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- Chair:* Mr. Marschik (Austria)
- later:* Ms. Monica (Vice-Chair)..... (Bangladesh)
- later:* Mr. Marschik (Austria)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.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. **Mr. Rodkin** (Israel) said that, despite the near-universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, millions of children around the world continued to be left behind and to have their rights denied. Moreover, children were disproportionately affected by circumstances outside their control, including the climate crisis, global conflicts, poverty, violence, inequality and exclusion. In 1980, Israel had established the National Council for the Child in order to ensure the safety and well-being of all children and youth in the country. The Council's assistance and support centres dealt with inquiries on a variety of subjects related to the protection and rights of children and youth and provided consultations, referrals and appropriate assistance, without discrimination.

2. Israel attached great importance to promoting and assisting children with disabilities in every aspect of their lives, from infancy to adolescence. Children with disabilities were entitled by law to free education until the age of 21 years, and dedicated classes were provided for them in public schools across Israel. In addition, children were encouraged to participate in a wide range of key positions, such as on school boards and city councils, and to engage with municipalities and even parliament members on issues of interest to them, so that their voices could be heard and their needs understood.

3. Despite his country's work to promote and protect the rights of children domestically and around the world, there was still much more to be done. Israel was therefore willing to share its experience and cooperate with other partners around the globe to ensure that no one was left behind.

4. **Mr. Pieris** (Sri Lanka) said that his country was an early signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had enacted several laws to protect the rights of children. Sri Lanka had not only ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, but had also adopted the Children's Charter. The latter was an important policy document that ensured that the standards of the Convention would guide law reform and enforcement, policy formulation and resource allocation.

5. Sri Lanka strongly condemned all forms of violence against children. Children and women's bureaux had been established in police stations, and child protection officers were posted at all divisional

secretariats across the country. Moreover, the National Child Protection Authority and the Department of Probation and Childcare Services were involved in child protection, with the latter comprising provincial departments in nine provinces.

6. In terms of education, every child had the right to pursue academic development until the age of 19 years, with girls afforded equal opportunities. Steps had been taken to remove disparities in education through the introduction of a technical education stream in the Advanced Level curriculum, and schools in rural areas had been identified and classified as "feeder schools". Moreover, morning meals were provided to 1.6 million students in order to ensure the participation of all students, including girls, in education.

7. It was alarming that between 500 million and 1.5 billion children were subject to violence each year and some 150 million girls and 73 million boys were victims of sexual abuse. On top of that, with millions of children had missed out on routine immunization between 2019 and 2021, essentially due to the strain on health-care systems. Moreover, with the rapid development of artificial intelligence platforms, it was incumbent upon Governments and policymakers to use systems that met the requirements for child-centred artificial intelligence. The impact of such intelligence ranged from enhanced educational tools to potential threats to privacy and mental health. Experts had also warned that children could form emotional bonds with artificial intelligence, thereby overshadowing human relationships and hindering social skills.

8. **Ms. Iileka** (Namibia) said that her country placed the welfare of its children at the forefront of its Government policies. Namibia had implemented legislation and policies focusing on child protection, education, health, disability and participation. Recognizing the transformative power of education in the development and empowerment of children, her country had also enacted laws to ensure free access to primary and secondary school education for all children, irrespective of their economic and social status. Those laws emphasized equitable, inclusive and quality lifelong learning and thereby contributed to improved school enrolment for both girls and boys and the achievement of gender parity at all levels.

9. Given the status of Namibia as a drought and flood-stricken country, child hunger and malnutrition posed a pressing challenge. Through the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, Namibia had implemented several projects to eliminate hunger and improve health and nutrition for schoolchildren. The School Feeding Programme provided mid-morning meals to nearly

330,000 learners nationwide, significantly enhancing access, attendance and retention and reducing dropout rates. Government-led initiatives were fortified by partnerships with United Nations agencies, including UNICEF and the World Food Programme, international and bilateral partners and private companies. In pursuit of sustainability, Namibia was exploring the possibility of linking school feeding programmes with smallholder farmers in an effort to ensure a stable market for the farmers, boost their income and improve food security and nutrition.

10. Clear and comprehensive legal protection frameworks were needed to counter the growing threat to children's well-being posed by digital commercial sexual exploitation, prostitution and child labour. Namibia was actively working on an electronic transaction and cybercrimes bill that would address such issues as online child pornography. Moreover, the negotiated legally binding instrument on countering the use of information and communications technology (ICT) for criminal purposes should enhance international cooperation and mutual legal assistance in addressing digital crimes, including child exploitation.

11. Mere rhetoric about children being the future was insufficient; specific policies and actions were needed to ensure that children enjoyed their full rights as stipulated in various international instruments. Efforts must be stepped up, including through increased financial investment in programmes and initiatives aimed at improving children's well-being and realizing their rights.

12. **Mr. Hakobyan** (Armenia) said that his country had developed a strong legal framework to protect the rights and freedoms of children, including through the ratification of all key international treaties, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its three Optional Protocols and the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse. Furthermore, Armenia had established inclusive, child-sensitive and resilient services that addressed the diverse needs of children, particularly those facing challenging circumstances.

13. Armenia cooperated closely with UNICEF on many aspects of advancing children's rights. His Government's priorities in that regard included the development of an inclusive and resilient social protection system and ensuring access to high-quality education, a universally accessible and affordable health-care system and a secure environment, with a special focus on vulnerable children. Particular attention was paid to ensuring equal rights and opportunities for children in all aspects of public life, regardless of their

nationality, race, gender, language, religion, social background or any other circumstances.

14. The humanitarian crisis that had evolved after the recent aggression by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh had had a particularly disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups. About one third of the 100,000 people who had been forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh after the brutal attack by Azerbaijan on 19 September 2023 had been children. Moreover, several children had been killed and dozens wounded during the attack, with the wounded having been evacuated to Armenia where they continued to receive medical treatment. The Armenian Government had taken steps to ensure that all rights of the displaced children were adequately protected. More than 6,500 forcibly displaced children had been registered in public schools in the areas and communities in Armenia where their families had found accommodation. A scholarship programme had also been launched to finance university-level education for the displaced youth. Prior to being displaced, children in Nagorno-Karabakh had faced a long and inhumane blockade, including a total siege for several months, during which there had been extreme shortages of food, medicine and other vital commodities. As a result, they were in dire need of additional and continuous psychosocial, educational, health-related, financial and other types of support.

15. In closing, he called on the United Nations and its relevant agencies, mechanisms and bodies to step up their efforts aimed at protecting children from violence, safeguarding their rights and freedoms and assisting the most vulnerable groups, who were so often left behind.

16. **Mr. Ouattara** (Burkina Faso) said that, in addition to the Constitution, his country had adopted numerous instruments and laws to strengthen the child protection system, including the Criminal Code Act and laws on the protection of children in conflict with the law or at risk, on combating the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, on education policy and on the status of wards of the State. The latter was a direct response to the need to provide health, educational, financial, material and moral care for minors adopted as wards of the State in the context of the security crisis currently facing Burkina Faso, which had led to a massive displacement of people, the vast majority of whom were women and children. In March 2023, children had made up 58.5 per cent of internally displaced persons. In addition, around 6,000 schools had been closed in April 2023, affecting more than one million pupils. The situation was causing children to drop out of school and was exacerbating such dangers as forced recruitment by armed terrorist groups, the worst forms of labour, prostitution, sexual abuse and

exploitation and female genital mutilation and forced marriages, with girls and children with disabilities being the most at risk.

17. In order to reduce the impact of the crisis on the school system and to ensure respect for children's right to education, Burkina Faso was implementing an emergency education strategy that had enabled affected children to resume quality, uninterrupted and safe education. During the 2022–2023 school year, his country had set up 32 child-friendly spaces in areas hosting internally displaced persons; subsidized schooling for 1,155 displaced girls and vulnerable children; provided 51,000 pupils with school kits and created 300 temporary learning spaces in areas where internally displaced persons had settled; provided 300 host facilities with desks; and rented classrooms for educational continuity. Measures had been taken to ensure that the health and nutrition of children in general, and of internally displaced children in particular, were monitored. In addition, a mechanism for reporting and recording complaints had been set up as part of the efforts to combat violence against children.

