Africa continued to face challenges related to political instability, economic and financial crises, climate change and inadequate developmental financing, which had made it difficult to provide

education infrastructure services, including the new digital education technologies necessary to cater for the needs of all children, including those with disabilities. In armed conflict situations, African children were vulnerable to displacement, witnessed acts of violence and risked being orphaned or losing their lives or their education opportunities. While important progress had been made in the realization of children's rights, there was still much work to be done to scale-up that progress in many African countries and also globally. A key component of the development and empowerment of children was education, the denial of which exacerbated inequalities in economic development among and within countries. For that reason, African States reaffirmed their commitment to achieving the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025 and the education-related targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

66. The COVID-19 pandemic had highlighted the inequalities among and within countries. Online education, science, technology and innovation had become tools for enabling children to continue with their education. However, with the absence of or limited access to the Internet, African children, especially those with disabilities, had been the hardest hit in comparison to children in developed countries. Those dynamics would continue to worsen in the absence of strong multilateral action and renewed political will and commitment. Strong partnerships, cooperation and solidarity were needed to create a world fit for children where every child had access to a well-functioning and supportive education system. Moreover, by reaffirming their commitment to sustainability; increasing the supply of qualified teachers through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, particularly African countries; supporting those countries in addressing the challenges in advancing their science, technology and innovation; and supporting their efforts towards the realization of the full potential of education for sustainable development, States would contribute to the development of sufficient and competent human capital worldwide.

67. Since child marriage perpetuated problems relating to health, lack of education, abuse, exploitation, inadequate access to nutrition services and lack of participation in economic opportunities, among other things, African States had launched a campaign to put an end to the phenomenon and were continuing to develop follow-up mechanisms. Convinced that violence against children hampered their full enjoyment of their human rights and affected their well-being, the Group encouraged the international community to continue its efforts, including through the allocation of

appropriate funds to support relevant national programmes, to ensure child protection and welfare, access to health and education and the end of all the forms of violence against children. Global efforts to protect children from trafficking, smuggling, exploitation or abuse were of particular importance in that regard.

68. In closing, he reaffirmed the African Union Agenda 2063 commitment on education, which emphasized the ideals of pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance in all education systems in Africa. The Group appealed to the international community and its partners to foster genuine collaboration, embark on innovation, reshape the existing learning structures, proactively explore new ways of learning, create change while channelling local experience and knowledge, close the digital divide and break down the barriers of inaccessibility, inefficiency and inequity for all children.

69. *Mr. Marschik (Austria) resumed the Chair.*

70. **Mr. Doderó** (Mexico), speaking as a youth delegate, said that his country was convinced that the promotion of children's rights was essential not only for comprehensive development but also for ensuring access to a life with equal opportunities, regardless of sex, gender, ethnicity, religion or social status, which generated fairer and more egalitarian societies. Such an approach prevented violence and child abuse and fostered proactive participation in society by nurturing committed citizens who were aware of their rights and duties and spared them from harmful situations that could have long-term effects on their physical and mental health. Children's well-being was synonymous with progress and sustainable growth.

71. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and rapid technological change required States and organizations to step up measures to safeguard children's rights, as those phenomena had directly impacted such critical areas as education, mental health and safety and had exacerbated worrying trends, including cyberabuse and cyberbullying, which were linked to the increase in the time children spent in the digital environment. In that regard, Governments and other relevant stakeholders should take measures to ensure access to quality online education and to health services, provide a safe home environment for children, inform and raise awareness among children about online risks and prevent and combat cybercriminals more effectively. In addition, it was vital to invest in programmes that focused on children's mental well-being and ensure access to appropriate mental health treatment and services.

72. Other critical phenomena that threatened the human rights of children, such as climate change, trafficking in persons, especially children, and migration crises, could not be ignored. Although the climate crisis affected humanity as a whole, it had an unequal impact on children, since it compromised their future even though they were not the cause of the problem. Efforts must therefore be redoubled to counter those challenges and protect the environment for the benefit of future generations. Governments and organizations must also continue to work to ensure safe and dignified conditions for children on the move and to prevent and detect trafficking in persons early and to protect the victims. That was a shared responsibility that demanded immediate action.

73. **Mr. Wallace** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that many children, including from the Caribbean, were still grappling with the lingering effects of school shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic; suffering from both online and offline violence, often in silence; facing uncertain futures as refugees and internally displaced persons due to conflict and climate change; and lacking access to basic necessities such as food, clean water, sanitation and adequate shelter. Governments, civil society organizations, international agencies and communities had to work hard to overcome those challenges. Caribbean Governments had stepped up their efforts to implement policies and programmes for the promotion and protection of the rights of children, including those who were at risk of harm and those who had come into conflict with the law.

