



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2794th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 9 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 third to fifth periodic reports of Mali (CRC/C/MLI/3-5, CRC/C/MLI/Q/3-5 and CRC/C/MLI/RQ/3-5)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Mali joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the delegation and the Permanent Representative of Mali to the meeting, explained that additional members of the delegation would be participating via video link.
3. **A representative of Mali** said that her country's periodic report (CRC/C/MLI/3-5) covered the period from 2008 to 2022, while more up-to-date information had been provided in the replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/MLI/RQ/3-5). The delay in submitting the report had been caused by the multidimensional security and institutional crisis that her country had been experiencing since 2012. The meeting with the Committee was an important opportunity for her country to showcase the efforts that, notwithstanding the crisis, it had been making to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to follow up on the recommendations that the Committee had made in its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/MLI/CO/2).
4. The periodic report addressed many issues, including the definition of the child, the family environment, alternative care, education, health and special protection measures. The replies to the list of issues focused on topics such as the reservation to article 16, the harmonization of national laws with the Convention, the adoption of a national policy for the promotion and protection of children, the enforcement of the Child Protection Code, the strengthening of the National Human Rights Commission, and the implementation of the Committee's general comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change.
5. Mali had ratified the Convention on 20 September 1990, just one year after it had been adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations. That was an indication of the country's determination to make the promotion of children a national development priority, and Mali continued to make every effort to meet its obligations in that regard. Notably, it had rolled out plans and policies in favour of children, enacted legislation on the age of criminal responsibility and juvenile justice, created public structures for the promotion and protection of the child, held events to disseminate awareness of children's rights among the public at large and established the Children's Parliament.
6. However, grave challenges persisted, such as the lack of care for children in street situations, difficulties in finding families to adopt children in institutions, and poor socioeconomic assistance to help vulnerable families care for their children. For that reason, Mali welcomed partners respectful of its values and sovereignty to assist in efforts to support the rights of children, who accounted for 54 per cent of the country's population. The inter-Malian dialogue that the Government had recently launched with a view to restoring peace and national unity sought also to resolve the country's endemic problems and to promote human rights in general, and the rights of children in particular, across the whole of the national territory.
7. **Ms. Otani** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that she had been disappointed to learn from the replies to the list of issues that Mali was not currently considering withdrawing its reservation to article 16 of the Convention, despite having previously expressed the intention to do so. While she understood that the Persons and Family Code of Mali provided for protection of the right to privacy with certain limitations, the right to privacy under article 16 was not absolute and did admit lawful interference. In fact, the scope of the right under the Convention was the same as that enshrined in article 10 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which Mali had ratified without reservation. In the light of that, she hoped that Mali might reconsider the possibility of withdrawing its reservation. Similarly, she wondered why the State party had no plans to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on a communications procedure when it had accepted similar procedures

under, *inter alia*, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

8. She hoped that the delegation could provide an update on the status of the bill to amend the Child Protection Code, including the timeline for its adoption, as well as information on a timeline for evaluation of the National Policy for the Promotion and Protection of Children of 2014 and plans to develop a new policy. She looked forward to hearing about the assessment of the impact of the 2009 reforms to the National Directorate for the Promotion of the Child and the Family, under which services had been decentralized at the regional and subregional levels. She also wondered what specific measures had been taken to provide stable budgetary support for child protection. The Committee was eager to hear more about the nationwide roll-out of the experimental child protection database and wished to know how the data collected were disaggregated.

9. The delegation should describe how children in Mali could seek justice and remedies for violations of their rights and, specifically, if they could bring cases to court, if they required parental consent, if they had access to free legal aid, if they could file complaints with the National Human Rights Commission and if the relevant information was available in child-friendly language. Were there any instances of such complaints having been filed? She wondered if any thought had been given to designating a commissioner for children's rights. She hoped to hear more about the "strategic guidelines set out in the country's protection policy", mentioned in the replies to the list of issues. She wished to know if the Convention and its two Optional Protocols had been translated into all 13 national languages, and to learn more about efforts to raise awareness among parents, religious and traditional leaders and the general public.