18. **Ms. Jabou Bessadok** (Tunisia) said that, given that children had always been a top priority for her Government, a progressive legal framework for the protection and promotion of the well-being and rights of children had been established and was constantly being improved. In collaboration with UNICEF, civil society and the private sector, the Government was working to promote and respect the rights of every child and adolescent. In line with the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and the country programme for the period 2021–2025, national plans and strategies were focused on children in all phases of their lives. Early childhood had been chosen as a priority area for the promotion of a new model of sustainable and inclusive socioeconomic development. Eleven Tunisian ministries, civil society and the private sector were preparing a strategy to further reduce inequalities and disparities in access to quality services, health care, nutrition and preschool education for children and their families. In addition, the Ministry of Education had initiated a reform process for primary and secondary schools to integrate life skills into education programmes, a national programme was being implemented to control and prevent school dropout and a second-chance programme for adolescents aged between 12 and 18 years had been developed to help them return to school or benefit from professional training to gain the skills needed to join the world of work.

19. Tunisia attached importance to guaranteeing access to justice for children and young persons,

especially in terms of teaching them to interact with the judicial and administrative systems. It was essential to ensure that the best interests of children were protected, no matter whether they were victims, survivors, witnesses or suspects. Furthermore, in its bilateral and multilateral cooperation with its partners, including the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations entities, and within the framework of South-South cooperation, Tunisia was prioritizing innovative financing approaches and optimal practices for the best interests of children. In that context, Tunisia called on the international community and the United Nations agencies to move to the next level of cooperation and innovation in order to make the world a better place for children.

20. **Ms. Ahangari** (Azerbaijan) said that her country spared no effort to protect all children in Azerbaijan and continued to strengthen the national child protection system, including by ensuring social services, access to justice and monitoring of children's rights. A new strategy and action plan had been adopted to align the child protection system with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to improve institutional protection mechanisms and increase the effectiveness of relevant State institutions. In addition, the action plan envisaged the adoption of new regulations on access to social services, the organization of alternative care, and inclusive education. In order to promote the active participation of children in the preparation of programmes, Azerbaijan had held a national children's forum every three years since 2019 to provide children with an opportunity to voice their problems, propose initiatives and make recommendations vis-à-vis the implementation of legislation and projects related to children's rights.

21. Azerbaijan paid particular attention to children who were especially vulnerable, providing those affected by military operations, epidemics and natural and environmental disasters, orphans, children of single parents and low-income families, and children of martyrs with protection and special programmes in accordance with the Law on the Rights of the Child. Full compliance with international humanitarian law during armed conflicts and accountability for past violations were key for providing effective protection and preventing new crimes. After the end of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, children continued to die because Armenia refused to share accurate and comprehensive information about the hundreds of thousands of landmines that it had laid on Azerbaijani territory. Since 2020, 327 people, including children and adolescents, had fallen victim to landmines, which further aggravated the situation in the region and posed a threat

to those returning home after having been displaced for three decades. Furthermore, Armenia consistently refused to clarify the fate of the approximately 3,000 Azerbaijani citizens, including 71 children, who were still missing in connection with the conflict.

22. General Assembly resolution 77/220 on missing persons requested States to pay the utmost attention to cases of children reported missing in connection with armed conflicts and to take appropriate measures to search for and identify those children. Her delegation hoped that the United Nations specialized institutions and respective mandate holders would give due consideration to resolving the issue, which was essential for the rights of the victims and their families.

23. **Ms. Bakytbekkyzy** (Kazakhstan) said that her country was undergoing structural reforms and political transformation and overhauling the architecture of public governance. One result of that process was significant and long-lasting changes in the protection of the rights of children and their well-being. The Government prioritized measures aimed at strengthening support for children and their families, with a special focus on girls, children deprived of parental care, those with special needs and those from large and low-income families. A national fund for children would be launched on 1 January 2024, and 50 per cent of the fund's annual investment income would be deposited in special savings accounts for children, to be used for housing and education when they reached the age of 18 years. A unified voluntary savings system would also be established, which would combine existing support measures for higher education.

24. In order to strengthen the work of the Ombudsman for Children's Rights, 14 regional offices had been established in all regions of the country. Kazakhstan would soon adopt a law on the Ombudsman for Children's Rights, which would bring the Office of the Ombudsman into greater compliance with the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. Furthermore, Kazakhstan was carrying out a number of activities under the road map for strengthening the protection of the rights of the child, combating domestic violence and addressing suicide incidence among adolescents for the period 2020–2023. With the support of UNICEF, a project was under way to map the capacity of Kazakhstan in order to respond to the needs of children affected by migration processes, with a focus on unaccompanied and separated children, and a national child well-being index had been implemented that consisted of 56 indicators grouped into four domains: child, family and society, public policy, and welfare of the country. An interactive map of child well-being had also been created.

25. The Government was implementing a national project on high-quality and affordable health care for every citizen, which included all necessary measures with respect to adolescent reproductive health, and increase the overall well-being of the population, especially youth. Another national project was intended to reduce gaps in the quality of education between urban and rural schools, increase the number of educational facilities and create a safe and comfortable learning environment, particularly for girls. In 2023, Kazakhstan had adopted a social code that contained provisions on the development of a methodology for a children's budget monitoring system. In addition, the country had acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure, recognizing the right of children to appeal to a specific international mechanism.

26. **Ms. Saleem** (Pakistan) said that, at the World Summit for Children held nearly three decades previously, the world's leaders had promised a better future for children. Despite legislative and normative standards, pledges and commitments, the international community was off-track from meeting the Sustainable Development Goals and the targets related to children and from fulfilling its human rights obligations towards children.

27. Pakistan accorded the highest priority to protecting and promoting the rights of children as the drivers and beneficiaries of development and prosperity. Her country had been one of the initiators of the World Summit for Children in 1990, which had led to the adoption of the landmark Convention on the Rights of the Child. Pakistan had been one of the earliest signatories of the Convention and its two optional protocols and had also ratified all of the core conventions of the International Labour Organization relating to child labour. Furthermore, it had taken legal, policy and administrative measures regarding the rights of children, including the enactment of several laws to safeguard rights and prevent violence and abuse, the establishment of the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, the development of child protection policies for each province, the establishment of child protection units and 13 child codes, the adoption of a national action plan on business and human rights, which included measures to counter child labour, and the participation of children in national consultations so that their voices would be heard.

28. As with many other developing countries, the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and conflicts had severely damaged her country's economy and restricted fiscal space, which had had a detrimental impact on the rights of children. The climate-induced flooding in

Pakistan in 2022 had affected 33 million people, including 10 million children. The promise made to children and future generations could not be fulfilled without realizing children's rights to development. It was time for States to translate their pledges into tangible action by implementing the stimulus plan proposed by the Secretary-General for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets related to children; making technical and financial resources available for the preparation of a country-specific road map for the promotion and protection of children's rights that was designed to correspond to the national circumstances of each developing country; and mobilizing the political will to translate pledges into action and establish legal and normative frameworks related to children's rights and development needs.

29. **Ms. Leonard** (Ireland) said that the promotion and protection of the rights of the child was a domestic and foreign policy priority for her country. More than three decades after its adoption, the Convention on the Rights of the Child remained a cornerstone of the international human rights architecture. The fact that the Convention had been almost universally ratified underscored its significance. It was clear, however, that there was still much work to be done. If States were to ensure that all children could fully enjoy the rights enshrined in the Convention, free from discrimination, they must take further steps towards implementing their legal obligations in that regard.

30. Children across the world continued to face grave human rights violations and abuses, particularly in situations of armed conflict. The immense impact that conflicts had on children, including the unprovoked and unjustified attack by the Russian Federation on Ukraine, could not be overstated. Ireland particularly deplored attacks on schools and hospitals. It was unacceptable that, in 2022, recorded incidences of such attacks had more than doubled globally. Conflict too often created long-term barriers to the enjoyment of rights, including the right to health care, food and education. Every child had the right to education, which provided a foundation for progress, alleviating poverty and addressing social challenges. In that regard, it was appalling that girls in Afghanistan continued to be denied that right, which constituted a flagrant abuse of children's rights. Ireland called on the Taliban to reverse its decision immediately.

31. The changing global context, including the rise of digital technologies, presented new challenges to realizing the rights of the child. The digital environment dominated the lives of many children and had brought with it significant benefits, particularly in terms of education and communication. While digital spaces had supported children's development, they were also a

significant source of potential harm. It was therefore vital that steps continued to be taken to strengthen frameworks to ensure the protection of children online. All States needed to do more to promote and protect the rights of children, and no State was above criticism in that respect.