74. As States parties to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Caribbean countries were providing access to quality and inclusive education, along with health-care services to ensure physical and mental well-being, with a special emphasis on maternal and child health; eradicating child labour and all forms of exploitation; promoting child protection systems to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect and violence; creating safe and nurturing environments where children could thrive, free from discrimination, racism and any other forms of injustice; and fostering a sense of inclusion and participation by giving children a voice in decisions that affected their lives and ensuring that their opinions were heard and valued. Moreover, Caribbean countries were combating trafficking in children and child exploitation, including child sexual abuse materials, by working collaboratively to strengthen border controls and legislation, and investing in programmes and initiatives that addressed the unique challenges faced by children in vulnerable situations, including those affected by poverty, disability or displacement.

75. The online safety of children was of the utmost relevance, with children at risk of encountering inappropriate content that could harm their development and desensitize them to inappropriate behaviour; sharing personal information online, which could lead to privacy breaches, identity theft and cyberbullying; and being exposed to false or misleading information online, which could affect their understanding of the world and their critical thinking skills. In that regard, CARICOM was heavily invested in the outcome of the discussions held within the Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes and the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025. Member States must educate children about online safety in order to equip them with the necessary skills to confront such challenges. Furthermore, Governments and businesses must adopt regulations and design tools that protected children online while also respecting their right to explore and learn in the digital age. In addition, the role of the family could not be overstated, as it bore primary responsibility for nurturing and protecting children both online and offline, in the best interests of the child.

76. **Mr. Beblavy** (Slovakia), speaking as a youth delegate, said that protracted conflicts, inequality and climate change were having a serious impact on the well-being and rights of children, especially those who belonged to disadvantaged or marginalized groups, such as girls and children with disabilities. The Sustainable Development Goals Summit in 2023 had been a wake-up call for Member States to step up their efforts towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for the sake of children, who were the innocent victims of the international community's irresponsible actions.

77. Slovakia fully supported the work of international mechanisms and human rights bodies to advance children's rights. In that regard, it welcomed the issuance of general comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change ([CRC/C/GC/26](#)), according to which children had the right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Member States must work towards that end, as some 4.2 billion children were expected to be born over the next 30 years and the consequences of the climate crisis would be their daily reality.

78. Children's rights were a longstanding priority for Slovakia, which was fully aware of the complex situation faced by the most vulnerable children due to social exclusion and economic deprivation in the areas

of housing, health and nutrition and education and health care access. The COVID-19 pandemic and high inflation, among other things, had caused deterioration of the socioeconomic situation around the world, which had directly impacted children's quality of life. Consequently, in April 2023, Slovakia had adopted a national action plan to improve living conditions for all children in Slovakia facing difficult life situations.

79. Slovakia was particularly concerned about the situation of children in Ukraine as a result of the unjustified and unprovoked aggression committed by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in blatant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The ongoing deportation of children to the Russian Federation and to the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine was deplorable. In that connection, he recalled that the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups had been included in the Secretary General's list of shame in his 2023 report on children and armed conflict (A/77/895) for carrying out grave violations against children.

80. **Ms. Makwati** (South Africa) said that, as the most vulnerable members of society, children bore the brunt of violence, displacement and loss during times of crisis. It was therefore essential for Member States to continue their engagement on the promotion and protection of the rights of children. For its part, South Africa would continue to advocate for strong international mechanisms and States' adherence thereto through active dialogues and partnerships. Furthermore, it had been making progress in its efforts to ensure that the promotion, protection and realization of the rights of children to survive, be protected from harm and reach their potential be afforded the highest respect possible, as enshrined in the South African Constitution.

81. South Africa remained committed to fully incorporating the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child into its domestic legal system, including through national legislation. By working collaboratively with other countries, international organizations and civil society, South Africa sought to ensure that children were provided with the support, care and protection they deserved. Moreover, it had been working to create an enabling and inclusive environment for all children in South Africa. Her country would continue to advocate for the full promotion, protection and realization of children's rights as determined by the Constitution, the Convention and numerous other international mechanisms and commitments.

82. **Ms. Velichko** (Belarus) said that her country's National Commission on the Rights of the Child

coordinated all activities to promote and protect children's rights. Work to implement the latest national action plan to improve the situation of children was continuing. Overall, there were 11 different types of benefits for families with children in Belarus. Moreover, those who found themselves in difficult life situations could rely on targeted State social assistance. Belarus was one of the few countries where a parent could take parental leave and receive full State benefits until the child reached the age of 3 years.

83. As State support for children was oriented towards ensuring a happy childhood, her country sought to address challenges that affected the safety of children. Growing online threats were a particular concern in that regard. According to statistics, almost 96 per cent of children aged between 6 and 17 years in Belarus used the Internet. In order to prevent children from accessing sites that promoted drugs, violence, suicide and illegal activities, including those of a pornographic nature, a number of Belarusian Internet providers had included parental controls in their list of services. Children were also taught how to protect themselves from cyberaggression. In that context, a legal website for children had been launched in order to teach minors to recognize and respond correctly to cyberthreats and to behave properly online, and information security and hygiene classes were held in schools.

