



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2792nd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 8 May 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Skelton

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

Consideration of reports of States parties *(continued)*

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Georgia (CRC/C/GEO/5-6;
CRC/C/GEO/QPR/5-6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Georgia joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Georgia**, introducing his country's combined fifth and sixth periodic reports (CRC/C/GEO/5-6), said that in recent years Georgia had undertaken several major reforms with a view to promoting and protecting the rights of the child. Its response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which had been a challenge, had included the non-stop delivery of health-care services, the provision of monetary assistance for children, the creation of a children's hotline and the construction of distance learning platforms. The country's public broadcaster had made it possible for children to follow their lessons on television. Patients from the occupied territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region had been treated in territory controlled by Georgia, including in a hospital built near the occupation line.
3. Parliament had adopted the Code on the Rights of the Child in 2019. The Code was informed by the idea that, in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration. Under the Code, responsibility for children's affairs was delegated to the relevant central or local government institutions; all forms of violence against children, including corporal punishment, were prohibited; provision was made for a data-collection and analysis plan; persons working with children were required to specialize; and assessments of the impact on children's rights of proposed legislative and policy measures were made mandatory.
4. The Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance and the Protocol on the Law Applicable to Maintenance Obligations had been ratified in 2023. Other relevant developments had included the adoption of the National Human Rights Strategy 2022–2030, which contained a chapter on the rights of the child, and the Action Plan for the Protection of Human Rights 2024–2026, in addition to the publication of documents laying out national strategies for education and science, civic equality and integration, and mental health. Mechanisms to coordinate and monitor the steps taken to give effect to the Convention and otherwise promote and protect the rights of the child had been set up at the legislative, executive and municipal levels.
5. Juvenile justice was administered only by judges, investigators, prosecutors, police officers, social workers, lawyers and others with special qualifications. Work on making the justice system and its environment friendly to children had begun in 2018, and in 2020 a juvenile referral centre had been established to run rehabilitation and re-education programmes for children in conflict with the law who were too young to be charged with a crime. All minors had been made eligible for legal aid. In 2022, a centre for the provision of psychological and social services to juvenile victims of sexual violence had opened in Tbilisi. A second such centre was set to open in western Georgia.
6. Public spending on health care and social programmes was steadily increasing. In 2023, a State programme to cover the costs of treatment for children with cancer had been launched. Children in State care had been taken out of large institutions and placed with foster families or in small family-type homes. Deinstitutionalization was complete.
7. Inclusive education, which was supported by relevant specialists, had been introduced in 2015. Ethnic minorities had access to all levels of education, and the Ministry of Education and Science had overseen a bilingual education programme since 2020. Between 2017 and 2022, 90 schools and 40 kindergartens had been constructed or rehabilitated.
8. State agencies, working in collaboration with international and civil society organizations, organized campaigns to raise public awareness of children's rights. The aim of one such campaign, led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, had been to combat child marriage.

9. The human rights situation in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, occupied by the Russian Federation, was dire. The Government was actively pursuing a policy of reconciliation and engagement with a view to promoting interaction by the communities divided by the line of occupation. One initiative in that context focused on children affected by conflict. In the period 2018–2024, around 1,000 children from the occupied regions had been treated in medical facilities located in territory controlled by the Government of Georgia.

10. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** (Coordinator, Country Task Force), welcoming the adoption of the Code on the Rights of the Child, said that she nonetheless wished to know what had been done to bring all relevant national legislation into line with the Code and what concrete effects the adoption of the Code had had. She wondered, for example, whether it had led to sufficient training and resources for the specialists who worked with and for children. She wondered, too, what resources had been set aside to ensure that the chapter of the National Human Rights Strategy on the rights of the child was acted upon. It would be helpful to learn, too, whether the Action Plan for the Protection of Human Rights 2024–2026 had been preceded by another such action plan and, if so, whether an assessment of that plan had informed the development of the current plan.

11. She would welcome additional information on the joint efforts made by the national-level coordination mechanisms responsible for implementation of the Convention. In particular, she wondered what resources the two mechanisms had at their disposal and what was done to ensure that civil society organizations participated in their work. She also wondered what were the objectives of the new mechanism that had been set up to enable authorities from the central Government and municipalities to liaise with each other.