32. In line with its long-standing commitment to the United Nations human rights treaty bodies, Ireland had been proud to engage with the review of its periodic report under the Convention on the Rights of the Child earlier in 2023. Her country strongly welcomed the role of the treaty bodies in highlighting human rights challenges in Ireland and helping it to improve and generate positive change. In preparation for the review, Ireland had undertaken substantial consultations with children and young people, whose inputs had been integral to the process. A suite of reports branded "What WE think" had been published in 2022 and provided important first-hand insight into how children in Ireland experienced their rights. Ireland continued to prioritize ensuring child and youth engagement wherever possible.

33. **Ms. Meunluang** (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that her country had continued to improve and enact domestic laws and regulations with a view to better protecting the rights and interests of children. In that regard, the National Assembly had recently passed an amended law on the protection of the rights and interests of children, in line with the key principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Her country had made great efforts to advance the implementation of the second Five-Year National Plan of Action on the Prevention and Elimination of Violence against Women and Children (2021–2025). Moreover, it had established an institutional framework for children's protection and services through community-based support and a counselling centre for women and children to provide advisory support and access to justice for children, including victims of trafficking in persons, domestic violence and sexual exploitation. Efforts had also been made to enhance the capacity of national focal points in line ministries and relevant sectors at the central and local level so as to ensure the effectiveness of mainstreaming policy guidelines into child-related programmes and projects. Likewise, particular importance had been given to resource mobilization, improving the reliability of data and information management systems and strengthening coordination mechanisms in close consultation with all stakeholders, international organizations and development partners.

34. The Lao People's Democratic Republic firmly promoted the right to education for all. It was committed to transforming the education sector and improving access to digital and flexible learning approaches, the

provision of ICT infrastructure and internet access for schools and children in urban and rural areas. Earlier in 2023, the Lao Women's Union had successfully co-organized with UNICEF and ChildFund Laos an awareness-raising event under the theme "Investing in our future means investing in our children", aimed at promoting the crucial role of children in addressing climate issues and fostering sustainable practices for the protection of the environment and biodiversity.

35. Despite the significant progress achieved over the past years, some challenges remained, particularly in terms of narrowing the development gap between rural and urban areas, eradicating poverty, enhancing capacity for national focal points and mobilizing sufficient resources for the implementation of the national policy and plan of action at all levels.

36. **Mr. Shrier** (United States of America) said that there was clear evidence that, by prioritizing the needs of girls in all their diversity, children of colour, Indigenous children, children with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex children and those who were disadvantaged, vulnerable or marginalized, States could better meet the needs of all children. UNICEF had demonstrated that investing in girls' education helped to reduce gender-based violence, child, early and forced marriage, child and maternal mortality and child stunting. Gender-equitable education systems had the power to support girls in realizing their rights, developing the skills to become active citizens and reducing gender norms that had negative consequences for both boys and girls.

37. Accessible and universal design principles made assistive devices, services and other products easier to use not only for children with disabilities but for all children. Innovative approaches to education, play, nutrition, health and protection in development and humanitarian contexts fostered inclusive and equitable classrooms and communities where no child was left behind. In addition, accurate and inclusive education on issues relating to race, Indigeneity, sexual orientation, gender identities and expression and sex characteristics helped to affirm the identities of children from marginalized groups, expanded the worldview of all students and prepared them to engage meaningfully in a diverse society.

38. The United States of America had invested \$350 million domestically to improve child protection services and community-based child abuse prevention programmes. Earlier in 2023, it had formed a task force on children's online health and safety so as to prevent and mitigate the potential adverse health effects of online platforms on minors. In addition, a strategy had

been developed to promote youth resilience in response to the mental health crisis and an action plan on adolescent health was being prepared, which aimed to ensure that all adolescents in the country had the safety, support and resources to thrive, be healthy and have equitable opportunities to realize their full potential.

39. The United States of America was committed to strengthening the livelihoods and meaningful participation in society of children, adolescents and families, both domestically and internationally, as it was one of the best investments a society could make to eliminate extreme poverty, boost economic growth and promote peace. To that end, States must pursue immunization efforts, combat food and nutrition insecurity and develop quality and inclusive educational programmes that reflected the diversity of all children and allowed them to grow, learn and gain the skills they needed to succeed. All children must be empowered to grow up to play a meaningful role in solving the most pressing global issues.

40. **Ms. Mendez Gruezo** (Ecuador) said that her country promoted the consolidation of a robust international architecture for the protection of children's rights in all areas, including in situations of armed conflict. The Ecuadorian Constitution, in its article 44, recognized the principle of the best interests of the child by establishing that the rights of minors should prevail over those of other persons. That provision was also contained in other legislation, in particular in the Code on Children and Adolescents. In a cross-cutting manner, all national institutions had made prevention, care, and the restoration of children's rights a priority.

41. The most important programmes and policies in that regard included a programme to support families living in poverty and extreme poverty, which provided comprehensive services during pregnancy and the first five years of a child's life; a cross-cutting policy for the prevention of pregnancy in girls and adolescents, developed together with UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), based on a model of comprehensive care for girl and adolescent victims of sexual violence; a national plan to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls; a special protocol on the rights of migrant children, as many children fleeing conflict or violence were exposed to criminal trafficking and smuggling networks; and a strategic plan for the prevention and reduction of chronic child malnutrition, which established the State's priorities in the design of a long-term social policy against malnutrition. As a direct result of the plan, chronic child malnutrition had been reduced by 3.5 percentage points in children under 2 years of age.

42. As technology evolved, children were particularly vulnerable to the effects of violence, both online and offline. In that context, the National Council for Intergenerational Equality had introduced a public policy for a safe Internet for children and adolescents – the first of its kind in South America – which was aimed at promoting preventive behaviour to mitigate risk factors that could endanger the integrity and dignity of minors. Along the same lines, the Organic Act Amending the Comprehensive Organic Criminal Code to prevent and combat digital sexual violence and strengthen efforts to combat cybercrime specifically addressed the vulnerability of minors to such crimes as pornography and exposure to harmful, sexualized, violent or hateful content, and school bullying using ICT.

43. Ecuador noted with concern the information in the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/78/247) regarding the increase in grave violations against children in conflict situations. There was a need for concerted action at the regional level and with relevant United Nations bodies to encourage adherence to national and international child protection instruments, support the development of national plans for the protection of children in conflict and promote the adherence of States to the Safe Schools Declaration in compliance with the three Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict and with existing international standards.

44. **Mr. Chala** (Ethiopia) said that, as a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols and to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, his country had adopted a comprehensive national child policy, giving priority to ensuring the rights and well-being of children, with a particular emphasis on alleviating all the dimensions of poverty that impacted the lives, growth and prospects of children. While much remained to be done, critical milestones had been achieved in reducing child mortality, enhancing universal access to quality education and ensuring adequate living standards, including improved access to safe and clean water, health and nutrition. Ethiopia continued to take legislative measures and enhance its institutional mechanisms focusing on the sectors that had a direct bearing on children and had taken steps to integrate children's rights and well-being into the public finance and budgeting framework.

45. Having prioritized the elimination of the worst forms of child labour and other harmful practices, Ethiopia had amended its Labour Proclamation to raise the minimum employment age from 14 years to 15 years and had launched a national action plan to eliminate the

worst forms of child labour. As part of its efforts to eliminate harmful practices, Ethiopia followed a community-centred approach that involved indigenous institutions and arrangements. The national strategy on harmful traditional practices was founded on the three pillars of prevention, provision and protection. Ethiopia was set to achieve its goal of full prevention of child marriage by 2025, which was a commitment made at the Girl Summit in London.

46. With its 10-year national development plan, which was aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union Agenda 2063, Ethiopia was on target to attain universal education by 2030. The net enrolment rate in primary and secondary school was 100 per cent and 92 per cent, respectively. In order to address the challenges that prevented children from enrolling and staying in school, Ethiopia implemented school feeding programmes and social safety net projects that were overwhelmingly led by women. In addition, it had increased investment in early childhood education programmes.

47. Ethiopia had revised its legislation and expanded access to civil registration to children in difficult circumstances, including refugees. Given the national security challenges faced by Ethiopia over the past three years, concerted efforts were being made to provide protection and recovery support for affected children. In that regard, his country had engaged with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and was committed to strengthening measures to protect and promote children's rights. In view of the work undertaken, his delegation believed that the situation in Ethiopia did not warrant inclusion in the Special Representative's report (A/78/247).

48. **Mr. Altarsha** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his country had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993 as well as both of its Optional Protocols. All forms of violence, physical abuse and sexual assault were subject to harsh criminal punishments, including the death penalty. The Syrian Government had adopted Act No. 21/2021 on the rights of the child, a comprehensive piece of legislation based on the overriding principle of the best interests of the child. The Act safeguarded rights related to the family, health and education, the rights of children with disabilities and the right to personal security and protection from recruitment and trafficking.