84. Belarus was seriously concerned about the manipulation of the agenda on children and the attempts by individual States to push their own agenda at the United Nations. Furthermore, her delegation was extremely disappointed by the growing politicization of her country's humanitarian activities to organize recreation for children at Belarusian resorts. Belarus had a decades-long tradition of inviting children from countries affected by various kinds of disasters for recreation and treatment in children's holiday camps. It was deeply regrettable that, for some reason, the subject had now become the subject of speculation on the part of some Western politicians, who had not yet bothered to provide a single piece of evidence or the name of any child who had been forcibly displaced to Belarus. Her country offered assistance to children based solely on humanitarian considerations and universal human values. Most importantly, it provided uninterrupted education for children living in situations of armed conflict.

85. Belarus had invited the Secretary-General to personally visit the country or to send his representatives to obtain objective first-hand information on the situation. Moreover, on 22 September 2023, Belarus had hosted a briefing for representatives of the diplomatic corps on the topic of

children's recuperation in Belarus. On 4 October 2023, foreign diplomats had visited places of recreation for children from the areas affected by the conflict in Ukraine. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus had issued a press release on the outcome of the visit. All of the children were returning home, had documents and were in Belarus with the consent of their parents or guardians. The current group of children would leave Belarus on 6 October 2023. Those who had wanted to make sure of the legality and validity of her country's humanitarian efforts had been able to do so during their visit. The refusal of diplomats of a number of countries to visit the children had only confirmed that they had invented the "children" issue for a reason. They did not have the slightest desire to find out the truth, rather, it was just another tactic against Belarus. Her delegation categorically rejected any allegations of the involvement of Belarus in any illegal activities with regard to children from the areas affected by the conflict in Ukraine.

86. **Mr. La Haozhao** (China) said that, although continuous progress had been made in the protection of children's rights thanks to the joint efforts of the international community, children in many parts of the world continued to face such threats as poverty, disease, hunger, conflict and natural disasters. Moreover, the misuse of unilateral sanctions by a certain country was further exacerbating the suffering of children in the countries concerned. In that context, China called on all countries to strengthen cooperation, accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and commit themselves to the promotion and protection of children's rights in development processes. The Chinese Government had always attached great importance to the cause of children, adhered to the principal of the best interests of the child, gave priority to the development of children and had taken legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures to safeguard children's rights to survival and development, among other things. Furthermore, it had taken measures to improve children's welfare, to narrow urban, rural and regional gaps and to promote healthy and comprehensive development.

87. The outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Vision 2035 contained a dedicated chapter on safeguarding the rights of women and children. In addition, the latest children's development programme set out 70 major goals and 89 strategic measures in the areas of health, safety, education, welfare, family, environment and legal protection for the promotion and comprehensive and equal development of children. All provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities in China had

developed measures for children's development on the basis of the actual situation in their respective regions. Furthermore, the relevant State departments, independent experts and non-governmental organizations monitored and evaluated the progress of the measures undertaken.

88. China had made considerable progress in the improvement of children's health, having been singled out by the World Health Organization as one of the top 10 countries in terms of maternal and child health. Furthermore, his country had established the largest education system in the world, thereby effectively guaranteeing children's right to education. With regard to its legislation, China had amended the laws on the protection of minors, the prevention of juvenile delinquency, and domestic violence, among other specialized laws.

89. It was important to implement human rights instruments on the protection of children's rights in good faith, and China fulfilled its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols and had submitted its combined fifth and sixth periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child earlier in 2023. China was ready to work constructively with that Committee and looked forward to strengthening cooperation. According to a joint report issued by the International Labour Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund, 1.77 billion children lacked access to a social protection system. There was still one country that had yet to ratify the Convention, and fully realizing the protection of children's rights remained an uphill battle.

90. **Ms. Pereira Gomes** (Brazil) said that her country remained fully committed to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in order to guarantee the full enjoyment of the rights of the child. In 2023, Brazil had redesigned its Bolsa Família Programme to include the payment of early childhood benefits to families with children aged between 0 and 6 years, with families needing to meet requirements for vaccinations, nutritional monitoring, school attendance and prenatal care. With the payment of that benefit, the percentage of families with children that had been lifted out of poverty had increased from 64 per cent to 84 per cent. Also in 2023, the Ministry of Education had launched a national child literacy programme through which \$600 million would be invested by 2026. Federal and state governments, together with municipalities, would cooperate to guarantee the right to literacy for all children and to resume the education of children impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Up to 15.8 million children in Brazil could benefit from the programme.