12. She wished to know what progress had been made towards the development of an electronic system for the collection and analysis of data relating to the Convention, whether measures had been taken to build data-production capacity, and whether the Government's policy document setting forth the measures it intended to take to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals had been revised. She also wished to know what percentage of both State and local budgets was set aside for efforts to protect and promote children's rights, and whether any thought had been given to introducing child rights-friendly budgeting.

13. A description of the measures that had been taken to ensure that vulnerable children or children from minority communities were aware of their Convention rights would be welcome, as would an account of the capacity-building efforts that were made to help specialists who worked with children incorporate a children's rights perspective into their daily routine. It would also be helpful to know where children who believed their rights had been violated, including the most vulnerable children, could turn for redress, and what had been done to let children know that they could submit complaints to the Committee under the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure.

14. In a welcome development, the national human rights institution, the Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, had been awarded category A status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. She nonetheless wondered whether the Public Defender monitored efforts to implement the Convention and received complaints from children. She would also like to know whether consideration had been given to creating an office for a public defender who worked on children's affairs alone.

15. It would be interesting to learn what steps were taken to involve civil society in the development of and follow-up to policies and strategies, and whether measures had been taken to strengthen corporate social responsibility and require businesses to answer for activities that affected children and their rights. In that connection, she wondered whether the Action Plan for the National Human Rights Strategy had a section on businesses and children's rights.

16. The State party had clearly made efforts to combat discrimination, but she wished to know what impact they had had. National legislation was informed by the principle according to which the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children; she wondered, however, what was done to ensure that the principle was actually observed. In addition, she wished to know what steps were taken to ensure that

government institutions had the resources they needed to support internally displaced mothers and children and to encourage families to vaccinate their children.

17. In 2023, the Committee had adopted a statement to clarify the concepts of parental guidance and evolving capacities of the child as enshrined in article 5 of the Convention. Had the relevant stakeholders been made familiar with that statement?

18. **Mr. Chophel** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to know what the position of the Government was in relation to ensuring that children born to surrogate mothers had access to information about their origin and received appropriate counselling and support. He also wished to know what was the legal status of aliens and stateless persons under the relevant laws, and whether the Government had considered ratifying the European Convention on Nationality and the Council of Europe Convention on the Avoidance of Statelessness in relation to State Succession.

19. He would welcome information on policies and programmes on children's right to information and a description of the steps that were taken to protect their right to privacy. In connection with violence against children, he wished to know what measures were being taken to strengthen referral systems, make inter-agency coordination more robust, improve data collection, address shortages of social workers and psychologists, and close gaps in national legislation.

20. It would be interesting to know, too, whether the social and psychological services that were provided at a centre in Tbilisi and which would soon be available in a centre elsewhere would ultimately be made available countrywide. In addition, he wondered what mechanisms would be introduced to coordinate the services provided from the centre and from other administrative regions and what was being done to guarantee high-quality social and psychological services, to investigate reports of violence against children living in boarding establishments, to develop reintegration programmes for such children, to give child victims of or witnesses to violence access to relevant support services, and to ensure that shelters met the needs of victims of violence, in particular girls with disabilities. An indication of the measures that were taken to make child-friendly helplines more effective would also be welcome.

21. Although the prohibition of corporal punishment was a positive development, he wished to know what steps were being taken to promote positive forms of learning and discipline and whether efforts were being made to change attitudes towards corporal punishment. He would also like to know more about sexual violence and harmful practices such as child marriage and bride kidnapping, particularly in minority communities, enforcement of the laws prohibiting such practices, campaigns intended to raise awareness of the harm they caused, and arrangements that had been made to protect the victims of child marriage who filed complaints.

22. **Ms. Correa** (Country Task Force) said that she would appreciate a detailed explanation of how the State party's authorities assessed the economic and other needs of families with children and what mechanisms were being developed to identify problems that, if not solved, could lead to the institutionalization of a child. In that connection, she wondered who decided to remove a child from the care of his or her family; what action was taken in follow-up to such decisions; how many social workers in the State party were responsible for child protection matters; whether those social workers also had other professional responsibilities; and what they did to coordinate with other relevant specialists. In brief, she wondered why so many children were still separated from their families.