49. Syria attached great importance to education. The country had participated in the Secretary-General's Transforming Education Summit in September 2022 and had issued a national report on the subject. As children

and young people made up 70 per cent of the Syrian population, the country was committed to protecting all children's rights, despite the unilateral coercive measures and economic embargo imposed on Syria.

50. Many children in Syria had been recruited by terrorist groups or separatist militias, in flagrant violation of their rights. National efforts had been made to identify those children, who were regarded as victims. Another phenomenon was the presence in the country of children and families of foreign terrorist fighters. Some 58,000 women and children with terrorist family members were being held in illegal prisons in areas outside the control of the Government, where they were used as a means of blackmail. Ghwayran prison, for example, held over 500 children in horrific conditions. The Syrian delegation therefore called for all such detained persons to be brought home as soon as possible, rehabilitated and reintegrated into their original communities.

51. The Syrian Arab Republic stressed its commitment to cooperation and dialogue with the United Nations at all levels, including for the protection of children in Syria. It also stressed its opposition to the politicization of human rights issues for purposes that ran counter to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

52. **Mr. Abdullah** (Bangladesh) said that States could no longer ignore how children were affected by their actions and inaction. They should therefore renew their commitment to effectively including children's perspectives in national development endeavours and to promoting and protecting the rights and welfare of children while ensuring a robust legislative and policy framework to protect children's rights.

53. The Bangladeshi Constitution explicitly called for actions to promote the rights and welfare of children. As an early ratifier of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Bangladesh had adopted the National Children's Act and a national policy on children in order to systematize its child-related national initiatives. Furthermore, it had introduced child-friendly budgets, established child welfare boards at the district and subdistrict levels to monitor the overall well-being of children and adopted the Child Day Care Centre Act in 2021 for the safety of the children of working women. The Government was working with the National Human Rights Commission to establish a separate Child Rights Commission.

54. Special attention must be paid to ensuring the well-being of children in vulnerable situations and to pre-existing inequalities. It was equally important to address violence against and the exploitation of children through effective legal, administrative and social

measures. In that connection, Bangladesh had expanded social safety nets to cover more children, especially orphans, and implemented family-based reintegration and rehabilitation programmes for destitute children and the Street Children Rehabilitation Programme.

55. The Government had pledged to eliminate all forms of child labour by 2025 and child marriage entirely by 2041 and, in addition to enforcing the Child Marriage Restraint Act of 2017, was investing in the socioeconomic empowerment of women and girls as a means of preventing child marriage. Moreover, in order to eliminate violence against children, a National Action Plan to Prevent Violence against Women and Children was being implemented and a 24-hour toll-free child help line and a mobile app were in operation to provide free telephone services to children facing violence, abuse and exploitation. To ensure children's access to justice, separate tribunals and child-friendly desks had been established in police stations. Child victims were provided with free legal and reintegration services through a one-stop crisis centre, a national trauma counselling centre and safe homes in every divisional city.

56. In the education sector, Bangladesh had ensured 100 per cent enrolment at the primary level and reduced the school dropout rate. Moreover, as part of its efforts to ensure quality education for all, the Government distributed free text books through book festivals on 1 January each year and had developed the National Blended Education Master Plan, under which 60,000 multimedia classrooms would be set up. Increased global efforts were needed to reduce the digital divide and ensure access to digital learning by all children everywhere.

57. Significant improvements had been made in the health of children, including in universal immunization. Some 18,000 community clinics had been established to bring health services to rural areas. Moreover, priority had been afforded to disability- and mental health-related issues. As many as 133,000 autistic children had been given therapeutic services provided by the Government.

58. In the United Nations, Bangladesh played a key role in the adoption of resolutions on the prevention of blindness and of drowning. Ahead of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Summit of the Future, States needed to reinvigorate their collective commitments to ensure the rights of children and to end all forms of exploitation, abuse and violence against children.

59. **Mr. Kim** Nam Hyok (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) expressed his delegation's hope that

the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action would provide a useful opportunity to seek realistic solutions for the promotion of the welfare of young generations throughout the world. Although many countries had made sustained efforts to create conditions favourable to the development of children since the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 30 years previously, they were still a long way from ensuring that all children were brought up in a healthy environment. Disputes and civil wars continued unabated in many parts of the world, deepening divisions between States and exacerbating problems in societies and, in turn, impeding the international community's joint efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and creating direct obstacles to the promotion and protection of children's rights. The right of young generations to a happy life and to development was clearly not dependent on material wealth but was a matter related to the political will of the Governments concerned.

60. His country provided children with everything they needed as a matter of priority. Having enshrined children's rights in the Constitution, the Government continued to improve laws on the protection of the rights of the child and childcare, the decree on the introduction of a 12-year compulsory education system and the legal system for the promotion and protection of children's rights. Nurseries and kindergartens were paid for by the State. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government had supplied dairy products and nutritious food to children in nurseries and kindergartens across the country on a daily basis. All children in the country received text books and other school items free of charge, and were provided with new school uniforms each year. Children with disabilities enjoyed the same treatment, education and life as those without disabilities. In addition, the State took sole responsibility for caring for orphaned children.

61. His country had acceded to the Convention in 1990 and had ratified the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It was faithfully fulfilling its obligations under the Convention and actively cooperating with the relevant international mechanisms, including by submitting six periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

62. **Ms. Tonon** (Italy) said that States had the primary responsibility to protect, respect and realize children's rights, both in times of peace and war. Italy supported UNICEF advocacy to put children at the heart of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and its

action to equitably reach all children everywhere to meet their needs and realize their rights. The Italian Government had consistently provided support to UNICEF-UNFPA joint programmes to combat female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage. Furthermore, it worked to fight poverty, food insecurity, discrimination and all forms of violence while promoting access to quality education for all children as an investment in development.

63. As digital technology took on a greater role in everyday life, States must collectively ensure that children were able to enjoy the digital world safely and that they were protected from any form of exploitation and abuse. Children were vulnerable to a wide range of risks in cyberspace, including those related to sexual exploitation and abuse, privacy violations and the prioritization of profits. During the high-level week of the current session of the General Assembly, Italy, the European Union and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime had organized an event on children's rights in the digital era in collaboration with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children. The discussion had demonstrated the urgent need for the international community, national Governments and lawmakers to take concerted and immediate action to prevent the harm caused to children and society by the proliferation of child sexual abuse material online.

64. The increasing number of grave violations against children, in particular killing and maiming and attacks on schools and hospitals, was of particular concern. Italy strongly condemned the repeated attacks on civilian infrastructure and called on States to respect the Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, the Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups and the Safe Schools Declaration. In the context of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Italy shared the concerns expressed regarding the situation of children transferred to the Russian Federation from areas of Ukraine. It encouraged all possible efforts towards family tracing and reunification and called on all parties to give child protection actors access to the children to facilitate the process in line with the best interests of the child. Since the abduction of children was one of the most difficult violations to document, adequate resources must be allocated to the monitoring capacity of the children and armed conflict mandate as it was an outstanding tool for encouraging the parties on the ground to change their behaviour and for strengthening accountability.

65. **Ms. Asaju** (Nigeria) said that, in Nigeria, the rights of children were inalienable and protected by

every mechanism of Government, regardless of the internal and external security dynamics facing the country. In addition to the Child's Rights Act and sexual assault referral centres, which had been established as safe havens for victims and survivors of all forms of sexual exploitation, the National Human Rights Commission had taken several measures to promote and protect the rights of children, whether citizens or foreigners. For example, it had established open human rights clubs in schools for survivors and their families, which provided safe platforms for reporting incidents and receiving help. Furthermore, the Commission's collective advocacy initiatives provided, among other things, free legal services for victims of all forms of violence, with follow-up procedures for healing, rehabilitation and reintegration. A sex offenders registry, national child welfare policy and child helplines and reporting mechanisms had also been established.

66. The Government had invested over 145 billion naira in the safe school initiative that was being implemented across Nigeria. Proactive strategies were focused on a balanced approach of prevention, intervention, security and emergency preparedness combined with improving school safety communications, a safe school climate, psychological and recovery support services and partnerships with organizations specialized in child safety. Nigeria vehemently opposed any exposure of children to content that was not age-appropriate and that could destroy their innocence and jeopardize their future and well-being. The Government had therefore enacted the Cybercrime Act in 2015, which unequivocally prohibited child sexual abuse and the dissemination of pornographic materials involving children.