10. In a ruling of May 2018, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights had found that the 2011 Persons and Family Code violated the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, specifically with regard to the minimum age for marriage and to the inheritance rights of children born to unmarried parents. She wished to know if the Government had any plans to rectify those situations and amend the Persons and Family Code accordingly. She also wished to know if the bill to criminalize slavery included provisions specifically to protect children from slavery. The delegation should inform the Committee about any measures taken or planned to eliminate *de facto* discrimination or stigma against children born to unmarried parents, children born into slavery, children with disabilities, children living in poverty and children in street situations.

11. She wondered if the obligation to give primary consideration to the best interests of the child was incumbent upon all governmental institutions, and she was curious to learn the legal basis underpinning the requirement for courts always to take account of the child's best interests. She hoped that the delegation could provide clarification concerning reports that death sentences were applicable to children under the 2008 Act on the Suppression of Terrorism. She would be interested to hear about any efforts to promote child participation at the local and community levels. She also wished to know if children's voices were heard in judicial and administrative proceedings concerning them, and whether the Children's Parliament had any role in the national decision-making processes.

12. She wondered whether the State party would consider including provisions to prohibit corporal punishment in the bill to amend the Child Protection Code. She wished to know if there were any harmful practices targeting children with albinism in Mali and, if so, what steps the Government was taking to prevent them. She hoped the delegation could update the Committee on the expected timeline for the adoption of the 2017 bill to prevent and punish gender-based violence and criminalize female genital mutilation. A clear legal framework explicitly prohibiting such mutilation was necessary, given the high prevalence of the practice in the country. The delegation should also explain how specific consideration was given to child victims in initiatives to address gender-based violence. Were multisectoral and child-sensitive approaches integrated into judicial proceedings for child victims, in order to prevent revictimization? Lastly, she hoped to hear about steps being taken to prevent the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Mali.

13. **Ms. Aho** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know what steps were taken to draw people's attention to the importance not only of registering the birth of their children but also of collecting the birth certificate. If certificates were issued free of charge, then it was important to make the public aware of that fact. Also in that regard, she wished to know how well equipped civil registry offices were, how accessible they were to the population as a whole, whether mobile offices were in operation, and whether registrars received any specific training. Were any specific measures in place to accommodate children born in refugee camps, displaced children and children in rural or nomadic communities?

14. She wished to know if any action had been taken to reduce statelessness. Were people aware of the procedures whereby they could acquire nationality? She hoped to hear more about the budget allocation, staff and operations of the Children's Parliament and other national structures through which children could make their views known, and about any measures to uphold children's right to religious freedom. She wished to know if special time slots were dedicated to children's programming on television and radio, including rural radio stations, and whether children themselves were involved in the broadcasts. Lastly, given the widespread use of electronic media, she hoped that the delegation could inform the Committee about measures in place to protect children from harmful online content, and to educate parents and children about the potential risks of the Internet.

15. **Mr. Jaffé** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to know why fathers and mothers were not considered as equals before the law in terms of their responsibility towards their children. In fact, the Persons and Family Code clearly favoured the father, who was designated as the head of the family, and the Code admitted polygamy, which was known to have a deleterious effect on children. In a society such as that of Mali, where extended families bore chief responsibility for the care of children, he asked what was done to help the most vulnerable families. He wondered what measures were taken in cases of family conflicts or other situations that affected the well-being of children and required action on the part of the State. Specifically, he wished to know if there were any institutions on the ground to which children could turn and which could intervene in the case of family problems. Which professional personnel were responsible for identifying and working with vulnerable families? How many social workers were there, and how were they distributed throughout the country? If children did have to be removed from their family, where were they placed and for how long? He wondered whether such placement was effected under court supervision and whether the premises in which they were placed were subject to regular oversight and control. The delegation should provide more details about the different private establishments for children and inform the Committee whether or not such establishments were certified and monitored. He would also appreciate more information about the categories of children placed there, whose numbers, particularly of those under 5, seemed to have increased considerably in recent years. He would appreciate it if the delegation could provide an explanation for that increase and tell the Committee what measures were being taken to deinstitutionalize such children and restore them to their extended families.