91. In 2022, the National Council of Justice had established a judiciary policy for early childhood that would safeguard the fundamental rights of children aged between 0 and 6 years, taking into consideration the relevance of early childhood in human development; broaden children's access to justice; encourage the formulation of protective measures; and provide children in early childhood and their parents with better services. As her country addressed migration from a human rights perspective in accordance with such international principles as non-discrimination, family reunification and the best interests of the child, all migrant and refugee children in Brazil enjoyed the same rights and had access to the same public services as Brazilian citizens.

92. Although inequalities within and among countries prevented children from having equal opportunities online, exposure to all sorts of harmful digital content was widespread. As underscored in the Secretary General's report on the status of the Convention on the Rights of the Child ([A/78/366](#)), children's lives and rights were increasingly connected to the digital environment. In that context, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the Ministry of Education had jointly developed an information campaign targeting educators, parents and children with the aim of providing simple and practical guidance on how to deal with violent online content and promote a safer and healthier digital environment for children.

93. **Mr. Dolah** (Malaysia) said that States bore responsibility for nurturing children by ensuring their physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual growth. His country was strongly committed to promoting and safeguarding the rights and well-being of children, including in situations of armed conflict. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Malaysia had put in place a robust domestic legal framework for the protection and promotion of children's rights through the Child Act 2001 and other legislation. Moreover, his country was committed to ensuring that the protection, development and participation of children was in line with its obligations under the Convention.

94. Malaysia had introduced a new national child policy and plan of action to address gaps in support systems that might result in harm to children, especially with regard to juvenile justice, bullying, mental health, child exploitation, child marriage, climate change and the protection of children online. The new policy was designed to be in alignment with recent legislative reforms concerning children and to be coherent with other domestic policies related to the protection of children online. In September 2023, Malaysia had

established the Department of Child Development, which was tasked with enhancing children's well-being through prevention, development, protection, rehabilitation and integration into society. In addition, Malaysia had introduced the concept of family-based care to ensure that children in need of protection and rehabilitation were housed with their parents or family members as much as possible so that they could continue to be nurtured in a family environment. Placement in welfare institutions was strictly a measure of last resort.

95. The approach of Malaysia to the protection of children also included those that were in conflict with the law. In that connection, his country had introduced the Diversion Programme, which essentially promoted a social welfare response rather than a criminal justice response to low-risk children who committed non-serious offences. The programme drew from the experience of the international community, which had found that the diversion of low-risk child offenders had proven to be more cost-effective and successful at reducing reoffending as opposed to treating them as adult offenders. The programme included three forms of diversion, namely police warning, stern warning and referral to the Social Welfare Department for a Diversion Intervention Programme, which focused on counselling, rehabilitation and community service.

96. **Ms. Zalabata Torres** (Colombia) said that her country considered children to be social agents from the beginning of their existence, endowed with particular interests, capacities and vulnerabilities, as well as the need for protection, guidance and support in the exercise of their rights. For that reason, Colombia had placed children at the centre of its national policies in its national development plan for the period 2022–2026.

97. In coordination with the national care system, Colombia aimed to provide universal comprehensive care for children between the ages of 0 and 5 years, with priority given to the rural communities and territories most affected by violence. Young children must develop holistically and grow up in conditions of love, play and protection so that they could become the "generation of peace". In that context, her country was fully committed to the children and armed conflict agenda and firmly believed that the implementation of Security Council resolutions [1612 \(2005\)](#), [2250 \(2015\)](#) and [2419 \(2018\)](#) would contribute to the goal of reconciliation and transition to a true culture of peace.

98. In Colombia, children who had been recruited by illegal armed groups to participate directly or indirectly in the conduct of hostilities were regarded and cared for by the State as victims and, consequently, were not

deprived of their liberty. In addition, her country had established an intersectoral commission for the prevention of the recruitment and use of and sexual violence against children and adolescents, comprising 22 national entities, with the aim of guiding, coordinating, organizing and monitoring the actions of State entities to prevent the violation of the rights of children and adolescents.

99. Having acceded to the Safe Schools Declaration in November 2022, Colombia was currently formulating an implementation plan that aimed to overcome the obstacles impeding education during armed conflict and improve the protection provided to students, staff and educational institutions. Furthermore, Colombia would host the first Global Ministerial Conference on ending violence against children in November 2024. The main challenge for the Colombian State was to take effective and timely action to prevent and eradicate violence against children and adolescents. Accordingly, it had created an inter-institutional consultative committee for the prevention of sexual violence and comprehensive care for child and adolescent victims of sexual abuse as a consultative mechanism for inter-institutional coordination and engagement with civil society organizations.