23. She wished to know what was the major obstacle to doing away with corporal punishment in the family, what role civil society played in combating such punishment, whether the magnitude of the problem had been studied, and whether there was a link between corporal punishment and the removal of a child from his or her home. It would be interesting to learn how the authorities responded to parents' decisions to institutionalize their children; how the operations of the smaller homes that had replaced large institutions were supervised; whether the religious groups that operated some such homes received public subsidies; and whether the Government had any information on the violent crimes that had allegedly been committed in some religious homes.

24. In the past, adoption in the State party had often involved dubious practices; she would accordingly welcome an update on current adoption practices. It would be interesting to know, too, what was done to protect children whose parents were deprived of their liberty. How many such children were there?

The meeting was suspended at 3.45 p.m. and resumed at 4 p.m.

25. **A representative of Georgia** said that the human rights situation in the two occupied territories of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region was steadily worsening as people were being deprived of their fundamental rights and freedoms, including freedom of movement and the right to life, and thousands of children were being denied their right to education in their native language. Moreover, increasing numbers of people, including children, were being abducted and illegally detained, while the Russian Federation and the occupation regimes were erecting barbed wire fences and other artificial barriers along the occupation line. Arbitrary closure of the line prevented children from reaching their schools in territory controlled by the Government of Georgia and hindered their access to health-care facilities, sometimes with fatal consequences. As a result of multiple waves of ethnic cleansing carried out by the Russian Federation, hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons and refugees had been driven into territory controlled by the Government of Georgia. International human rights organizations, including the European Union Monitoring Mission and United Nations agencies, were being denied access to the occupied regions or hindered in their activities on the ground. The Russian Federation bore full responsibility for all human rights violations. Though denied effective control over its own territory, the Government of Georgia was pursuing all possible diplomatic, political and legal channels to protect fundamental human rights and freedoms in the occupied regions. To that end, it was enacting a policy of peaceful conflict resolution that sought conciliation and engagement between the societies divided by the occupation line, also through forums such as the Geneva International Discussions.

26. **A representative of Georgia** said that the Government was pursuing its reconciliation policies with a view to the eventual restoration of the territorial integrity of Georgia. In the meantime, it sought to ensure the welfare of people living in the occupied regions, who suffered harsh security conditions and severe human rights violations. In particular, Georgia worked to provide quality health services free of charge to persons in the occupied lands, thereby contributing significantly to the right to health of children and families there. Under the State health-care referral programme, residents of the occupied regions could seek treatment in medical institutions located on territory controlled by the Government of Georgia. In all, 5,497 persons, including around 1,000 children, had benefited from that programme between 2020 and 2024. Apart from the referral programme, residents of the occupied regions could, through a simple online registration process, benefit from free access to all State health-care services. The Government continued to supply medical equipment and drugs to health-care facilities operating under occupation, including treatment for diabetes, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. To that end, it had disbursed a total of 30 million lari between 2020 and 2024. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, it had also supplied medical equipment, medicines and hygiene products for a total value in excess of 2 million lari. Specially equipped ambulances were deployed in the vicinity of the dividing line in order to transport patients into Georgian-controlled territory.

27. The Government also sought to provide educational opportunities for children and young people in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, particularly in higher and vocational education. Persons from those regions who were willing to study at institutions of higher education on Georgian-controlled territory benefited from State funding and could matriculate without any obligation to sit an entrance examination. In 2023, 235 students from the occupied regions had availed themselves of that opportunity. Other similar programmes also existed, including one launched in 2019 whereby children pursuing their secondary education in the occupied regions could enrol in a one-year course that would prepare them to matriculate in higher education institutions. If successful, they received scholarships and accommodation. More than 1,500 students from the occupied regions had benefited from those programmes between 2019 and 2023.

28. A recently launched “peace fund” was helping children and their families to improve their socioeconomic circumstances and exercise their rights. The Government strongly

encouraged the engagement of international organizations in child rights projects in its occupied regions. More than 200 such projects had received government support since 2019.