16. He wished to know how the national adoption system worked and how many adoptions took place. Were international adoptions still prohibited and, if so, was their unavailability one of the reasons for the increasing number of children in care facilities? He wondered if the State party had any plans to accede to the 1993 Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption. Information would be appreciated about the number and age of children whose parents were incarcerated, and about the care and support they received. Were their facilities where a child could be held with his or her incarcerated mother?

17. He would be interested to hear how children with disabilities were viewed in Malian society. Was the absence of information and data a sign that they suffered discrimination? He hoped to hear about government programmes to combat any stigmatization that they might face.

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

18. **A representative of Mali** said that the creation of a reception and guidance office in the National Directorate for the Promotion of the Child and the Family as part of the 2009 reforms had improved the delivery of services. Similarly, the establishment of planning,

monitoring and evaluation units within regional directorates for the promotion of the child and the family had led to a tangible improvement in the planning and coordination of activities undertaken by the Government.

19. Development of the child protection database, which had begun many years previously, was currently at an advanced stage. Indeed, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family was currently preparing to launch the Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS+) and its accompanying website. The process had entailed much work to modernize the data collection tools used by State institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international partners. Relevant actors would be trained in the use of the new digital tools.

20. The Children's Parliament was consulted on all actions related to children's rights and participated in activities such as training workshops and the preparation of documents. For example, it had participated in the development of the child protection bill, which would eventually replace the Child Protection Code, and the national multisectoral strategy to end child marriage. The Children's Parliament had a two-year term and budget, and it carried out its activities in accordance with national and regional action plans.

21. The Government had conducted a feasibility study with a view to establishing a hotline for children, which would initially cover the Bamako area before being rolled out in the rest of the country.

22. **A representative of Mali** said that, as a result of decentralization over many years, basic competences in the area of the promotion and protection of children's rights had been transferred to local authorities. Those authorities had forged partnerships with the National Directorate for the Promotion of the Child and the Family and with specialized departments at the region and *cercle* levels to address issues related to children's rights.

23. **A representative of Mali** said that she would provide information on the preliminary bill to criminalize slavery at a subsequent meeting. Children's ability to bring cases before the courts, in the event of a violation of their rights, was restricted by their lack of legal standing – however, they could assert their rights through a representative, which might be a parent. Children's right to legal aid was recognized. The State was working with partners on measures that would allow children to benefit from legal advice and to be heard in respect of decisions concerning them. There were also projects under which children who were victims of or witnesses to criminal offences were assisted by lawyers or social workers.

24. The National Human Rights Commission had a commissioner responsible for women's and children's affairs. Every December, the Commission conducted an awareness campaign in French and Bambara to inform the public about the institution and its work and procedures.

25. Following the judgment of the African Court on Human and People's Rights concerning the minimum legal age for marriage, the Government was implementing a strategy to put an end to child marriage. The strategy focused on assisting parents by creating income-generating activities, which would provide them with the means to keep their children in school rather than giving them into early marriage. The Government did not wish to impose amendments to the Personal and Family Code that went against the wishes of the population; instead, it aimed to make parents understand the negative consequences of early marriage.

26. The principle of the best interests of the child was guaranteed by law. Judges who did not respect the principle risked censure by the higher courts. The best interests of the child were therefore always taken into account in decisions affecting them, including in divorce proceedings.

27. Mali had endorsed the *Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups*. Moreover, the Government had issued a circular instructing all those involved in child protection to treat children who had been forcibly recruited by terrorist groups as victims. Demobilized child soldiers in Mali were not convicted, prosecuted or even taken before a judge, but were immediately referred to the authorities responsible for the promotion and protection of children's rights.

28. Measures were in place to support child victims throughout criminal proceedings. Criminal investigation officers were specifically trained in interviewing and dealing with children. Children were heard with respect for their privacy and dignity, and measures were taken to shield them from the media.

29. For several years, the Ministry of Justice had carried out projects to facilitate access to Malian citizenship for refugees and to raise awareness about statelessness. Information had been disseminated on the causes of statelessness, on groups of persons who risked becoming stateless and on the advantages of birth registration. Mobile court sessions had been organized in which civil registry services, including birth registration, had been provided for victims of forced displacement.