67. Any form of violence against children and the phenomenon of children in armed conflict was a tragedy. It was disheartening that thousands of children across the globe had lost their childhoods owing to the activities of criminal elements who engaged children in armed conflicts as combatants, harmed their mental well-being and even took their lives through armed attacks on schools. Many children were abducted, drugged, brainwashed, forcefully recruited and used as human shields in armed conflicts. The world must continue to condemn such abhorrent acts and fight to end all forms of violence against children.

68. Nigeria reaffirmed the centrality of the institution of the family in the country's overall political, cultural and socioeconomic development. It rejected any attempt to redefine the parameters of the family and to undermine the family and parental guidance as foundational to society and to the proper modelling of

the lives and future of children. All of the Government's children and youth initiatives were geared towards empowering the family to support the education, growth and development of boys and girls, in partnership with local and international stakeholders.

69. *Ms. Monica (Bangladesh), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

70. **Ms. Abdalrhman** (United Arab Emirates) said that her Government gave priority to promoting and protecting children's rights. To that end, it had adopted a number of laws and legislation, national strategies, plans and initiatives to create a safe environment for children, including laws on the protection of children's rights, on protection from domestic violence and on juvenile offenders and those at risk of delinquency, which provided legal guarantees and protection in juvenile trials and regulated the work of juvenile institutions.

71. The United Arab Emirates continued its efforts to strengthen and develop child protection institutions. To that end, the Ministry of Education had launched a child protection unit in 2022, which aimed to protect children from all types of abuse in public and private schools and homes and to maintain their physical and psychological health and safety in schools. Furthermore, her country had enhanced its national policies and strategies on children's rights, including its policy on child protection in educational institutions, which had been launched by the Council of Ministers in 2022. The policy was designed to ensure the implementation of child protection mechanisms and measures in educational institutions in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

72. The United Arab Emirates also continued its efforts to protect children at the regional and global levels. In September 2022, the Supreme Council for Motherhood and Childhood had organized a Gulf States dialogue entitled "Child Welfare Policies: Stronger and Comprehensive Child Protection Systems in the Gulf" in cooperation with the Secretariat General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Abu Dhabi Early Childhood Authority and UNICEF. The dialogue had highlighted the importance of child protection systems and the need to support social workers and strengthen coordination mechanisms. At the international level, the United Arab Emirates was a member of the WeProtect Global Alliance, which included Governments, the private sector, civil society and international organizations and sought to develop policies and solutions to protect children from sexual exploitation and abuse online.

73. **Ms. Dime Labille** (France) said that digital technology offered new opportunities for children to

have access to education, acquire knowledge and express their opinions and, in that sense, it had contributed to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the misuse of digital technology was synonymous with new threats for children, and the digital world must be properly regulated to protect children's rights. While cyberspace had become the new global public space, it could not be a lawless one, and France was working to ensure that at the national level. The fight against online bullying was a top priority, and education professionals, non-governmental organizations and major digital platforms were working to lay solid foundations for an environment conducive to respecting and protecting children's rights. The French Government would be presenting a bill on cyberbullying in schools in the coming weeks, which was aimed at facilitating reporting, making platforms more accountable and creating specific penalties, such as permanent confiscation of laptops or banning from social networks.

74. At the international level, the French President had launched the Children Online Protection Lab at the Paris Peace Forum in November 2022. The initiative was designed to bring together public and private stakeholders to provide operational responses to the challenges posed by the growing exposure of minors to cyberharassment and online violence. The results of the first experiments would be presented at the sixth Forum, to be held in November 2023. In addition, France had taken part in consultations prior to the negotiation of the global digital compact, which was aimed specifically at promoting an open, free and safe Internet for children and developing the digital commons to facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Effectively protecting children from online risks was a complex task. A multilateral, multi-stakeholder approach, complemented by a strong, transnational regulatory framework, was a collective imperative. All States should therefore support the joint declaration on the rights of the child in the digital environment.

75. **Mr. Mitchell** (Australia) said that his country was deeply concerned about the sale and sexual exploitation of children, violence against children both online and offline and the global discrimination against girls and adolescents. Millions of children around the world were denied the opportunity to reach their potential for no other reason than their gender. Girls in particular experienced multiple and often intersecting forms of discrimination and continued to face early and forced marriage, gender-based violence and limited access to reproductive health services and quality education, including comprehensive sex education. Each year, 12 million girls were married before the age of 18 years.

Australia had noted with concern the Secretary-General's report on the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on girls, including adolescent girls. The ongoing effects of the pandemic has reversed progress in all spheres of girls' lives, including freedom from violence and discrimination, health and education.

76. All regions of the world had a responsibility to ensure and expand children's opportunities in life. Although a new school year had recently started in many parts of the world, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) had estimated that 250 million children would remain out of school, with girls and children with disabilities disproportionately represented. Education was a catalyst for development and a powerful driver for reducing poverty and building strong, inclusive and resilient societies. It was also a protective factor in creating a safe space for children and improving their health and nutrition outcomes – with generational benefits. Every day, children in all regions and on every continent learned, connected, played and expressed themselves in the digital environment. It was therefore critical that their human rights were promoted and protected, both online and offline. To that end, Governments, regulators, industry, advocates and children themselves must collaborate in order to protect children from all forms of violence in the digital environment, including cyberbullying, sexual exploitation and abuse.

77. Ahead of the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2024, Australia reaffirmed that families were critical in helping children to realize their full potential. The family, in all its diversity, was an agent for sustainable development, social protection, inclusion and well-being. Support for families was therefore an important element in promoting and protecting human rights. Sadly, families and households could also be a source of human rights abuses, including of children. It was essential that Governments listen and respond to the voices and views of children and young people and those who cared for them, as their insights were critical to promoting children's safety and well-being.

78. **Mr. Lenanguy** (Central African Republic) said that education was necessary for children to thrive intellectually, physically and socially. To that end, his Government had developed programmes to remove obstacles that hindered vulnerable groups' access to education and a national strategy to ensure the provision of basic education, school supplies and school canteens to keep children in schools. Policies for the education of children, particularly girls and children with disabilities, were necessary to reverse trends in the country and to

ensure equal life-long learning and inclusive and sustained economic growth.

79. Although the Central African Republic had recently experienced one of the most serious crises of its history, the relative calm of late had allowed presidential and legislative elections to be held and a national reconciliation process to be initiated, which had increased public confidence in the Government but had also raised expectations concerning security, national reconciliation and development, which must be addressed to avoid a resurgence of tensions and to end ill-treatment, exploitation and all forms of violence and torture perpetrated against children.

80. Children continued to be subjected to exploitation in domestic work, agriculture and mining, particularly in rural areas. According to a recent report of the United Nations, there had been some 10,000 child soldiers in the Central African Republic in 2014, and the use of child soldiers had been the primary serious violation of children's rights in the country in 2021.

81. In 2022, the Government had adopted a Children's Code and established a national council for the protection of children, which would coordinate all relevant programmes and strategies. The Government had also established a unit for urgent response and prevention of sexual violence against children and women, youth brigades, a national committee to combat harmful practices and violence against young girls, children's courts and a children's parliament.

82. **Ms. Nabeta** (Uganda) said that, despite progress in recent years, children in Uganda still faced challenges such as domestic violence, household poverty, school dropout and child trafficking. The Children (Amendment) Act of 2016 provided for the establishment of a national children's authority to coordinate, monitor and evaluate child rights programmes and policies and ensure that children's rights pertaining to survival, development, protection and participation were safeguarded. The need for system strengthening and capacity-building had been recognized in the Act and had been communicated to 136 districts of the country as well as to local governments.

83. In 2019, the Government had conducted a cultural audit to establish the situation regarding harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage. National programmes were in place to support children in street situations, and an alternative care framework was in development. Parenting guidelines were being disseminated with support from partners such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Legislation had been enacted to provide for mental health treatment and psychosocial support in health centres.

84. Children were entitled to specific rights by virtue of their age and needs but also had age-appropriate responsibilities. The best interest of the child should be the primary consideration in all actions directly or indirectly affecting children, in line with their evolving capacities. A national child policy for the period 2020–2025 had been developed with a rights- and responsibility-based approach. It would fulfil the child welfare mandates of the Government and provided a national framework for government ministries, departments and agencies and the private sector to plan and deliver interventions that addressed children's rights holistically. An institutional mechanism was responsible for the multisectoral and multidisciplinary implementation of the policy. To fulfil its commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, Uganda needed to optimally invest in children and mainstream social protection interventions targeting children and families.