29. **A representative of Georgia** said that the first National Human Rights Strategy, which covered the period 2014–2020, had been assessed in 2019, also with the assistance of an independent United Nations expert. The main achievement of the strategy consisted in the development of a more robust legislative framework to protect human rights, while one of the shortcomings identified by the expert concerned the grass-roots implementation of human rights policies. In order to address that issue, the Government was working with municipalities to ensure that national human rights standards were duly implemented at the local level.

30. Work on the second National Human Rights Strategy had begun in 2019 and, following extensive meetings with numerous stakeholders, it had been adopted in 2023. To complement the Strategy, a national human rights action plan had also been drafted. The development of the plan had involved multiple meetings and extensive discussions with international organizations, civil society groups, independent experts and State institutions. A first draft had then been distributed among all the various stakeholders, whose feedback and suggestions had been incorporated into the final plan, which was a comprehensive 140-page document that covered many issues and envisaged a raft of specific actions. The Action Plan for the Protection of Human Rights 2024–2026 had eventually been approved and adopted at the end of December 2023. Unlike previous action plans, the current Plan had its own budget, under which the institutions involved in its implementation had to allocate specific sums for the actions they were required to take. The budget also envisaged contributions from international donors and partner organizations. The Permanent Parliamentary Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child was actively involved in the approval, implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan.

31. Disaggregated data on children were collected by the National Statistics Office, which drew the information from several sources, including the population census and multiple indicator cluster surveys. The most recent population census had been conducted in 2014; a new one was in the process of being conducted and the results were expected to be available in 2025. The Office had recently created an online portal where it posted statistical data and, in 2023, it had issued a statistical publication with information on children's education, health care, social conditions and leisure activities.

32. The Public Defender had been elected by Parliament in 2023 with the support of both governing and opposition parties. The funds allocated to the Public Defender's Office had increased from 6.4 million lari in 2018 to 9.27 million lari in 2024. A department for the protection of children's rights had been functioning as part of the Public Defender's Office since 2001. The department monitored the implementation of the Convention, received complaints from citizens about alleged violations, proposed legislative and administrative changes, and worked to raise awareness about children's rights among the public at large. All the services that the department offered were available to the public free of charge. The Public Defender's Office also functioned as an anti-discrimination mechanism and monitored the implementation of the 2014 Act on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination. In 2023, the Office had considered 122 cases of alleged discrimination, just 4 per cent of which had concerned discrimination on grounds of age. Between 2020 and 2023, there had been no convictions for crimes committed against children on grounds of age-based discrimination.

33. In view of the impact that the work of private companies could have on human rights in general and children's rights in particular, the National Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan had, for the first time, a component on business and human rights and corporate social responsibility. The Government cooperated with civil society organizations that operated in that field, taking a dual-pronged approach that focused on labour and environmental protection. A labour inspection service had been launched in 2021, which sought to ensure that the rights of children working in public and private entities were duly respected, in line with the Labour Code. The service had carried out more than 5,000 inspections in 2023, detecting children's rights violations involving 23 minors in 11 workplaces. When they discovered a violation, inspectors had the authority to impose fines against the offending institution. Efforts were currently under way to provide labour inspectors with training and capacity-building. In 2017, Georgia had adopted a code with which to assess the

environmental impact of public and private sector activities, including their transboundary impact, and to promote public participation in the relevant decision-making process. The implementation of the code was monitored by an environmental agency. The Government was working to harmonize national legislation with European Union environmental directives.

34. There was no separate budget allocation exclusively dedicated to children. However, many budgetary allocations did go to serve the best interests of the child. For example, in coming years, 2.5 billion lari from State and municipal budgets would be spent on the construction and refurbishment of schools and kindergartens, while 200 million lari had been earmarked for health-care services in 2024 and 150 million lari for child benefits, childcare, social rehabilitation and maternity allowances. The Sustainable Development Goals were being applied at the national level and had been incorporated into plans and frameworks, such as the National Human Rights Action Plan. Numerous public outreach initiatives, educational programmes and awareness-raising activities had been run by many different State institutions, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Care Agency, the Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education and Science and the Communications Commission.