30. A project had been carried out to regularize the status of long-term refugees who had arrived in the Kayes region of Mali in 1989 as result of the conflict between Senegal and Mauritania. An initial survey had been conducted, in which the refugees had been asked whether they preferred to return to their country of origin or integrate into Malian society. More than half of respondents, some 15,000 people, had expressed a preference for integration. The project had resulted in more than 4,000 refugees regularizing their status.

31. In accordance with the pledge to establish a procedure for the determination of statelessness, a bill on statelessness, which would establish a commission for stateless persons, was being drawn up. The Government was developing a guide for persons at risk of statelessness who wished to regularize their situation. The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization had carried out a project to strengthen civil registry systems, which had enabled retroactive birth registration campaigns. Information on the naturalization procedure was disseminated through workshops and outreach in all regions of the country, with the participation of communities and authorities. In particular, authorities had been made aware of their role in facilitating the naturalization of stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness.

32. Regarding the equality of parents in decision-making concerning children, the provisions of the Personal and Family Code reflected the reality that the country had a largely Muslim population. However, if a mother could prove that her husband was not fulfilling his duties, or for some reason was prevented from doing so, the courts could recognize her as the head of household.

33. The Government did not share the view that polygamy had a negative impact on children. The practice was rooted in the country's customs and in no way violated any of the international commitments given by Mali. Indeed, Mali had not ratified any international instrument that prohibited polygamy.

34. **A representative of Mali** said that 87.7 per cent of births in Mali were registered. In urban areas, the figure stood at 92 per cent; in rural areas, 71 per cent. All stakeholders in the civil registry system had signed a memorandum of understanding with a view to ensuring systematic birth registration. Measures taken included the introduction of so-called village notebooks to collect data on births, the opening of birth registration centres in health facilities and the organization of mobile court sessions. As a result of those activities, more than 1 million children had been registered.

35. Furthermore, the Government, sometimes in cooperation with NGOs, had raised awareness of the importance and usefulness of civil registration. Civil registry services had not run out of print materials in recent years. A system had been put in place to enable the late birth registration of displaced persons and to issue birth certificates for all those who did not have them. The birth certificate itself was free; copies could be obtained for 100 CFA francs. The public was informed of the availability of free birth certificates by various means, including during antenatal check-ups and through meetings held in community health centres.

36. **A representative of Mali** said that public policies had been formulated to provide solutions for children deprived of parental protection. Private reception and placement establishments, created by a decree of 1997, cared for children aged up to 6, who were often orphans or had mental illnesses. Private reception, listening, guidance and accommodation establishments, on the other hand, cared for children aged between 6 and 18 from destitute

families. All such institutions were monitored by the State and had to submit the relevant documents before they were permitted to open. They were required to be situated in a suitable geographical location and to have infrastructure that allowed for the accommodation of children in the best possible conditions. Once authorized to operate, they were obliged to submit regular reports to the Government and to undergo inspections, sometimes unannounced, in order to ensure that the children were being properly cared for. Children's judges provided oversight and conducted checks on a quarterly basis.

37. It was true that the 2015–2019 action plan associated with the National Policy for the Promotion and Protection of Children had not been evaluated. However, annual action plans were drawn up and annual reports, which detailed all developments in the area of child protection, were submitted to the responsible ministry.

38. In terms of efforts to tackle the stigmatization of children with disabilities, the Cité des Enfants, a children's community centre that served as a space for the recreation and participation of children, made no distinction between children who had disabilities and those who did not. Children with disabilities could visit playrooms free of charge.

39. **A representative of Mali** said that, in matters of inheritance, the courts made no distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children. Under Malian law, to obtain a share of an inheritance, it was possible to apply to the courts for a *jugement d'hérédité* – a judgment that identified the heirs on the basis of evidence such as their birth certificates. Judges were required by law to declare legitimate and illegitimate children as heirs with equal rights. The case would then be referred to the notary in charge of settling the estate. It was possible that one or more heirs might, acting in bad faith, exclude an illegitimate child from the settlement. In such cases, the child in question had the right to apply to the court that had issued the *jugement d'hérédité* to retract the judgment; the judge could then hand down a new decision, recognizing the illegitimate child among the heirs and requiring the correction of the settlement.