100. **Ms. Arab Bafrani** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that her Government had implemented a multisectoral strategy for the protection of children's rights, focused on strengthening institutions, allocating adequate resources and setting long- and short-term goals, which included monitoring and accountability mechanisms and the engagement of governmental organizations, civil society, academia and other stakeholders. Iran had adopted a national law on the rights of children and adolescents in 2021, a law on the protection of children and adolescents in 2020 and an amendment to nationality legislation in 2019 which provided that Iranian citizenship could be granted to the children of Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers.

101. Iran would soon submit its combined fifth and sixth periodic reports on the implementation of its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A mass immunization programme was in place and, following the implementation of national policy and programmes, the maternal mortality rate had fallen to 15 per 100,000 live births in 2021 and the infant mortality rate had fallen from 15 per 100,000 births in 2017 to 11 in 2022. Health screening was conducted in schools, children with disabilities received professional educational support, the State welfare organization identified children with autism, and financial assistance was provided to low-income families with children with autism.

102. Steps were taken to reduce the number of children missing primary education, distance learning platforms were available, children in remote and under-privileged areas received education services and support, and free education was provided to Afghan children living in Iran. Given the primary role of parents and families in children's lives, family courts had been established and progressive laws had been adopted on the protection of families and of mothers and children. Financial support, such as cash transfers, was provided to meet the essential needs of families in vulnerable situations, including those with children out of school or at risk of school dropout.

103. Despite her country's efforts to protect the rights of children, the United States of America and its European allies continued to impose unilateral coercive measures against Iran. As a result of overcompliance with sanctions and the adoption of risk elimination policies by some companies and financial institutions, access to health services and life-saving drugs had been significantly affected, which was tantamount to collective reprisals. It was the duty of Member States to refrain from recognizing those illegal measures and to cooperate in terminating them immediately.

104. **Mr. Kuzmenkov** (Russian Federation) said that his country remained convinced that the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child should serve as a basis for the further strengthening of international cooperation in building a world fit for children. It was therefore disappointing that the most important international treaty was still not universal due to the failure of a single State, the United States of America, to accede to it. It was clear that the United States was violating the rights of children on a large scale, with children working in demanding and harmful jobs in agriculture, the food industry and the workshops of major commercial chains. The primary victims of that labour exploitation were migrant children who were in an unknown country and forced to earn a living instead of attending school.

105. The countries of the collective West seemed not to understand that a family environment was needed for children's full and harmonious development, which was one of the founding principles of the Convention, as they instead emphasized the independence of children and their views and showed disregard for the role of parents and legal guardians, which was established in article 5 of the Convention, in the exercise of the rights of children. Such approaches were unscrupulous and harmful to children, who, due to a lack of experience and maturity, were susceptible to suggestion which could be used for manipulation by strangers. The Russian Federation reiterated that decision-making by

children should be carried out only with the proper guidance of parents and legal guardians and in accordance with the evolving capacities of the child.

106. As part of its commitment to protect children's rights, the Russian Federation had submitted its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports under the Convention, which would be considered at the ninety-fifth session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. Policy on the protection of children's rights was enacted in line with the principles of the outcome document of the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly. A plan of action for the decade of childhood for the period 2021–2027 was in place and was designed to ensure children's safety and health, improve their well-being and quality of life, develop education and update necessary infrastructure. Priority was given to children in vulnerable situations such as orphans, children with disabilities and children from large or low-income families.

107. **Ms. Lepage** (Luxembourg), speaking as a youth delegate, said that, following amendments that had entered into force on 1 July 2023, the fundamental rights of children were protected by article 15 of her country's Constitution, which stipulated that the best interests of children should be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting them. All children had the right to protection and care for their well-being and development, and Luxembourg actively defended the rights of children so as to protect them from negligence, exploitation, abuse and violence.

108. In her country, literacy was first taught in German and Luxemburgish, with French introduced as a third language in the second year of primary education. However, given that the migrant population of Luxembourg now represented 47 per cent of the total population, such linguistic demands had become a challenge in cases where parents did not speak those three languages, or children had not begun their schooling in Luxembourg. A pilot project on literacy in French had therefore been launched.

109. Issues of health were often raised in consultations with the youth population. The demand for psychological therapeutic services was often greater than capacity, such services were often unaffordable, and young persons with mental health problems often had to wait up to six months to consult a therapist. Such challenges needed to be urgently addressed to ensure mental health care for all those in need of it.

110. **Mr. Wald** (Luxembourg), speaking as a youth delegate, said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognized the right to participate, and the presence of youth delegates of Luxembourg within the

Third Committee was testimony to his country's serious commitment to promoting youth participation. A national youth council offered young people the opportunity to engage politically and socially; as children would decide the policies of the future, they should therefore be heard today. Luxembourg called for Member States to protect the rights of children constitutionally, to promote multilingualism in education and the participation of children and young people in policymaking and to make mental health services accessible by reducing wait times and guaranteeing effective financial support.

