



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2796th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Friday, 10 May 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Skelton

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Initial report of Panama on the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC/C/OPSC/PAN/1; CRC/C/OPSC/PAN/Q/1; CRC/C/OPSC/PAN/RQ/1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Panama joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the delegation of Panama to the meeting, explained that some members of the delegation would be participating via video link.
3. **A representative of Panama** said that Panama had ratified the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography pursuant to Act No. 47 of 2000. The ratification of the Optional Protocol demonstrated her Government's commitment to preventing activities that amounted to serious human rights violations and which compromised children's future.
4. The establishment of the national standing committee on the implementation of and follow-up to the national and international human rights commitments made by Panama had allowed the Government to quantify progress and identify challenges in the sphere of human rights. Thanks to the work of the committee, the Government had been able to submit seven reports to the human rights treaty bodies and four reports to the inter-American human rights system. The seventh periodic report of Panama under the Convention on the Rights of the Child was due to be submitted soon.
5. The country's legal and institutional framework had been strengthened by the adoption of Act No. 79 of 2011, on trafficking in persons and related activities, and the establishment of the National Commission against Trafficking in Persons. The Commission had taken steps to comprehensively address the problem of trafficking, focusing on prevention, protection and prosecution. Awareness-raising and training had been organized, and services had been provided to victims. Several investigations and operations had led to the dismantling of trafficking networks and the rescue of many vulnerable persons.
6. The aim of Act No. 171 of 2020, on the comprehensive protection of early childhood and early childhood development, was to ensure the well-being of children from birth until the age of 8 years. Under the Act, a mechanism had been established to ensure a rapid institutional response to cases of abuse, ill-treatment, exploitation and discrimination. The Government had established the System of Guarantees and Comprehensive Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents under Act No. 285 of 2022.
7. The National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family provided psychological support through the Tía Elaine hotline in cases related to violence and possible violations of the rights of children and adolescents. Between 2020 and 2022, the hotline had benefited over 5,200 users and received an average of 372 calls per month.
8. Provincial and municipal committees for children and adolescents had been established, with the participation of local authorities, to coordinate actions to address the problems of child abuse and violence against children. In 2019, an observatory on the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents had been set up to monitor the national situation and report on the issue, thus increasing social awareness.
9. The Panama Tourism Authority had completed the first draft of a code of ethics for the tourism sector, which it aimed to adopt in 2024. The new code would establish clear standards of conduct and responsibility for tourism companies and professionals, while promoting a culture of awareness and vigilance to effectively prevent and address sexual exploitation.
10. Panama had a robust legal framework for the prevention and punishment of the behaviours, acts and activities covered by the Optional Protocol, which had been defined as offences under the Criminal Code. In respect of criminal procedure, the Public Prosecution Service operated seven Gesell chambers throughout the country, thus protecting the privacy and the integrity of victims. Juvenile courts relied on adapted spaces that served as Gesell

chambers, while training was provided to the interdisciplinary teams, judges and lawyers attached to those courts. By virtue of Act No. 409 of 2023, which established the System for the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents, the justice system was supported by various entities devoted to safeguarding the rights of children and adolescents, including the Public Defence Institute and the Department of Legal Aid for Crime Victims.

11. In 2019, the Government had set up an inter-institutional committee for the protection of unaccompanied migrant children and adolescents, which provided children and adolescents with ongoing support and facilitated their identification and transfer to protection centres or foster families, in accordance with Act No. 46 of 2013, the General Adoption Act. A manual had been prepared setting out procedures for monitoring the quality of care in children's homes and protection centres. The Ministry of Health provided a range of services for the comprehensive health care of migrant children and adolescents, including immunization, treatment and family counselling.

12. The Government had also adopted a protocol for the identification and care of refugee children, which was based on the principle of non-refoulement and children's right to be heard, and which recognized the need for appropriate measures so that children seeking refugee status received the protection and assistance necessary to fully exercise their rights. Moreover, the Government coordinated with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the International Committee of the Red Cross, the International Organization for Migration and non-governmental organizations on measures to protect migrant children and adolescents.

13. The Government was committed to strengthening its institutional capacity, particularly for the collection of data and qualitative information. It would continue to support multilateral efforts to eradicate violence and all forms of violence against children and adolescents, so that all children could grow up in a safe and secure environment where their rights were protected and their voices heard.