35. **A representative of Georgia** said that several important pieces of enabling legislation had recently been enacted and were currently in force governing, inter alia, asylum processes; procedures for determining State compensation for victims of domestic violence; standards for working with child witnesses, victims and defendants with disabilities; procedures for registering the birth of children conceived using in vitro fertilization; and templates for child-friendly legal documents including complaints forms and summonses. Parliament had held several discussions around the *barnahus* model but had not yet come up with any concrete recommendations.

36. The Permanent Parliamentary Council for the Protection of the Rights of the Child had recently adopted an action plan under which it monitored children's welfare and enforcement of the Code on the Rights of the Child. The Council cooperated with various entities, including by requesting information and conducting thematic inquiries, and engaged actively with civil society. For example, the speaker of the Parliament had signed a memorandum with the Georgian National Platform, which brought together about 200 non-governmental organizations. The Council played an important role in improving communication between the Government and civil society. It should be noted that the Government involved civil society in decision-making at all levels, in accordance with a recommendation it had received from the European Commission.

37. Regarding business and human rights, she wished to add that the Government, as part of its cooperation with the private sector, promoted the incorporation of children's rights in everyday business practices. An innovative platform, the Business Advisory Council for Children, had been created to support the realization of children's rights in workplaces, the marketplace and the community.

38. **A representative of Georgia** said that children living in closed institutions and State-run care facilities had access to confidential complaint mechanisms. Children who entered the prison system, either because they had been convicted or were awaiting trial, were informed about their rights and obligations and the complaint mechanism within 24 hours of admission. Brochures providing that information had been translated into several languages. Trained social workers could provide the child with assistance in filling out the complaint form, if he or she so requested – a process that was entirely confidential. Complaints boxes were placed in a location accessible to all juvenile prisoners and were not under video surveillance, thus ensuring the anonymity of the complainant. The same approach was applied in all government-run detention centres, including mental health facilities.

39. The Government recognized the links between birth registration and the provision of identity documents, on the one hand, and one of the core principles of the Sustainable Development Goals, to leave no one behind, on the other. Accordingly, legal and institutional mechanisms were in place to ensure the timely birth registration of all children born in Georgia. Under the Organic Law on Georgian Citizenship, children born in the territory of Georgia to two stateless parents, or to one stateless parent and one unknown parent, acquired

citizenship at birth. Minors living in Georgia whose parents were unknown were deemed to be Georgian citizens unless proved otherwise. Stateless children would be granted Georgian citizenship after living in Georgia for at least five years. Georgia was a party to the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The Government had joined the 10-year campaign to end statelessness (the I Belong campaign) of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and had developed a national action plan to end statelessness. In 2022, the authorities had launched a door-to-door campaign to identify undocumented persons and stateless persons. Forty-three persons had been identified as undocumented; they had been either granted the status of stateless persons or, if found to be Georgian citizens, assisted in obtaining the missing documents.

40. Georgia had 180 public service halls that provided a range of government services, including birth registration. In 2021, the Ministry of Justice had launched the Mobile Public Service Hall project, whereby specially equipped vehicles went to citizens' homes to provide services, especially in rural communities. One of the aims of the initiative was to register children who had been born at home and not in a hospital, and whose birth therefore had not been reported to the relevant agencies. Applications for birth registration and identity documents could also be submitted through the Government's electronic services portal. A simplified procedure had been introduced for the issuance of identity documents to children in street situations. In 2023, 16 such children had been registered and issued with documents.

41. **A representative of Georgia** said that maternal and child health was a top priority for the country. In the framework of the National Strategy for the Promotion of Maternal and Newborn Health 2017–2030, the Government planned to adopt a new action plan for the period 2024–2026. The Ministry of Health delivered maternal and child health-care programmes that included antenatal care, labour and delivery, neonatal care and the early detection and screening of diseases and abnormalities. It also delivered State programmes for the management of diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and diabetes, a mental health programme and an organ transplantation programme. Programme budgets were increased every year in order to meet the priority health needs of mothers and children.

42. The National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health administered immunization and epidemiological surveillance programmes, which included education and awareness-raising activities. The Centre also provided training for primary health-care providers and paediatricians throughout Georgia, in order to increase their knowledge of vaccines and possible side effects and to improve their communication skills. Through such activities, the authorities hoped to increase public awareness of the importance of vaccination and to improve the uptake of immunization services.