111. **Ms. Stoeva** (Bulgaria) said that violent conflict, climate change and the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to affect children. Shortly after the Sustainable Development Goal Summit, it was clear that the Sustainable Development Goals pertaining to children would be difficult to achieve, but, if children were not at the centre of efforts to achieve the Goals, sustainable development could not be realized.

112. All national policies and programmes for the protection and promotion of children's rights in Bulgaria were based on a child rights-based approach and the best interest of each child. Targeted measures had been implemented for the promotion of the rights and well-being of children, particularly vulnerable and marginalized children. Bulgaria prioritized early childhood development and access to inclusive and quality education, including for children with disabilities and refugee and migrant children. Since 2022, an interinstitutional coordination mechanism had been operational at the national and local levels to assist unaccompanied migrant children.

113. As part of progress to deinstitutionalize childcare, all former 133 specialized institutions for children had been closed, except for four homes for medical and social care, managed by the Ministry of Health, which were being phased out. Special measures had been implemented to prevent child abandonment, encourage good parenting, support families with children and provide foster care and integrated community services.

114. As part of its commitment to end violence against children, including domestic violence, the Government of Bulgaria had adopted a national programme for the prevention of violence and abuse of children for the period 2023–2026. The programme would serve as a framework for coordinating all entities involved in the prevention of violence and abuse of children and aimed to improve data collection and awareness-raising regarding violence against children.

115. Since the onset of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, Bulgaria had welcomed over 130,000 Ukrainian refugees, many of whom were school-age children. Educational institutions had worked with civil society organizations to provide a safe and inclusive environment for those children.

116. Bulgaria co-chaired, together with Jamaica and Luxembourg, the Group of Friends for Children and the Sustainable Development Goals, which worked to include children's rights in all major global processes within the United Nations. In January 2023, Bulgaria had joined the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The promotion and protection of children's rights were a priority that Bulgaria would champion if elected to the Human Rights Council in October 2023. If children's interests and rights were not prioritized in the face of the current multidimensional crises of unprecedented scale, the future, if there was one, would be bleak.

117. **Ms. Almunaifi** (Kuwait) said that challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, natural disasters, armed conflict and lack of food security affected millions of people, including children. It was important to strengthen and protect the rights of children through international conventions, yet there was a significant gap between ambition and reality. Children had the right to health and a decent quality of life, yet many still suffered from abuse on a daily basis. Kuwait urged the international community to increase coordination between Governments, international organizations, the private sector and civil society organizations to improve legislation that protected children against violence and poverty and to protect their right to education. Kuwait called on the international community to protect all civilians, including children, and on parties to conflict to allow unimpeded civilian access to humanitarian aid. Her country had supported countries affected by conflict and United Nations entities that focused on alleviating the suffering of children.

118. In 2015, a family court had been established in Kuwait to ensure that family members, particularly children, were not adversely affected during the settlement of family disputes. A comprehensive law on the rights of children, enacted in 2015, guaranteed their rights to a family environment, education, health and protection against all forms of violence and discrimination. Citizens were the cornerstone of development, and education was the main pillar of human development and the advancement of society.

119. **Mr. Dang** Tran Nam Trung (Viet Nam) said that children faced a multitude of challenges, including

armed conflict and environmental crises, which were compounded by discrimination against women and girls. Children often suffered from inadequate parental care and faced obstacles in accessing essential services, such as education and health care. The digital revolution offered educational opportunities, but issues such as cyberbullying and online exploitation posed a significant risk to children's safety.

120. Viet Nam had been diligent in fulfilling its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and had been one of the first countries in the world to ratify it. Viet Nam had ratified seven of the nine core United Nations human rights conventions, many of which included provisions for child protection, and others such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). Viet Nam had achieved the targets relating to universal primary education and reducing child mortality and was one of the pathfinder countries in the Global Alliance to Eradicate Forced Labour, Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking and Child Labour in line with Sustainable Development Goal target 8.7. Viet Nam actively engaged with regional platforms, such as the Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, in order to promote gender equality, eliminate violence against women and children, strengthen child protection and address emerging challenges affecting women and children in the region.

121. In recognition that children were the future and an important resource for development, his Government had enacted a national action plan for children for the period 2021–2030 and a national programme for the prevention and reduction of child labour for the period 2021–2025. Viet Nam had adopted its first comprehensive law on children, which clearly defined the rights and protections afforded to children in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Over 154,000 children had received welfare benefits and an increasing number of children received educational opportunities and legal protection. Viet Nam would continue to work with global partners and stakeholders to ensure that every child had the opportunity to lead a life filled with promise, security and dignity.

122. **Mr. Al Mandil** (Saudi Arabia) said that his country's national legislation protected the rights of all children without discrimination. Saudi Arabia had strengthened the regulatory framework for the protection of children from ill-treatment and neglect, which included harassment, exploitation and incitement to disturb public order. In line with article 5 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which

established the responsibility of parents in providing guidance for children, a family affairs council had been established to ensure that families were strong and cohesive and respected religious and moral values.