14. **Mr. Gudbrandsson** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would be interested to know about any shortcomings in the reporting, investigation or prosecution of offences covered by the Optional Protocol which might explain why such offences accounted for only a fraction of cases of sexual violence against children. He wondered what was being done to improve the collection of data, so that the State party might publish figures broken down by age, gender, nationality, socioeconomic background and rural or urban residence. The Committee would also appreciate data disaggregated by type of offence and data on the number of child victims who had received counselling, support or compensation.

15. The establishment of the observatory on the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents was a welcome development, as it presented an opportunity to gather qualitative information. He would be interested to know whether the Government had promoted or disseminated the observatory's research or had relied upon its analysis to inform the formulation of policies.

16. Legislation to strengthen child protection, such as Act No. 285 of 2022, was welcome. However, he was concerned that the State party's laws failed to adequately address offences covered by the Optional Protocol. He wondered whether the Government had considered introducing more robust laws to prevent and address online child sexual exploitation, including by criminalizing the grooming of children, the viewing of the sexual abuse of children live-streamed over the Internet, the distribution of child sexual abuse material, including self-generated content produced from coerced sexting, and sexual extortion. Had the State party taken steps to ensure that Internet service providers had effective procedures for blocking and removing harmful material? What measures had been taken to implement Act No. 230 of 2021 introducing the Amber Alert system to ensure a rapid response to reports of missing children?

17. It would be interesting to know whether any steps had been taken to involve Indigenous, provincial and local authorities in efforts to implement the Optional Protocol and whether the State party had increased community participation, including children's participation, in policy formulation and evaluation processes.

18. Furthermore, the Committee would be interested to know what steps had been taken to improve coordination between the agencies responsible for protecting children's rights, and why the National Intersectoral Committee for the Prevention of Violence against Children and Adolescents seemed not to be functioning. The delegation might indicate whether the National Multisectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violence against Children 2018–2022 had been implemented, reviewed and updated. Information on measures to strengthen the Public Prosecution Service's Unit for the Protection of Victims, Witnesses, Experts and Other Participants, such as the allocation of adequate resources and the recruitment of specialized personnel, would be welcome.

19. He wished to know what measures had been taken to develop long-term awareness-raising programmes for professionals and the public, including children and families. He wondered how the State party ensured that the media respected children's right to privacy and reported on offences covered by the Optional Protocol in an informed and ethical manner. It would be useful to know whether the State party had developed any programmes or projects to build the capacity of civil society organizations to address offences covered by the Optional Protocol. Recalling that the National Commission for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Offences worked in the areas of prevention, training and public awareness in relation to the sexual exploitation of minors, he asked whether the Committee might be provided with more information on those activities, and why, given their different fields of expertise, the Commission was attached to the Public Prosecution Service. Lastly, he would welcome information on measures taken to prevent vulnerable children – including victims of domestic violence, migrant, asylum-seeking and refugee children, Indigenous children, rural children, children in street situations, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children, children living in poverty, children with disabilities and children in residential or foster care – from falling victim to offences covered by the Optional Protocol.

20. **Mr. Pedernera Reyna** (Country Rapporteur) said that, as the Committee was concerned about impunity, he would be grateful for information on the number of prosecutions brought and convictions secured in connection with the offences covered by the Optional Protocol. As it was unclear that the penalties set forth in the Criminal Code were commensurate with the gravity of those offences, he wished to know what penalties might be applied, for instance, in the event of an aggravated offence of trafficking in persons committed against a minor. The delegation might like to comment on reports that offenders benefited from grounds for exemption from criminal liability that allowed them to avoid custodial sentences. It might also explain what steps had been taken to ensure that criminal proceedings were not unduly prolonged.

21. As the State party had ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, he was curious to know how the State party addressed the issue of enforced disappearance in the context of adoptions. He would appreciate clarification regarding the status and likely impact of the proposed amendments to the General Adoption Act.

22. The Committee would welcome further information on measures taken, in addition to the introduction of Gesell chambers, to protect child victims of offences and prevent their revictimization. He would be interested to know whether any awareness campaigns had been conducted to keep children safe on the Internet and ensure that they did not fall victim to cybercrime.

23. Noting that the Ombudsman's Office was accredited with B status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, he asked what steps the State party was taking to bring it into full compliance with the Paris Principles and how the State party intended to strengthen the Office and support its activities within the framework of the Optional Protocol.