43. **A representative of Georgia** said that the prevention of violence and the protection of safety and public order were among the main principles of the Law on General Education. Violence in schools, against students or any other persons, was prohibited by law, and schools were required to respond immediately and appropriately to any kind of physical or verbal abuse. The subject "Society and Me", which formed part of the national curriculum, addressed topics such as safety, prevention of violence, protection of personal information, bullying and cyberbullying. The Ministry of Education and Science administered a programme under which teachers were trained to promote democratic culture, provide human rights education and develop a safe and tolerant learning environment. Where necessary, social workers provided counselling and support for students, parents and teachers.

44. During the previous year, various activities had been organized to prevent violence in schools, with the participation of 1,200 school officials, 9,500 teachers and almost 127,000 children. School resource officers had regularly led activities on issues such as anti-discrimination, hate speech, bullying and cyberbullying, gender equality and tolerance. Resource officers, who assisted students in resolving problems at school, were currently present in more than 700 State schools across the country, covering 90 per cent of schoolchildren. The Ministry of Education and Science had a professional development centre for teachers, which provided regular training and awareness-raising for teachers so that they could detect and report any kind of violence.

45. At the basic education (lower secondary) level, the revised civic education curriculum addressed the topic of detecting early marriage, while the biology curriculum covered the risks associated with early marriage, pregnancy, factors affecting fetal development, protection against unwanted pregnancies, and prevention and early detection of diseases of the reproductive system. The issue of early marriage was also addressed under teacher's professional development programmes. Civic education had been made a compulsory part of vocational education programmes.

46. **A representative of Georgia** said that protecting children from violence, including sexual violence, was a top priority of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Criminal Code provided for the punishment of different types of violence and for an aggravating circumstance in the event that an offence was committed against a minor. Any information reported to the authorities regarding an offence, whether by children, parents, teachers, doctors, social workers or any other persons, would result in an immediate investigation.

47. All juvenile justice professionals, including judges, prosecutors, detectives and investigators, were obliged to undergo specialized training before they were permitted to work on cases. More than 2,000 law enforcement officials had received the training. As a result, juvenile justice was administered effectively and in a child-centred manner.

48. The Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs had introduced specialized training on sexual offences, which investigators were required to undergo regularly. All investigative proceedings were conducted in a child-friendly environment, and the Ministry had opened a centre in Tbilisi that was based on the *barnahus* model. The Human Rights Protection Department monitored all criminal and administrative cases involving minors in order to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of investigations. It had also developed recommendations for law enforcement officers investigating cases involving children. Victims of offences were provided with information about their rights and available services and were referred to shelters, crisis centres or non-governmental organizations.

49. The Ministry of Internal Affairs paid special attention to the protection of children from domestic violence. The police used a tool for assessing the risk of recurrence of violence and had mechanisms for monitoring compliance with restraining orders. Violation of a restraining order would result in prosecution and imprisonment.

50. In 2020, Parliament had enacted the Law on Combating Crimes against Sexual Freedom and Inviolability, which provided that persons convicted of crimes committed against the sexual freedom and inviolability of minors could be deprived of specific rights, including the right to work in educational institutions. Under the Law, a register of persons convicted and deprived of their rights was kept for the purposes of crime prevention and identification of reoffenders. The Ministry had appointed case managers to criminal police departments, whose role was to monitor criminals convicted of crimes against sexual freedom and inviolability. Campaigns to raise awareness of violence, including sexual violence, were conducted through meetings with target group representatives, as well as television programmes and social media networks.

51. Georgia had strict laws on combating child marriage, including unregistered marriage. Forced marriage knowingly committed against a minor was punishable by 2 to 4 years' imprisonment. There had been two cases in which the courts had punished persons for becoming engaged to a child; there was no need to establish a separate offence in that regard. From 2020 to 2024, the Ministry of Internal Affairs had opened investigations into some 700 criminal cases involving possible child marriage. The high number of cases did not mean that more crimes were being committed but was a reflection of increased reporting owing to awareness campaigns. When the authorities detected a possible offence, they immediately opened an investigation, which would be conducted by a specialized investigator. Restraining orders could be issued if necessary. In some cases, the victim had been separated from the abuser and placed in a shelter. Victims were provided with information about their rights and referred to the relevant services. The Human Rights Protection Department monitored all cases of child marriage offences in Georgia. Awareness-raising on the subject of child marriage had included the campaign "Don't Deprive Her of Her Childhood" and television and social media campaigns.