85. **Ms. Teo** (Singapore) said that, since education was a key component to child welfare, her country invested about 3 per cent of its gross domestic product in heavily subsidized education, and primary education was compulsory. Singapore ensured that school provided children not only with skills to join the workforce, but also with a safe environment and opportunities to learn and live together with peers from different racial, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. In the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment, Singaporean students from disadvantaged backgrounds had performed better than average in all core domains and had outperformed international counterparts from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.

86. Greater support was needed for early childhood education, particularly for children from low-income families or those with developmental needs. The KidSTART government programme had provided over 6,000 such children aged 6 years or under with health, learning and development support, and would be rolled out nationwide by 2026. Government-funded early intervention programmes would meet the needs of 80 per cent of children with higher developmental needs by 2027.

87. To help protect children from troubled homes, community network programmes referred disadvantaged students showing early signs of absenteeism to social services coordinators and community resources. Some 900 students had been supported since 2022, and the programme would be expanded nationwide.

88. To ensure that students were future-ready, Singapore had launched a master plan for the period to

2030 to enhance children's digital literacy and technological skills. Schools would be provided with resources to support the development of digital information management, artificial intelligence literacy and good digital habits. An online learning space offering resources and tools to guide learning was available to all students above the age of 7 years, and tools such as artificial intelligence were being leveraged to customize learning for every child.

89. **Ms. Sonkar** (India) said that, as the future generation of leaders and innovators, children had special privileges and protections in Indian society and legal frameworks. The Constitution of India guaranteed fundamental rights to all children, and a national commission for the protection of child rights ensured that laws, policy, programmes and administrative mechanisms were aligned with the Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

90. To ensure access to quality education for all, elementary education had been made a fundamental right, and education for children between the ages of 6 and 14 years was compulsory. Integrated child development services provided nutrition, health care and early childhood education to children under 6 years, and the national health programme focused on early detection and intervention in children's health issues. Programmes highlighting the need to educate girls aimed to comprehensively address imbalances in the child sex ratio. The rights of children and juveniles alleged to be in conflict with the law, and those of children in need of care and protection, were safeguarded, with the Government and civil society working together within a robust legal and administrative framework under the active supervision of the judiciary. Effective measures were in place to prevent and protect children against cyberstalking, cyberbullying, child marriage, sexual harassment, pornography and trafficking in persons.

91. During the interactive dialogue on the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, the delegation of Pakistan had misused the forum to engage in baseless and malicious propaganda against India. Pakistan did so to detract the attention of the international community from its own abysmal human rights record. The union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh had been an integral part of India since the complete, legal and irrevocable accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India in 1947. Matters pertaining to those union territories were internal to India, and Pakistan had no right to comment on them. As a country with one of the world's worst human rights records, Pakistan would do well to arrange

its own affairs before pointing a finger at India, which was the world's largest democracy.

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

93. **Ms. Aboue Itoua Lekegny** (Congo) said that her country's development plan for the period 2022–2026, based on the Sustainable Development Goals, served as a framework for all policy, programmes and strategies linked to the family and promoted social progress and conditions for inclusive growth based on a strong, diversified and resilient economy. The importance of the family for protection, development and fulfilment was recognized in the national policy for social action for the period 2023–2026.

94. Article 39 of the Constitution stipulated that all children, without discrimination, had the right to protection by their family, society and the State. Her Government had adopted a strategic framework for strengthening the national child protection system through the inclusion of families, communities and children as rights holders. Awareness-raising campaigns had been held regarding care facilities and shelters for children; on all forms of violence against children, including violence within families, schools, care facilities and shelters; and on gender equality, the rights of women and girls and efforts to combat gender-based violence.

95. The Government ensured that legislation on the promotion and protection of Indigenous populations, particularly children, was accessible to those concerned. Training for Indigenous teachers was envisaged under a national action plan for the period 2022–2025 to improve the quality of life of Indigenous Peoples to ensure that education was adapted to their needs.

96. The Government was focused on implementing the child protection system in all regions of the country, building capacities for the comprehensive protection and care of children, increasing the school enrolment rates of children with disabilities and combating discrimination and ill-treatment of children with disabilities.

97. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that social, family and community spaces were needed for the development of independent, purposeful and active children. Children deserved a healthy environment, free of violence, in which they could grow up without fear. Since 2007, the Government of Nicaragua had implemented a number of social programmes to promote the values of peace, freedom, protection and care for children. Nicaragua was committed to children's rights in line with national and international legal instruments, such as its Constitution, the code on children and

adolescents and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Nicaragua had joined the Regional Action Group of the Americas for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation of Children and, under legislation on cybercrime, punished anyone who used technology to sexually exploit children, young persons or persons with disabilities.

98. Due to privatization instigated by previous Governments, school infrastructure in Nicaragua had been in a state of disrepair, and one million school-age children had been out of education. The current Government had succeeded in reinstating free education.

99. Public policy was founded on respect for human dignity, and all children in Nicaragua, without discrimination, had the right to protection and opportunity. Recognizing that disability was part of human diversity, the Government guaranteed educational, family, community and social inclusion to children with disabilities. Nicaragua provided free medicine and vaccines and ensured that children received general and specialist medical care in health-care centres.

100. All government programmes for child development were free of charge. Human rights were not commercial goods, but inalienable guarantees for those who had fought for them. Nicaragua condemned the imposition of unilateral coercive measures on developing countries, which hindered the enjoyment of those rights.

101. **Ms. Lortkipanidze** (Georgia) said that, in recognition of both the opportunities and risks associated with digital transformation and the importance of protecting children's rights in the digital environment, her country had introduced a national Internet development strategy for the period 2020–2025 for digital skills and literacy programmes and campaigns for online safety, particularly for children. The International Telecommunication Union's *Guidelines for parents and educators on Child Online Protection* had been translated into Georgian. Georgian telecom operators now allowed users to block certain webpages to protect children from cyberbullying and false information. A national strategy for education and science, based on equality, equity and good governance, approved in 2022, was designed to ensure access to high-quality education through hybrid and remote learning models. The Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia implemented its educational policies and activities in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. Measures to ensure that no one was left behind included the adoption of laws on early, preschool,

general and vocational education, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

102. Measures to combat violence against children were integrated in the national human rights strategy. However, the occupation of the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions by Russia prevented children in occupied territory from enjoying all rights under the human rights protection framework. The prohibition of education in the native language in those regions was a major concern and, coupled with other gross human rights violations and ethnic discrimination, risked another wave of displacement, as many schoolchildren and their families were forced to leave their homes so that they could attend school in their native language.

103. **Ms. Hazlewood** (Guyana) said that, although the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulated that the best interest of the child should be paramount, millions of children were still left behind, many of whom were living in extreme poverty. Too many children were victims of violence, with devastating and lifelong consequences on their health, development and well-being, particularly for children living in conflict, disaster and humanitarian situations. Child labour and trafficking of children remained pervasive. Member States should continue to report on such issues and take targeted action to ensure a safe and harmonious environment in which children could realize their full potential.

104. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was enshrined in the Constitution of Guyana, and a dedicated agency ensured that children were protected from threatening, harmful and vulnerable situations. Since educational empowerment was the only way to change the trajectory of a country and improve the lives of its people, Guyana had invested heavily in quality education for children in all regions, including through school construction, teacher training and curriculum reform. Budgetary allocations had increased by over 60 per cent since 2020, and special attention was given to rural and remote areas, where most Indigenous People resided. Children of migrants had equal access to education.

105. The special protections afforded to children under international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the Convention should be translated into quantitative deliverables such as accurate monitoring and reporting, health care, increased financial resources and appropriate reintegration measures. Member States needed to end and prevent conflicts.

106. Governments, the private sector and all other stakeholders must collaborate to create a safe online

environment for children, and enhanced efforts were needed to bridge digital divides and ensure that those in rural and remote communities were not left behind. Guyana had implemented several programmes to equip children with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills. Domestic legislation on cybercrime addressed the exploitation and abuse of children, and Guyana was engaging in negotiations of the Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes.

107. **Mr. Amorín** (Uruguay) said that the promotion and protection of children's rights should be a priority for all Member States, and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda should be consistent with the child rights obligations of States. Uruguay attached great importance to that issue, as reflected in its domestic policies and its international leadership on the subject, and was concerned that children's vulnerability to violence was being exacerbated by multiple overlapping crises, such as increasing poverty, social and economic inequalities, forced displacement, conflict, climate change, environmental degradation, natural disasters and food insecurity.