24. According to the report, a new version of the National Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents, which dated from 2008–2010, was being drafted. He wished to know whether the National Plan had been evaluated, what lessons had been learned and whether the new plan for 2019–2025 had been adopted.

25. Lastly, he wondered whether the State party might alter the arrangement whereby the proceeds of the \$1 departure tax collected from tourists travelling through Tocumen International Airport were allocated to non-governmental organizations, and whether the State might instead use those funds directly for activities to combat sexual exploitation under the Optional Protocol.

The meeting was suspended at 3.40 p.m. and resumed at 3.55 p.m.

26. **A representative of Panama** said that, in line with the protocol applied by the Unit for the Protection of Victims, Witnesses, Experts and Other Participants, service users were referred to the appropriate health or mental health services. The National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family conducted follow-up home visits for child victims: between 2019 and 2022, 7,553 follow-up sessions had taken place.

27. While Act No. 285 of 2022 and Act No. 409, which had entered into force in May 2024, did not contain the term “grooming”, they did set out regulations governing the appropriate use of virtual settings by children and adolescents, as well as penalties for psychological or sexual abuse committed against minors in those settings. Training programmes had been set up to inform parents about grooming, online harassment and the appropriate use of parental controls on mobile devices. In addition, the Ministry was piloting initiatives aimed at young people, using colloquial language and computer games to help them understand the dangers they might face online.

28. Advisory boards had been rolled out nationwide to enable children and adolescents to participate in decision-making processes. Boards had been established in the provinces of Colón and Panama West in 2017, the province of Panama in 2018 and the province of Chiriquí in 2023.

29. **A representative of Panama** said that, with the aim of avoiding revictimization, the Unit for the Protection of Victims, Witnesses, Experts and Other Participants provided comprehensive support to victims through 11 local offices. The Unit had a number of relevant protocols in place, including one for victims of sexual offences. A manual for the use of Gesell chambers had been in use since 2015. Under article 391 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, minors and other vulnerable persons were permitted to give statements and testimony via video link to avoid having to face their aggressor.

30. Multidisciplinary teams were available in every province to provide support to children and adolescents who were victims of crime. The Unit employed 42 psychologists, 32 social workers, 13 legal assistants and 6 Gesell chamber operators nationwide. In response to the challenges engendered by the scale of migrant flows through Darién, a Gesell chamber had been set up, and 85 per cent of public officials who interacted with child victims had received training on how best to provide them with support. Prosecutors and other employees of the Public Prosecution Service had been trained in the use of Gesell chambers, and two sessions had been organized with, inter alia, judges and victims’ advocates to discuss best practices in the use of the chambers.

31. **A representative of Panama** said that efforts were being made to improve the collection of the departure fee levied on foreign nationals when they left the country, since the fee was currently imposed only at Tocumen International Airport and the income generated from it remained below the level provided for in the legislation regulating the charge. Some progress had already been made in reducing the delays in the transfer of funds from the airport authorities to the National Commission for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Offences.

32. Following the expiry of the National Plan for the Prevention and Elimination of the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Adolescents in 2010, work had begun on an updated version of the Plan, including through the completion of research supported by UNICEF. The process had gained new impetus with the appointment of a new commissioner to head the National Commission, and between June and October 2023 a national assessment had been conducted, with input from local authorities, civil society, the private sector – with a particular focus on the tourism industry – and Indigenous Peoples. There were plans to set up provincial offices of the National Commission for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Offences, which would require adjustments to budgetary allocations.

33. Since 2021, a campaign entitled “People not Objects” had been conducted on television and radio, online and in the press to raise awareness of risk factors that could make people more vulnerable to cybercrime.

34. **A representative of Panama**, replying to the question about the National Multisectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violence against Children, said that Act No. 285 of 2022 had established the System of Guarantees and Comprehensive Protection of the Rights of Children and Adolescents and the National Council for Children and Adolescents. The National Council was a forum for consultation and coordination between government bodies, civil society, academia and children and adolescents and was overseen by the Ministry of Social Development. Subordinate to the Council, a commission for the prevention of violence against children and adolescents had been created and was currently working to update the National Multisectoral Strategy.

35. Following the adoption of Act No. 285, robust efforts were being made to improve coordination and cooperation between provincial authorities and local communities and to increase awareness of the content of Act No. 285 and Act No. 171 of 2020. The two Acts governed safeguarding and comprehensive protection in early childhood and together formed part of a systematic shift towards a rights-based approach to child protection.