52. **A representative of Georgia** said that the prosecution service had a clear policy to effectively combat violence against children. Specialized prosecutors had worked on cases involving minors since 2016, as required by the Juvenile Justice Code; prosecutors specializing in sexual offences had been introduced in 2021. Specialization had resulted in an 86 per cent increase in prosecutions for sexual offences against children and a similar rise in the number of recognized victims of those offences. Between 2020 and 2023, 606 persons had been prosecuted for sexual offences against children, of whom 446 had been convicted.

53. In 2021, guidelines on the investigation and prosecution of sexual violence against children, including a chapter on child victims, recommending the involvement of psychologists in investigations, had been issued. In 2022, a compilation of guidelines for cases involving children had been produced and made available to all prosecutors. Training on juvenile justice was conducted on an ongoing basis. The prosecution service's specialized juvenile justice department systematically monitored relevant cases and used them as a basis for guidelines. It was planned to develop more detailed guidance on determining the best interests of the child in all investigative procedures.

54. From 2017 to 2023, 589 persons had been prosecuted for forced marriage offences involving 568 victims. The prosecution service had changed policy to prohibit plea bargains in cases of sexual acts with persons under 16, which had led to two recent convictions with sentences of 6 and 7 years' imprisonment.

55. A complex investigation into allegations of violence at Ninotsminda boarding school, involving over 200 witnesses, was ongoing. The forensic examinations of 22 persons had not resulted in a finding of ill-treatment, the examinations of 7 persons had yet to be completed and 4 persons had refused to be examined. One person had officially been recognized as a victim. All potential victims could familiarize themselves with the case materials and 11 had done so to date. The alleged rape at the school was also under investigation.

56. **Mr. Chopel** said that he would like to know how the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the amended Law on General Education and the Code on the Rights of the Child had contributed to improving services for children with disabilities, particularly with regard to teachers and other education staff, and what financial and human resources were in place to ensure their effective application. He would appreciate a response to concerns that the lack of reliable data on disability negatively affected service accessibility and led to insufficient measures being taken to prevent the abandonment and institutionalization of children with disabilities. It would be useful to have information about services to assist foster families with children who had behavioural and mental health issues. He wished to hear about policies and plans to address violence against children with disabilities and the shortage of child-sensitive disability professionals, including in law enforcement and the judiciary. He would be interested to learn about any awareness-raising campaigns aimed at government officials, families and the general public to combat the stigmatization of and prejudice against children with disabilities and instead promote a positive image of them as rights holders.

57. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she would like to know whether it was planned to expand the coverage of cash transfers, including for asylum-seeking children. She wondered what was being done to reduce child poverty, and what measures had been taken or planned to ensure access to drinking water and sanitation facilities, particularly in remote and rural areas. She would like to know how the impact of climate change was taken into account with respect to children's rights, including in relation to health monitoring and natural disasters. She wondered whether children's views and concerns were considered in the development of environmental and climate change policies.

58. With regard to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, she would like to know what had been done to implement the anti-terrorism strategy, and especially to tackle the sociological, economic and ideological causes of terrorism and to prevent children from being used in terrorist acts. She wished to hear about any plans to incorporate in the Criminal Code an explicit prohibition on the recruitment of children by the armed forces and non-State armed groups. She asked what measures had been taken to ensure that children attending military academies followed the general curriculum and were not subjected to military discipline or required to use firearms or real bullets. She wished to hear

about any mechanism to identify asylum-seekers who had been involved in armed conflicts and measures to promote their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

59. **Ms. Zara** (Country Task Force) said that she would like to know what measures had been taken to facilitate access to education for ethnic minorities, including by addressing the shortage of teachers in non-Georgian language schools. She wished to hear about the Government's strategy for upgrading school infrastructure in remote areas, where many schools lacked running water and sanitation, and the financial resources allocated to develop and expand early years education. She wondered what had been done to ensure access to high-quality education for all children and to increase incentives and professional development opportunities for teachers in remote areas, thereby combating school dropout.