40. Use of the country's 13 official languages was envisaged under the 10-Year Programme for the Development of Education and Culture. In the central and northern regions, a criminal justice system coordination framework brought together representatives of the United Nations and all large NGOs working on child protection in quarterly meetings. In the Mopti region, the Government had worked to ensure that explanations of civil, criminal and customary law procedures were available to children and their parents in all 13 languages, with funding from the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali and the International Development Law Organization.

41. The Government had taken note of the judgment of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights regarding child marriage and excision, which were sensitive issues in Mali. In cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment (UN-Women) and other key actors, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family had put together a framework to combat gender-based violence, particularly child marriage and excision. It had adopted a community-based approach, promoting the signing of local agreements to end such practices, which were subsequently approved by the courts. In the Mopti region, some agreements had been signed over 15 years previously, leading to the complete eradication of child marriage and excision in certain villages.

42. **A representative of Mali** said that an updated draft of the Child Protection Code was currently being reviewed to incorporate amendments requested by the Cabinet some years previously, bearing in mind comments made by traditional and religious leaders. A theme related to children's use of the Internet had been chosen for one of the children's days celebrated in Mali. Government agencies, along with national and international NGOs, conducted other awareness-raising campaigns on the subject of children and digital platforms. The national multilateral strategy to end child marriage had been adopted in 2020 and the related action plan was currently being implemented by the Government and its partners.

43. The ban on intercountry adoptions did not apply to couples with at least one Malian national, regardless of their country of residence. Adoptions within the country were increasing. The best interests of the child were ensured through background investigations of

prospective adoptive parents, focusing on their financial situation, before the final decision was made by the courts, in the presence of a representative of the National Directorate for the Promotion of the Child and the Family.

44. Currently, the majority of residential institutions for children were privately run. However, they were accredited by the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, Children and the Family, based on a review of relevant documents. An evaluation of such institutions and the challenges they faced had been conducted in 2018. Following the crisis in northern regions, some had closed. They accommodated children of unknown parentage, children of mentally ill mothers, children from families in difficult situations and orphans. Although the Government supported such institutions to the extent of its capacities, the level of demand meant that it was often obliged to rely on external partners.

45. **Ms. Otani** said that she would appreciate clarification on the applicability of the death penalty to persons who had been minors when they had committed terrorist offences. She would like to know whether the Government was considering making special arrangements to allow delayed birth registration in cases of crisis or displacement, as recommended by the Secretary-General in his fourth report on children and armed conflict in Mali (S/2022/856). She would appreciate confirmation that the national multisectoral strategy to end child marriage and the related action plan did not provide for the amendment of the Personal and Family Code to raise the minimum age of marriage. If so, she wondered whether the Government had any plans to do so.

46. **Ms. Aho** said that she would like to know whether the Government planned to adopt a strategy to modernize civil status registration and put in place a digital registration system. She wondered what was preventing the Government from further increasing the birth registration rate. She wished to know whether the judgments handed down in lieu of birth certificates at mobile courts were transcribed, what fees were charged for the court hearing and transcript, and whether the public was informed of the possibility of obtaining such a judgment. She asked what proportion of birth certificates went unclaimed and what was done with the documents. She would like to know how many civil registry offices there were and how many officials worked in them. She would be interested to hear about any strategies for ensuring that the births of displaced children were registered and birth certificates obtained.

47. **Mr. Jaffé** said that he would appreciate more information about the situation of children with different types of disabilities, the types of services provided and any relevant action plan based on the principle of the best interests of the child. He would appreciate a response to research showing that polygamy had a negative impact on children, bearing in mind that it was not practised in all Muslim countries.

48. **Ms. Todorova** said that the delegation's responses should focus on actions undertaken to implement the Convention by the Government, rather than the actions of NGOs and other partners. She wished to know what was being done to uphold article 18 of the Convention on the common responsibility of both parents for children's upbringing, given the male domination enshrined in the Personal and Family Code. She wished to understand how the courts could resolve the issue of discrimination against children of unmarried parents in matters of inheritance, for instance, unless the law was changed. She would be interested to hear the delegation's views on inequality in Internet access among children. It would be useful to receive more information about the reasons why children were left without parental care and to learn what measures the Government was taking to keep children with their families. She would appreciate clarification on whether adoption was recognized in Mali.