36. The media were also regulated by Act No. 285, which covered their role in education, the dissemination of social and cultural information and addressing the informational needs of children and adolescents. The Act also contained provisions designed to ensure that the media did not disseminate messages that violated children’s rights or had a negative impact on their physical, mental or social development. Television programmes depicting pornography, social vices or violent, criminal or discriminatory attitudes or behaviour must not be broadcast at a time when children might see them.

37. The observatory on the sexual exploitation of children and adolescents was represented on the National Council for Children and Adolescents. Legislation on an Amber Alert system had been adopted, and the system was now operational and had already proved to be effective in efforts to recover missing children. A website had been set up, and alerts were also shared on social networks. The system benefited from inter-agency and intersectoral cooperation, with the involvement of the Public Prosecution Service, law enforcement agencies and the media.

38. **A representative of Panama** said that the introduction of oral proceedings had reduced the length of criminal prosecutions. The oral system had been rolled out gradually, beginning in the provinces in 2011, with a view to identifying best practices in its use. The Code of Criminal Procedure provided for a period of six months for the investigation phase, from the time charges were laid. In complex cases, that period could be extended to up to two years, subject to prior authorization. Due process judges were responsible for ensuring that procedural safeguards were respected and that the rights of suspects were upheld. Significant investments had been made, both in the recruitment of additional judges and in the upgrading of technological systems, to ensure the full implementation of the oral system and to deal with cases that had been pending since before the move away from the inquisitorial system. Judges had been provided with training on the workings of the new system. A protocol was in place for cases involving trafficking in persons.

39. Act No. 40 of 1999, on the criminal responsibility of adolescents, was in the process of being overhauled. The Brasilia Regulations regarding Access to Justice for Vulnerable People were applied in all relevant criminal proceedings, and a specialized unit was in place for the defence of minors in conflict with the law. The budget for the criminal prosecution system had been increased from US\$ 61 million in 2009 to around US\$ 330 million in 2023. Children’s and family courts, which in 2023 had been allocated a budget of about US\$ 12 million, ensured that the rights of minors were upheld.

40. **A representative of Panama** said that the authorities were committed to strengthening data collection processes. The National Statistics and Census Institute had simplified its website to make statistical information more readily available. The site contained 47 downloadable datasets and a number of interactive dashboards, seven of which were based on information from the 2023 census. An additional dashboard on children and adolescents was under development. The second National Survey on Disabilities had been

completed and the results, including those relating to minors, would soon be released. UNICEF had provided support for a consultation process that had taken place between September 2023 and February 2024 with a view to analysing the status of children's rights in Panama. A memorandum of understanding with UNICEF was being drawn up for the completion of a multiple indicator cluster survey.

41. **A representative of Panama** said that the National Plan against Trafficking in Persons 2022–2027, which had been developed by the National Commission against Trafficking in Persons, was the country's third such plan. The Commission, on which a number of institutions were represented, focused on prevention and awareness-raising, victim protection and support, prosecution, international cooperation, and monitoring and follow-up. The Commission oversaw operations both domestic and international, including a recent one in which five Panamanian minors had been rescued with the help of the Costa Rican authorities. Two domestic operations to rescue trafficking victims, Operation Medusa and Operation Omega, had taken place in 2023. Prison sentences for trafficking were lengthened if the victim was a minor and if the perpetrator was a close relative of the victim.

42. **A representative of Panama** said that, under the teacher training plan of the Ministry of Education, activities to convey the idea that violence would not be tolerated were organized for large numbers of schools and teachers, and teachers were made familiar with methods of preventing child sexual abuse and cyberbullying. In 2020, even before the COVID-19 outbreak had been declared a pandemic, the authorities had taken steps to help ensure that children could use the Internet safely. The aim of one human rights education module was to alert young people to the dangers of trafficking in persons and ensure that they knew where to turn for help.

43. **A representative of Panama** said that parts of the bill that would have repealed some provisions of the General Adoption Act had been vetoed by the Office of the President. The second reading of the bill in the National Assembly had been under way since August 2021.

44. The authorities had used digital and other platforms to organize campaigns for the prevention of violence against children and the promotion of their rights. Those campaigns, which had reached more than 31,000 people between 2019 and 2022, had touched on specific issues such as communication in the home, positive parenting, family harmony and the prevention of the online sexual exploitation of children and adolescents. There was also a hotline for psychological support. It, too, had served thousands of users in recent years.