108. Although the digital environment could facilitate and improve children's access to inclusive and quality education, it also exposed children to harmful information, sexual abuse and exploitation, and online bullying and violence, which threatened children's mental health. Millions of children had no Internet access, which increased existing disparities in access to inclusive and quality education. Reducing the digital gap was key to guaranteeing the right to non-discrimination. Ensuring children's access to and protection within the digital world should be a priority in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to fulfil obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

109. Uruguay took pride in its robust free public school system, which had been a long-standing but continuously updated tool for social advancement. The Government had implemented a One Laptop per Child initiative, which had led to unprecedented levels of connectivity in schools and worked as a mechanism to combat inequality in education. Early education coverage for children aged between 3 and 5 years had grown exponentially in recent years, allowing hundreds of children to receive a quality public education. Investment in education should leave no one and no community behind. Uruguay would continue to advocate that all children benefit from the implementation of cross-cutting programmes focused on not only education, but also health, gender equality,

the defence of strong and fair institutions and efforts to combat climate change.

110. **Ms. Nyirongo** (Malawi) said that children made up over 40 per cent of her country's population. The Government had harmonized all laws relating to children and had enacted further legislation and policy to adequately ensure their protection. Amendments to the Constitution had changed the definition of a child to a person aged under 18 years, rather than 16. Under the national children's policy, the largest share of government resources was allocated to sectors working to improve children's lives such as education, health, early childhood development and nutrition, with support from development partners.

111. A national children's commission was being established to oversee all issues related to children and ensure accountability at all levels. In line with article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and article 7 of the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which enshrined the right of children to participate in decisions affecting them, the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare had developed national guidelines for child participation. Child participation structures had been established at the national, district and community levels to allow children to propose solutions for matters affecting them to policy makers.

112. A national strategy on ending child marriage had been implemented. Child protection at the community level was strengthened through the recruitment of child protection workers and the engagement of traditional leaders. The Constitution of Malawi prohibited slavery and forced labour; exploitation, abuse, slavery and forced labour were criminalized by law.

113. Almost 1,000 children had been reintegrated into their families as part of efforts to deinstitutionalize children in orphanages and other childcare centres. Under a 2010 law on childcare and protection, children in conflict with the law could not be detained in adult prisons and were reintegrated into their communities. Malawi commended the support provided by its development partners in fulfilling the Government's commitment to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights.

114. **Ms. Alghali** (Sierra Leone) said that the protection and promotion of the rights and welfare of children should be a priority for all Governments. The elimination and prevention of all forms of sexual exploitation, abuse and violence, to which children, particularly girls, were at greater risk, was a priority for her Government. Sierra Leone welcomed the unanimous support within the United Nations to recognize 18

November as World Day for the Prevention of and Healing from Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Violence and called on all Member States to increase efforts to raise awareness of child protection and the preservation of their dignity.

115. The digital environment was a fundamental part of children's lives and offered tremendous benefits but also presented risks of cyberbullying, online violence and exposure to hate speech and violent content from which children, as the world's future, must be protected. As part of efforts to strengthen child protection systems, a review of the Child Rights Act of 2007 was at an advanced stage, and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs would soon review the Sierra Leone National Child Justice Strategy so as to protect children from harmful digital content and services.

116. Education was not a privilege, but a fundamental right for all children. Access to education had expanded in Sierra Leone under a human capital development programme, and State expenditure on education had increased to an average of 22 per cent of the national budget since 2018. Sierra Leone championed a policy of radical inclusion to ensure that no child was left behind. Member States should reflect on the importance of safe schools for children and condemn attacks on education. All Member States had a legal and moral responsibility to stop the use of children in conflict. Sierra Leone urged Member States to protect and respect children's rights both in peacetime and during conflict.

117. **Mr. Milambo** (Zambia) said that his country was highly concerned that the world was not on track to end all forms of violence against children and had not met targets in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. State and non-State actors must work together to make the required progress in eliminating violence and harmful practices against children.

118. Child marriage, though nominally illegal, was largely tolerated at the global level, and country-specific drivers of the practice included traditional customs, gender norms, family practices and low levels of education. The issue required individual and collective responses, and the President of Zambia was the African Union Champion for ending child marriage. Zambia had recently enacted Act No. 12 of 2022, the Children's Code Act, to strengthen multisectoral approaches to child protection and to criminalize all forms of violence against children. The Government had extended protections against trafficking and smuggling, provided for in its strong policy and legislative framework, to children on the move and those at risk.

119. Despite progress in social protection in many countries, many children still lived in poverty and were deprived of their most elementary rights. Zambia implemented child-sensitive social protection programmes to prevent and reduce children's vulnerability and to address inequalities and had increased the investment of public resources in social sectors benefiting children.

120. Zambia had enacted legislation which provided for the right to early childhood, basic and high school education and had introduced a free education policy for primary and secondary school. Legislation enhancing access to education for children with disabilities, in line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, had also been enacted.

121. **Ms. Hameed** (Maldives) said that Member States' solemn duty to protect and promote the rights of children and to ensure that their potential was nurtured in a safe, inclusive and supportive environment was both a moral imperative and the cornerstone of a just and prosperous society. Complex issues, such as the pervasive influence of digital media and threats of violence and discrimination, must be confronted directly through innovative strategies and cross-sectoral partnerships to ensure that no child was left behind.

122. Act No. 19-2019, the Child Rights Protection Act, was an innovative legal framework that protected the rights of all children on the basis of the best interest of the child, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Act No. 18-2019, the Juvenile Justice Act, protected children under 15 years from prosecution in criminal courts, so as to break cycles of violence and prevent children from coming into conflict with the law repeatedly. The Act provided for restorative justice and rehabilitation for children in detention or under other sanctions.

123. In line with its international obligations, Maldives had ratified in 2019 the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure. It was a point of pride that the country had been a leading negotiator of, and one of the first signatories to, the Optional Protocol, thus becoming a party to all three optional protocols to the Convention.

124. In recognition that education was not just a privilege but a fundamental human right, Maldives sought to create an inclusive and equitable education system, including through the provision of free quality schooling from early childhood to secondary school, thus overcoming financial barriers and ensuring that all children could reach their full potential.

125. In the digital era, children were more interconnected than ever, but issues such as cyberbullying, grooming, harassment and exposure to inappropriate content required immediate intervention. Maldives was particularly concerned at reports of child mistreatment in their own homes and at the distress caused to children by the worsening impact of climate change and environmental degradation. Nevertheless, the country remained steadfast in its commitment to ensuring child protection, building partnerships and working together to build a just, prosperous and resilient future.

126. **Ms. Kamiya** (Japan) said that shedding a light on human dignity would help to overcome differences in opinion and values. It was particularly important to remember the dignity and future of children and to promote cooperation by addressing the needs of children and the issues facing them.

127. The Children and Families Agency, which had been established in April 2023 under the 2022 Basic Act on Child Policies, based on the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, promoted policies and measures related to children while aiming to place the voices of children, young people and guardians at the centre of society. General principles for policy on child-related measures would be adopted in 2023.

128. It was critical to ensure that children in conflict and other humanitarian situations had access to education, which was the foundation for lasting peace. To that end, Japan had supported the reconstruction of educational facilities, provided school meals programmes and increased access to digital education tools through partnerships with UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Food Programme. Japan was also supporting a programme, led by the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, to promote positive parenting and offer training to parents and schools on the detection, mitigation and reduction of violence against children in areas of five sub-Saharan African countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and climate crises.

129. **Mr. Konaté** (Guinea) said that the public authorities of Guinea had endorsed all international, regional and subregional obligations with regard to child protection. Children in Guinea, as in other countries with high levels of poverty, faced a number of vulnerabilities, including an increased risk of violence. To address the situation, Guinea had become a pathfinder country of the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children and had strengthened its legal framework, including by amending the Children's

Code to prohibit corporal punishment, end child marriage, increase legal protections for children and strengthen community provisions.

130. A roadmap to end violence against children provided for the alignment of the national Children's Code with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as the establishment of child parliaments, the denomination of June as the month of the child, the creation of an office for child protection, gender and values within the Ministry of Security and the establishment of coordination and cooperation frameworks within government ministries.

131. **Mr. Lippwe** (Federated States of Micronesia) said that, despite several issues impacting the enjoyment and realization of children's rights in the Federated States of Micronesia, his Government was committed to prioritizing those rights through policy, administrative and institutional measures. UNICEF had helped create a national child protection policy and was developing an early childhood development policy, which was being reviewed to ensure that it was relevant to the local context. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All programmes had been implemented in the country's schools, in partnership with UNICEF, and had been critical in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing immunization programmes and other support.