60. She wished to hear about plans to address a lack of access to high-quality preschool education for children with disabilities and those in remote areas, living in poverty or speaking minority languages. She would appreciate information about measures taken to ensure that all children received free, high-quality primary and secondary education with effective and relevant learning outcomes, to improve education quality and infrastructure, and to provide high-quality teacher training, focusing on rural areas. She wished to hear about the strategy adopted to ensure that all children, especially those with disabilities and those in rural areas, had adequate computer equipment and Internet access, and to ensure access to remote vocational training, including for disadvantaged children.

61. She would be interested to learn about any training for teachers on non-violent discipline and communication with children conducted by child psychologists and child rights specialists, and about measures taken to ensure that all schools had psychologists available for both students and teachers. She wondered what the State party was doing to combat restrictions on the use of Georgian in schools in areas outside its effective control, imposed by the occupying Power, and what other efforts had been made to support such schools.

62. **Ms. Correa** said that she would appreciate updated statistics on major health issues, including lead exposure. It would be helpful to know the situation for adolescent girls with respect to sexual and reproductive health and the strategies implemented for HIV/AIDS prevention. Information about the comprehensive mental health programmes put in place by the Ministry of Health would be welcome. She wished to hear about the coverage of the assistance mechanism available to poor households, any plans to expand it and local implementation strategies.

63. She would like to receive up-to-date statistics on displaced, asylum-seeking and refugee children and to know why the numbers enrolled in specialist programmes were low. She wondered whether there were any plans to conduct a new child labour survey, in view of the post-pandemic situation and the increased number of displaced children. She wished to understand the operation of the labour inspection system, and in particular how it coordinated with specialized protection services, including whether possible criminal offences were referred to the prosecution service, and how inspectors addressed criminal sexual exploitation. She would appreciate updated information on the labour migration of children to Türkiye and details of any actions being taken or planned to address the phenomenon of labour exploitation.

64. She would like to receive up-to-date statistics on children in street situations and to know which authority was competent to address such situations and how it coordinated with other protection agencies. She would appreciate an explanation of the policy of placing such children in shelters. It would be useful to have more information on the issues faced during implementation of the unified State strategy to address violence against children in street situations for the period 2023–2026 and the related action plan. She wished to know more about the operation of the mobile groups working with such children in major cities. She would be interested to hear what was being done to prevent children from returning to the streets and to ensure that they were placed with foster families where their rights to protection, health and education were upheld, in line with deinstitutionalization policies.

65. She would appreciate receiving detailed information about the training for judges and prosecutors specialized in juvenile justice, including the level and type of course, the institutions where it was provided and the assessment methods. She wished to better

understand the role of social workers in protecting children's interests during legal proceedings, and she wondered whether lawyers might not be better placed to offer such protection, especially to uphold procedural safeguards.

66. Lastly, she wished to know how many minors were currently serving custodial sentences, how pretrial detention for juveniles was managed, and for what types of offences and periods juveniles could be sentenced to imprisonment. She wondered how justice was administered to meet the goals of rehabilitation and uphold the rights of children in conflict with the law.

67. **Ms. Todorova** said that she would like to know whether an impact analysis had been carried out concerning the effect on civil society organizations working with and for children of the bill on transparency of foreign influence. She wished to have more information on the proposed constitutional amendments on the protection of family values and minors, and their potential implications for children's rights and current children's rights legislation. She would appreciate a response to concerns about increased xenophobia, including violent incidents, particularly against nationals of African and Asian countries. She would also appreciate comments on reports of increased violence and discrimination by homophobic and anti-gender groups against LGBTQ persons and their exclusion from education and health settings. She wished to know what measures would be taken to protect children who might be affected by discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

68. **Ms. Correa** said that she would like to know whether any studies had been conducted on the impact of surrogacy on the best interests of the child and children's right to know their origins. She wished to know how the State party regulated surrogacy undertaken abroad.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.