45. **Mr. Pedernera Reyna** asked what the authorities were doing to offer protection to child migrants, not all of whom spoke Spanish, after their harrowing crossings of the Darién Gap. He also asked what measures the State party was planning to take with a view to combating violations of children's rights on such transnational digital platforms as Instagram and WhatsApp. How did it intend to reconcile efforts to protect the right to privacy and the rights of the child?

46. **Ms. Beloff** said that, as parents who disapproved of their daughter's boyfriend sometimes reported the boy to the police, she wished to know how consensual sexual activity by minors above the age of consent would be addressed in the new Criminal Code, reforms to which were ongoing. She also wished to know whether efforts were made to ensure that resources were optimized as part of the reorganization of the institutions that had a mandate to combat trafficking in persons.

47. **Mr. Gudbrandsson** said that he would welcome more information on how consensual sexting by adolescents was addressed in the law. He wondered, for example, whether the law made any mention of the age of the persons who exchanged sexually explicit images that they had created themselves.

48. He would welcome an explanation of what was done, in particular in judicial proceedings related to the crimes of child pornography or the sale and sexual exploitation of children, to determine what course of action was in the best interests of the child. He wondered, too, whether the Amber Alert Commission was active.

49. It would be helpful to learn more about how child victims of crimes covered by the Optional Protocol were treated in the justice system. Measures were evidently taken to keep them from having to encounter the accused person, but he wished to know, for instance,

whether child victims had to take the stand in court or whether recorded statements sufficed. He also wished to know whether they had to wait for a guilty verdict to receive therapy and trauma support, what steps were taken to ensure that the medical, social and psychological services worked together to provide multidisciplinary forms of support and whether protocols for interviewing child victims had been developed.

50. **Ms. Kiladze** said that it would be interesting to know what steps the authorities took to ensure that there was no overlap in the work of the National Commission for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Offences, the National Council for Children and Adolescents and the National Commission against Trafficking in Persons.

51. **Ms. Aho** said that she wondered what measures were taken to protect child victims who reported what had been done to them from reprisals, whether training and capacity-building efforts were designed not only for judges and prosecutors but also for civil society, and who managed the monetary damages that child victims were sometimes awarded. She also wondered whether children had the right to a court-appointed lawyer.

The meeting was suspended at 5.05 p.m. and resumed at 5.15 p.m.

52. **A representative of Panama** said that Act No. 285 of 2022 made ample provision for the recognition of children's rights and best interests in all legislative, administrative and judicial proceedings, as well as in educational and social processes undertaken by public or private entities. Under the Act, the recognition of children's rights and best interests presupposed their effective involvement in all decisions that had an impact on their lives. The system of guarantees protecting children and adolescents was overseen by a steering committee headed by the Ministry of Social Development, with members drawn from other ministries, the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family, and the National Council for Children and Adolescents. The National Council for Children and Adolescents, the National Commission for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation Offences, the Anti-Trafficking Commission and the National Commission against Trafficking in Persons each had their own separate sphere of responsibility and there was no overlapping of functions.

53. The Government had rolled out the so-called Beehive Strategy to tackle multidimensional poverty among the most vulnerable groups in the country, including in Indigenous and rural areas and among disadvantaged urban communities. Thanks to the strategy, which prioritized care for very young children, multidimensional poverty had fallen by more than five percentage points between 2018 and 2022. The Amber Alert system was up and running and had produced excellent results. Panama worked actively alongside neighbouring States and dedicated enormous resources to provide care and protection for the increasing numbers of irregular migrants entering the country. Migration was a global issue that had to be addressed on the basis of principles of solidarity and shared responsibility, while always prioritizing the integrity of human life. At the same time, it was important to provide people with the possibility of living dignified lives in their own countries and therefore not finding themselves obliged to face the perils of irregular migration.

54. **A representative of Panama** said that, under the Constitution and the law, all children and adolescents had to be treated equally, irrespective of their status. That meant that the State had an obligation to ensure the welfare and protection of every child, Panamanian or non-Panamanian, on national territory. Thus, government programmes for the support and welfare of children and adolescents were applicable to all minors, regardless of their migration status or that of their parents, on a basis of equality and non-discrimination. In order to provide optimal protection to persons entering the country across the inhospitable southern jungles of Darién, it would be very helpful to have information about irregular migration flows from the moment the migrants began moving towards the Panamanian frontier. Such information would help the authorities to prepare for their arrival.