123. The report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (A/78/214) was welcome. Saudi Arabia had implemented measures to protect all people, including children, from different forms of abuse. The child protection system had also been reformed, and national policy for the prevention of child labour had been introduced in 2021 to ensure a safe environment for children and the full enjoyment of their rights. An initiative for children and teachers had been launched to protect children in cyberspace.

124. Saudi Arabia shared the concerns, set out in the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/78/247), regarding the scale of grave violations committed against children. The international community had a shared responsibility to protect children in armed conflict and to address the root causes of such conflict.

125. Saudi Arabia reiterated its commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of all children, particularly those affected by armed conflict and natural disasters. The country had signed an agreement with UNICEF to provide food, water and sanitation to some 75,000 people, including children, affected by the earthquake in Syria. Since 2017, there had been a project which aimed to rehabilitate children recruited for or affected by armed conflict in Yemen, provide them with social support and return them to their normal lives. So far, some 60,000 children had benefited. Saudi Arabia would continue to cooperate with the United Nations and the international community to provide a safe world and a prosperous future for all children.

126. **Ms. Banaken Elel** (Cameroon) said that, at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly in 2002, Member States had committed to building a world fit for children, in which they could receive the best possible start in life, receive quality basic education and develop their individual capacities and in which the family would be strengthened as the basic unit of society. To do so, States had invested in preserving the planet, protecting the environment and combatting desertification and biodegradation.

127. However, Member States should also ensure that children were fit for the world by ensuring that they were fully aware of their rights, assured of their material and social well-being and could become adults capable of continuing the development of their country. To that end, in line with the African Charter on the Rights and

Welfare of the Child, Cameroon promoted an education which developed children's personalities, strengthened positive African cultural, traditional and moral values and prepared children to live responsibly in an open society.

128. It was the sole responsibility of parents, rather than schools, to provide the sexual education they considered best for their children. Schools should instead focus on teaching the history of their country, which was sometimes regrettable and had consequences, particularly with regard to colonization and slavery, for which reparations should be made; biology, so that children understood that all persons shared a common humanity that went beyond race and that scientific advancements should be shared as common goods; and mathematics, technology and economics to develop children's innovation skills and prepare for their future inputs to national and global development. In that connection, Cameroon had introduced finance modules in the primary school curriculum. Under national legislation, educational policy was developed in collaboration with regional authorities, families and public and private institutions.

129. **Mr. Aryal** (Nepal) said that his country was a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, two of its optional protocols, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

130. Nepal incorporated the core principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development and respect for the view of the child in its Constitution, legislation, plans and policies. The National Child Policy, the Children's Act and the national strategy for early childhood development were guided by a child rights-based approach, protected the basic rights of children, met all of children's needs for their physical, psychological and educational development, prevented discrimination and ensured that the youth justice system was child-friendly.

131. A national strategy was in place to end child marriage by 2030, and the penal code explicitly prohibited and criminalized child marriage below the age of 20 years. Legislation had been enacted to prevent, prohibit and respond to all forms of child abuse online, and all forms of harm against children was punishable by law.

132. The Constitution guaranteed the fundamental right to education and ensured free primary and secondary education. An emergency child mitigation fund had been established to provide immediate relief and rehabilitation to children in emergency situations. According to a 2021 child labour report from ILO, there had been a significant decrease in child labour in Nepal. As a pathfinder country for Alliance 8.7, Nepal was committed to ending all forms of child labour by 2025 as a national priority. Legislation on child labour prohibited the employment of children in factories and mines and other harmful activities and ensured all necessary provisions for their health and security in the exercise of other activities.

133. A monthly cash transfer programme for children under 5 years had been launched, and monthly scholarships and daily meals were provided for children in remote areas and marginalized communities. Nepal prioritized the health of newborns and mothers and had made significant progress in child health targets and school enrolment. Member States needed to work together to address the severe impact of multiple current crises on children's rights.

134. **Ms. Al-Thani** (Qatar) said that her country had taken a number of legal and administrative measures to promote and protect children's rights at the national, regional and international levels, in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Qatar had established a centre for the protection and social rehabilitation of children, under the Qatar Foundation for Social Work, which aimed to raise awareness of and build capacities in the field of child protection.

135. The education system of Qatar was one of the most advanced in the world. According to the World Bank Group, educational spending in the country in 2019 had been \$5.3 billion, the equivalent of 3.3 per cent of gross domestic product and 9.3 per cent of total State expenditure, which was one of the highest rates in the Middle East and North Africa region. A number of other government and civil society initiatives had provided quality education opportunities for both citizen and resident children. A mobile application had been launched in 2018 to enable children to request help in situations of harm. Qatar had also undertaken international and regional initiatives to provide quality education to millions of children affected by poverty, armed conflict and natural disasters. One such programme involved 65 projects in 50 countries and had provided education for 10 million children.