132. UNFPA was supporting health service providers and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific had supported the operationalization of indicators for the Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific in support of disability-inclusive development, particularly for children with disabilities. The World Health Organization had provided technical expertise during the COVID-19 pandemic and continued to assist in health disaster and policy-related activities. The Government of the United States provided financial aid to provide early screening and intervention services for women, children and young people under national family planning programmes.

133. The Government had re-established the President's National Advisory Council for Children and had established national task forces for human rights, the universal periodic review and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Federated States of Micronesia was committed to developing referral pathways to protect children and to prioritizing child protection in national development plans and sectoral strategies.

134. His country faced challenges in recruiting specialists in health care, education and other sectors providing services for children, particularly children with disabilities; in tackling teenage pregnancy and its

related stigma; and in providing early intervention services and support to families with children with autism and other neurological disorders. The COVID-19 pandemic had impacted the rights and well-being of children who relied on adults and had caused difficulties in accessing education, health care and social services.

135. However, all those rights and opportunities would be worth nothing if climate crises were not addressed. Marine resources were threatened by environmental degradation, and climate change increased health risks, including vector-, water- and food-borne diseases, malnutrition and mental health issues. His Government urged the international community to protect children by addressing those challenges.

136. **Mr. Nena** (Lesotho) said that his Government had strengthened national policy related to education, in collaboration with stakeholders such as UNICEF, to give children a healthier and better life, access to quality education and protection of their universal rights. To address the challenges hindering children's education in Lesotho, the Government had introduced universal, compulsory and free primary education with a feeding programme that ensured that even children from the poorest families were guaranteed one decent meal a day. School enrolment had increased by up to 80 per cent. A royal trust fund assisted poor and vulnerable children with education. Although the Government wished to scale its interventions up to secondary level, a number of competing priorities and ever-increasing debt burdens made that dream difficult to realize. Lesotho continued to advocate for the restructuring of international financial institutions to make them more democratic and fit for the purpose for which they were established.

137. The Children's Protection and Welfare Act of 2011 prohibited child abuse, including against orphans and vulnerable children, and gave the Master of the High Court, which also served as a children's court, powers to protect children's rights in circumstances in which both parents were absent. The Lesotho Mounted Police Service had a specialized unit dedicated to protecting the rights of children and women, including by protecting them from sexual and physical abuse and neglect and by protecting the estate of orphans after the death of their parents.

138. The Ministry of Social Development, in collaboration with World Vision International, was advocating for changes in cultural norms in order to discourage forced and early marriages, including by conducting public awareness-raising campaigns. Persons with disabilities did not have equal access to public buildings, and facilities to accommodate children

with physical disabilities in lower and higher education were limited. The Ministry of Education, with support from Japan, was constructing four dedicated secondary schools for persons with disabilities. Lesotho invited other development partners to collaborate. Member States needed to work collectively to guarantee the fundamental right of all children to have access to digital tools, so that they could unlock opportunities.

139. The delivery of essential health services in Lesotho had been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and the increasing price of commodities, which affected women and children the most, especially those living in rural areas. The Government, in partnership with non-governmental organizations, was carrying out targeted education programmes through sports and other activities.

140. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Brunei Darussalam) said that his Government had taken a holistic and whole-of-nation approach to the promotion and protection of the rights of children, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A national child protection framework had been launched in December 2020 and was supplemented by three sectoral assessment protocols for front-line social workers. Blueprints had been developed for each of the three goals of the Brunei Vision 2035 development plan, including one for ensuring a high quality of life, which would facilitate sustainable, inclusive and resilient social development. The Plan of Action on Family for the period 2023–2027 would be aligned with that blueprint and would strengthen families to ensure that all children were cared for in a safe and secure environment.

141. A register had been launched in May 2022 to facilitate inter-agency monitoring of vulnerable children and young people in need of protection. A new shelter for women and children fleeing abuse had opened in 2021 and provided a safe space that was conducive to health, well-being and development. A comprehensive and centralized national welfare system implemented in July 2020 would ensure that those in need of assistance were not left behind. Since July 2022, the application and assessment of in-kind assistance for schoolchildren in need had been facilitated under that system, in line with a national plan of action on poverty eradication for the period 2021–2024. Legislation enacted in 2021 provided for the introduction of disability registration cards, so as to facilitate access for persons with disabilities to certain services, and introduced severe punishments for abuse and neglect against persons with disabilities, including children.

142. **Ms. Matos Menéndez** (Dominican Republic) said that the respect for and promotion of children's rights was fundamental to full, inclusive and sustainable development. Children deserved equitable care as integral members of the community. Despite strengthened policy, practices and international legal frameworks for children's rights, millions of children faced poverty, violence, conflict, exploitation and a lack of access to quality education and health care.

143. In the Dominican Republic, inter-institutional policy, distribution of responsibility, capacity-building and increased resources had been essential in maximising the impact of government initiatives. A school health programme, for example, aimed to guarantee health within school communities and reduce obstacles to learning. Child marriage had been prohibited by law and awareness-raising programmes had been launched on positive parenting and comprehensive sex education as part of a policy for the prevention of teenage pregnancy and early marriage. The Government had increased initiatives and dialogues on child protection, recognizing the importance of collaboration in schools and families to end child marriage. In October 2022, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children had visited the Dominican Republic and met with government representatives, civil society and other actors to learn of progress and challenges in preventing violence against children in the country.

144. Children should be guaranteed the right to access accurate and impartial information, so as to prepare them for the complexities of a modern world dominated by digital technologies. Combating disinformation would pave the way for a generation of critical thinkers and help to build a future founded on truth, confidence and understanding. It was important to generate information and recommendations regarding the impact of current multidimensional and interconnected crises on children. Constructive cooperation between Governments, civil society, the private sector and children themselves was essential in guaranteeing children's rights.

145. **Mr. Feruță** (Romania) said that policies and measures for the benefit of children, including those affected by conflict, contributed to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals; that principle had been embedded into his country's approach to the universal periodic review in May 2023 and to its second voluntary national review in July 2023. A new strategy for children's rights 2023–2027 was being finalized and focused on increasing children's participation in decision-making that affected them, reducing poverty and social exclusion among children, improving

children's health, increasing participation in quality inclusive education, developing mechanisms to protect children against violence, ensuring child-friendly justice and ensuring children's access to digital public services in safe conditions.

146. Despite global efforts, in 2022, some 45 million children under the age of 5 years had suffered from wasting, and millions of others had stunted growth or were overweight, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. According to the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/77/895-S/2023/363), thousands of children had been victims of grave violations in 2022. It was outrageous that States and government forces were the main perpetrators of the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals and denial of humanitarian assistance. The war against Ukraine by Russia continued to have devastating consequences for children, whose well-being and mental health was deeply affected by repeated explosions, crimes, forced displacement and separation from family members. Romania stood by the children of Ukraine through national programmes, support to UNICEF and other United Nations entities and close collaboration with the Ukrainian authorities. The mental health of children and young persons was an underestimated and underexplored area that needed to be addressed as a priority.

147. As a supporter of the Safe Schools Declaration, Romania had immediately sent rescue teams and support to children affected by the deadly earthquakes in Turkey and Syria in February 2023. Romania had also facilitated access to education for refugee children under the same conditions as Romanian children. Education and the protection of civilian infrastructure against attacks were key to providing for the next generations everywhere in the world.

148. **Mr. Nunes** (Timor-Leste) said that, despite remarkable strides in advancing development, hundreds of millions of people lived in extreme poverty with children disproportionately affected. Many children lived in war zones or lacked food, sanitation, shelter, health care and education. Children were dependent on others to satisfy their needs, making them particularly vulnerable, and other key factors increased their vulnerability to the negative consequences of poverty.

149. His country had adopted a first cross-sectoral and strategic national action plan for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was overseen by a national commission on the rights of the child. Child protection law was also a priority for the Government. The population of Timor-Leste was young, with a median age of just 20.9 years. Timor-Leste was

considered a lower-middle-income country but was also a least developed country due to its economic and environmental vulnerability, and an estimated 40 per cent of the children of Timor-Leste lived below the national poverty line.

150. To eliminate child poverty by providing tools to parents and families in need, the Government had introduced social protection measures such as school subsidies and pensions for persons with disabilities, older persons and veterans of the fight for independence. Cash transfer allowances were designed with a special focus on the health and education of children. To reduce malnutrition and combat its long-term consequences on children's development, the Government had introduced school food programmes and a policy on age-appropriate nutritious diets, which promoted exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of a child's life and a minimum acceptable diet up to the age of 2 years.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.