49. **Mr. Van Keirsbilck** (Country Task Force) said that he would like to know what was done to ensure that children were only placed in institutions as a solution of last resort that was regularly reviewed. He wondered whether efforts were made to find other family members as alternative carers before placement and whether social workers were employed to monitor the situation, meet families and identify their support needs. He would like to know what the State party was doing to regain control of all its territory so that it could uphold children's rights throughout the country.

50. **A representative of Mali** said that the reservation to article 16 of the Convention was necessary because traditional Malian culture did not allow children to have unrestricted liberty. Both parents and children had obligations to each other. Parents were responsible for

their children's development and flourishing, while children owed their parents respect and assistance. Children should remain under their parents' responsibility and guidance until they reached adulthood. Therefore, the liberty accorded to children by article 16 could not apply in the Malian social context. Reservations were a vital part of international law encouraging States to ratify international conventions.

51. **A representative of Mali** said that a number of measures had been taken to assist persons in need. Every October, as part of the Month of Solidarity, the Ministry of Health and Social Development conducted outreach campaigns across the country to provide persons in need with government assistance. Under a project implemented during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, all persons identified as needy by the relevant technical service had been given cash. The National Medical Assistance Agency paid for the medical care of persons whose families were unable to support them. The Government had created the conditions for children with disabilities to flourish and to study on an equal footing with others. Positive discrimination in favour of qualified persons with disabilities was applied in public sector recruitment.

52. **A representative of Mali** said that his country had not ratified the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure because it had no reason to. Children had satisfactory means of asserting their rights in the domestic legal system.

53. **Ms. Aho** said that she wondered what the State party's health budget was and what measures were being taken to ensure that everyone, in particular in regions affected by armed conflict, had access to health services, including the services that would enable women to give birth in good conditions. She also wondered what was done to staff all health facilities adequately and ensure that they were well equipped.

54. Efforts had been made to combat starvation, but she wished to know what additional steps were being taken to prevent acute and chronic malnutrition, especially among children under 5. Although caesarean sections were offered at no charge, it would be interesting to learn whether the women and girls who had them had to buy their own blood bags.

55. She was interested to know what vaccination rates were, whether vaccination campaigns covered all of the country, including the regions affected by conflict, and what was done to encourage parents who were reluctant to have their children vaccinated to change their minds. She wondered, too, what steps were taken to help the women, many of whom had given birth as girls, who were affected by obstetric fistulas. She wished to know what were the rates of morbidity and mortality in the State party. In addition, she wondered what efforts were made to provide adolescents with information about reproductive health and to support the pregnant girls who often had to resort to backstreet abortions.

56. A comment from the delegation on the nutritional or other measures – in connection with advertising, for example – that had been taken to reduce overweight and obesity would be welcome. Other topics on which she would welcome information included the State party's efforts to promote breastfeeding, its ability to ensure that children had access to mental health services and the measures it took to prevent the abuse of narcotic drugs, tramadol in particular, by children. In connection with HIV/AIDS, she wished to know what was done to prevent mother-to-child transmission, what percentage of the population was HIV-positive, what support services were available to HIV-positive mothers and children, and what was done to track down the HIV-positive children whose condition was no longer monitored.

57. She wondered whether climate change was covered in the school curriculum and what measures were being taken to help people who were affected by it. Forced begging, sometimes driven by poverty, was another problem affecting the State party's children. What were the authorities doing to fight poverty?

58. **Mr. Jaffé** said that he would appreciate detailed information on the plans that the State party was making to adapt to climate change and to involve children in the formulation of those plans. He wondered whether the delegation might not, on its return to the State party, take steps to ensure that, in all matters concerning climate change, children were recognized both as a vulnerable segment of the population and as agents of change. He wished to know, in that connection, whether children could be invited to participate in an exercise to further

revise the State party's intended contribution to combating climate change, and whether any plans had been made to recognize children's right to a healthy, safe and sustainable environment. What might the children of Mali do to highlight an issue, climate change, that troubled children the world over?