55. The National Migration Service, which was part of the Ministry of Public Security, worked hand in hand with the Public Prosecution Service, the courts and the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family to protect and care for minors as they entered national territory. Foreigners entering the country were recorded in a single register, which had been improved considerably over recent years. The biographical data of migrant children, irrespective of whether they were regular or irregular migrants, were entered into

the register and they were assigned an identity number which ensured that they remained traceable and allowed them to access a gamut of State services. That was particularly important in the case of children who remained in the country. The Panamanian authorities had arrested several persons for serious migration-related offences, such as paedophilia.

56. **A representative of Panama** said that consensual sexual relations between minors under the age of 14 were not considered to constitute an offence and were dealt with via a process of protection and education. However, a situation in which a minor between the ages of 15 and 18 engaged in sexual relations with a minor under the age of 14 did constitute an offence. Such matters were dealt with by special judges and special prosecutors under the juvenile justice system, which always took account of the best interests of the child and in which the purpose of any penalties handed down was to educate rather than to punish. In such cases, trial proceedings and penalties were regulated by Act No. 40 of 1999, which was currently in the process of being amended to bring it into line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to better reflect recommendations made by the Committee.

57. A children's court in Darién provided protection for child migrants entering the country who were thought to be victims of a crime. They were allocated a lawyer and attended by a multidisciplinary team of social workers, psychiatrists and health-care professionals. If it emerged that the children were victims of a crime, then the Public Prosecution Service would intervene to investigate the offence. In 2023, the court had dealt with a total of 201 children – 113 girls and 88 boys – who had subsequently been returned to their families, thanks to the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family.

58. **A representative of Panama** said that a mechanism existed to ensure that children called to give testimony during trial proceedings were not revictimized by being forced to confront their presumed aggressor in the courtroom. Under that mechanism, prosecutors could arrange for vulnerable children to pre-record their testimony, which would then be delivered to the court using videoconferencing or other technological means.

59. **A representative of Panama** said that the courts had recently set a favourable precedent by handing down a conviction in a trafficking case in which, for the first time, the sentence also envisaged monetary compensation for the victim who, in the case in question, was an adolescent of Panamanian nationality who had been a victim of labour exploitation.

60. **A representative of Panama** said that children's right to online protection was enshrined in Act No. 285 of 2022, while the Criminal Code criminalized the corruption and sexual exploitation of minors. Under the joint application of those two pieces of legislation, adults convicted of online grooming with a view to the sexual abuse of children could be liable to terms of imprisonment of up to 15 years. If the perpetrator was a child, however, the matter would be dealt with under the juvenile justice system. In that regard, Panama was also seeking to involve the broader community in prevention efforts; to that end, the National Secretariat for Children, Adolescents and the Family was running campaigns to help children and their families recognize grooming and exploitation, understand its dangers and learn how to avoid it.

61. **A representative of Panama** said that the Government had signed 14 bilateral agreements and a number of multilateral agreements on mutual legal assistance. Under those agreements, Panama could cooperate with other States in relation to acts that were criminalized under Panamanian legislation. Such cooperation could take the form, inter alia, of assistance in investigations and other legal proceedings or the confiscation of goods and instruments related to an offence. In the absence of any agreement, such assistance was regulated by the international principle of reciprocity. Between 2021 and 2024, Panama had provided assistance on 47 occasions in relation to offences involving child pornography, the abduction of minors and rape.

62. **Mr. Pedernera Reyna** said that he was curious to know if the authorities intended to abolish the requirement for double criminality in cases of extradition for offences covered by the Optional Protocol.

63. **The Chair** said that that the delegation was welcome to submit any additional information in writing within 48 hours; that information would be considered by the Committee when drafting its concluding observations.

64. **Mr. Gudbrandsson** said that he wished to thank the delegation for the very substantive answers it had provided to the Committee's questions.

65. **A representative of Panama** said that the meeting with the Committee was a crucial way for his Government to better evaluate the progress made and the challenges that remained. The outcome of the interactive dialogue would guide the authorities in their efforts to draw up more effective policies to protect and promote the rights of children and adolescents in Panama.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.