136. Qatar was proud of its close partnership with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-

General for Children and Armed Conflict and had provided the Office with financial support between 2018 and 2023 and hosted its Analysis and Outreach Hub in Doha. A UNICEF office had been opened in Doha and a partnership between UNICEF and the Education Above All Foundation had transformed the lives of 5 million children in 17 countries. Progress had also been made towards Sustainable Development Goal 4, on inclusive and equitable quality education. A partnership signed in 2021 between UNICEF, the Qatar Fund for Development and the Qatari telecom company Ooredoo was aimed at transforming the lives of children around the world in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

137. **Ms. Mudrenko** (Ukraine) said that the full implementation of Member States' obligations under core legally binding international instruments for the protection of children's rights should be a national, regional and international priority. Ukraine, as a signatory to those instruments, was determined to bolster the protection of children, particularly in the face of the war of aggression by Russia, which was marked by brutal and genocidal crimes against children by Russia. Nearly two thirds of the 7.5 million children in Ukraine had been internally or externally displaced. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 75 per cent of school children suffered from stress and 26 per cent had post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of the full-scale Russian invasion. Just one third of school-age children enrolled in school were receiving fully in-person education. Due to the unabated bombardment and shelling by the Russian armed forces, 3,780 educational institutions had been damaged and 333 had been completely destroyed. Some 21 cases of conflict-related sexual violence against children by the Russian military were being investigated, with the youngest victim just 4 years old.

138. Since 2014, Russia had pursued a policy of mass abduction and forcible indoctrination of Ukrainian children in Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk. Such children were deported to Russia or the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine, illegally given up for adoption and exposed to so-called re-education, which was nothing but an aggressive brainwashing attempt aimed at erasing their Ukrainian identity and preparing obedient soldiers for the Russian army. To date, some 19,456 deported Ukrainian children had been identified, but just 386 of them had been successfully repatriated and reunited with their families. The return of all children deported by Russia was a priority of the peace formula for Ukraine.

139. A constructive dialogue had been established with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for

Children and Armed Conflict, and a joint prevention plan had been signed in August 2023 to end grave violations against children in Ukraine. Ukraine welcomed the Secretary-General's unprecedented decision to name the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups as parties that had committed grave violations affecting children in situations of armed conflict in his report on children and armed conflict (A/77/895-S/2023/363). Ukraine called for the United Nations and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to demand that the Russian Federation fulfil its obligations under international humanitarian law and human rights law, including by ending all grave violations against children in Ukraine and ensuring the timely and safe return of all Ukrainian children. Ukraine expressed its gratitude to all States that had provided humanitarian assistance and shelter to Ukrainian children and urged the international community to unite and intensify pressure on Russia to cease its aggression and withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory within internationally recognized borders.

140. **Ms. de Armas García** (Cuba) said that it was essential for children to grow up in an environment that allowed the full development of their personalities and potential. Within the Third Committee, the clock now mattered more than what Member States had to say about efforts to build a better world for children. Cuba expressed its hope that Member States could return to listening to one another during debates, with full respect for the right of each State to take the floor, without being interrupted or microphones being turned off.

141. According to UNICEF, 202 million children under the age of 5 years lived in severe food poverty, 45 million suffered from wasting, 67 million children had missed out entirely or partially on routine immunization and 48 million of them missed out entirely. Some 64 million children of primary school age remained out of school. The reality was the consequence of an unjust world order, and solutions would require strengthened political will and the commitment of all countries, particularly the wealthiest countries, to multilateralism, international cooperation and solidarity.

142. However, unilateral coercive measures imposed against countries of the global South had a serious impact on children. The economic, commercial and financial blockade that had been imposed on Cuba by the United States for over six decades violated the Charter of the United Nations and international law, was the main obstacle to development in Cuba and affected the rights of all children in Cuba. The blockade prevented Cuba from accessing medicines, supplies and advanced technological equipment that was needed to

improve health indicators among children and ensure their quality of life.

143. Despite the blockade, Cuba had achieved positive results in the enjoyment of children's rights and remained fully committed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The principle of the best interests of the child was integrated into the Constitution and other national legislation. Health indicators were equivalent to those in developed countries, 99.9 per cent of births took place in health centres and Cuba had been the first country to eliminate maternal transmission of HIV/AIDS and syphilis and to develop a specific COVID-19 vaccination programme for children between the ages of 2 and 18 years with its own vaccines.

144. Child labour was prohibited by law, and effective measures were taken to prevent children from being victims of child sex tourism, trafficking in persons, slavery, the sale of organs and illegal adoption. In July 2023, a comprehensive policy for children and young persons and a corresponding action plan had been adopted.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.