59. **Mr. Van Keirsbilck** said that he would like to know what could be done to ensure that all families that were entitled to cash transfers, including families displaced by conflict from their home villages, received them. He asked what measures, non-discriminatory and sustainable over the longer term, were being taken to improve food security for all ethnic communities in the State party. In view of the school closures affecting more than half a million children, he wished to know what steps were being taken, including programmes to build schools, to ensure that children in all parts of the country had access to education, of high quality if possible. He wondered whether learning materials were accessible, what steps were taken to ensure that girls had access to suitable sanitary facilities at school, and what efforts were made to prevent children from dropping out of school.

60. In some regions, teachers were volunteers who were reportedly forced to hide what they were doing because the occupying authorities took a dim view of education. In that connection, he wished to know whether work on the bill on safe schools was still under way and what it would involve when it was made law.

61. He wondered how the prohibition of corporal punishment in school settings was enforced, and what advocacy and training efforts were made to familiarize teachers with positive, non-violent disciplinary methods. He also wondered whether students, in particular those in Qur'anic schools, had access to complaints mechanisms; what had been done to collect the data that would help make it possible to meet the needs of schoolchildren with disabilities; whether girls who were pregnant or had given birth received the support that would enable them to continue their schooling; and what efforts schools made to prevent the stigmatization of and discrimination against children with albinism. He would welcome a practical example of a module of the curriculum on human rights, children's rights in particular.

62. As children who were deprived of their family environment were entitled to special protection and assistance, it would be helpful to learn whether any efforts were being made to identify or help child refugees and internally displaced children. In particular, he wondered whether there was a programme to help the very young children of Tinzaouaten, who were forced to work to survive. He wished to know, too, how many beds there were in facilities for displaced children, how many children were accommodated in those facilities, whether the results of the action plan for the elimination of child labour, including its worst forms, had been evaluated, and whether a new action plan had been adopted. Reports of children engaged in hazardous work in mining areas or areas controlled by the Wagner Group were particularly troubling. It would be helpful to learn how the Government responded to cases of chronic mercury poisoning and what it did to help children in street situations.

63. He wondered whether there were plans to ensure that there were juvenile courts throughout the State party; why children in conflict with the law were not offered alternatives to prosecution; what immediate steps were being taken to ensure that every child deprived of liberty was separated from adults; and whether ongoing amendments to the Civil Code were informed by the Committee's general comment No. 24 (2019) on children's rights in the child justice system. The delegation might also comment on efforts to ensure that proceedings in the customary justice system did not violate children's rights. Were there mechanisms in place to make children aware of their rights, and notably of the right to lodge complaints? Was the National Human Rights Commission able to receive and respond to complaints?

64. With reference to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, he would like to know whether the number of children recruited by non-State armed groups had risen in recent years, how such children were identified, and what steps were taken to make the recruitment of children by armed groups a criminal offence. He wished to know what had been done to investigate violations of children's rights in armed conflict and to prosecute the perpetrators. Lastly, he asked what measures had been taken in follow-up to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes formerly overseen by the

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, whose mandate had been terminated at the request of the Government.

65. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that, in view of the delegation's explanation of the State party's reservation to article 16, she wondered whether children were not considered equal in rights to other persons. She also wondered why, if adequate internal remedies were available in the State party, the Government was reluctant to ratify the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure.

66. **A representative of Mali** said that he objected to the suggestion that some of his country's ethnic communities were victims of discrimination. The term "occupying authorities" was also objectionable, in particular if it had been used to refer to the forces that were attempting to push terrorist armed groups out of the parts of the country they had occupied. Mali was a sovereign nation, and its army had the right to combat terrorist groups and re-establish government control over the whole of its territory.

67. Following a request by the Government on 16 June 2023, the Security Council by resolution 2690 (2023), had decided to terminate the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali.

68. Mention had also been made of the Wagner Group. It was unclear why. His Government, which was willing to cooperate with the Committee as long as the proper decorum was observed, made no secret of its cooperation with the Russian Federation.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.