



# International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

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## Human Rights Committee 141st session

### Summary record of the 4117th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 3 July 2024, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Abdo Rocholl

## Contents

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant  
(*continued*)

*Fourth periodic report of Croatia (continued)*

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*The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.*

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant**  
(continued)

*Fourth periodic report of Croatia (continued) (CCPR/C/HRV/4;  
CCPR/C/HRV/QPR/4)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Croatia joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Croatia** said that the new action plan to combat discrimination included specific measures to support and protect LGBTIQ persons, including training sessions for civil servants on the rights of LGBTIQ persons, regional workshops on combating hate crime and support services for victims of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender expression. Corporate training sessions were also being organized to combat discrimination, stereotypes and bias against LGBTIQ workers.
3. **A representative of Croatia** said that the government budget for 2025 included an allocation for a public celebration of the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia.
4. **A representative of Croatia** said that lawyers did not receive training on human rights as a subject in its own right, but human rights issues were covered in the context of other subjects. Elective modules were available to lawyers wishing to study human rights issues further.
5. **A representative of Croatia** said that the lifelong learning programme of the Judicial Academy included a module on European Union law and international law.
6. **A representative of Croatia** said that a press release would be issued to inform the Croatian media and the public about the outcomes of the present dialogue.
7. **A representative of Croatia** said that the latest amendments made to the Criminal Procedure Act, which had entered into force in April 2024, differentiated between misdemeanours and serious criminal offences but also stipulated that acts of domestic violence that would, in principle, be classified as misdemeanours would be considered to constitute a serious criminal offence if such acts had been committed repeatedly or involved aggravating circumstances.
8. In criminal proceedings, all victims of sexual offences or sex trafficking and victims with special protection needs who were called upon to testify in court had the right to provide their testimony via a video link. Such persons always testified via video link in such instances, unless they expressly stated that they did not wish to do so.
9. **A representative of Croatia** said that the competencies of the Commission for the Resolution of Conflicts of Interest had been expanded, its budget had been increased systematically since 2020 and new staff had been employed.
10. **A representative of Croatia** said that students belonging to the Serbian national minority in Vukovar still had the right to be educated in their minority language. A total of 731 primary and secondary school students and 225 preschool children in Vukovar were receiving instruction in Serbian and the Cyrillic script. The State co-financed the development and printing of Serbian-language textbooks.
11. **A representative of Croatia** said that data on gender-based violence and domestic violence were being collected in accordance with the relevant regulations. The national plan for protecting women against gender-based and domestic violence provided for the harmonization and standardization of data collection in that field.
12. **A representative of Croatia** said that the State was implementing housing programmes to improve the living conditions of the Roma people, many of whom preferred to live in their own communities. In 2019–2023, more than 2,800 Roma households had been provided with sanitary fixtures and other types of household equipment. Efforts were being made to improve existing Roma settlements by providing members of those settlements with legal titles to their homes.

13. **A representative of Croatia** said that the Free Legal Aid Act stated that victims of violent crimes that gave rise to civil or administrative proceedings concerning compensation for the damage caused by the commission of the criminal offence had the right to free legal aid. The right of all victims in criminal proceedings to free legal aid was set out in the Criminal Procedure Act. In 2024, the budget for primary legal aid had been increased by 100 per cent compared to the previous two years, while the budget for secondary legal aid had been increased by 69 per cent.

14. **Mr. Ndiaye** said that he wished to obtain further information on any measures taken to reduce prison overcrowding, such as the application of alternative measures to detention and the construction of more prisons in line with international standards. He would also like to know what the key challenges were in terms of the provision of access to health care to prisoners and the prevention of inter-prisoners and inmate-staff violence.

15. It would be of interest to the Committee to hear what steps had been taken to address the issues highlighted in the recommendations made by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment following its visit in 2022 and the Croatian Ombudswoman. He also wondered what measures had been implemented to guarantee the independence and effectiveness of the national preventive mechanism and, more generally, how the State party ensured compliance with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).

16. **Mr. Santos Pais** said that he would be grateful for a response to his earlier questions on the funding and expansion of shelters for victims of domestic violence and on the steps being taken to expedite the adjudication of corruption-related cases. He would also welcome examples of cases in which State officials, including persons holding senior positions, had been convicted on corruption charges.

17. What preventive and other measures did the State party plan to take to combat human trafficking more effectively? He wondered how the State party intended to increase the capacity of multisectoral mobile teams, border police, judges, prosecutors and staff in facilities for asylum-seekers and refugees to screen and identify victims of trafficking and at-risk individuals. He would like to hear the State party's perspective on the observation that the deterioration in the State's response to trafficking was partly due to the absence of a holistic, victim-centred training programme for all relevant governmental actors, which made it more difficult to identify new forms of exploitation and to take cultural differences into account, particularly when dealing with harmful traditional practices.

18. He wondered whether there were plans to provide increased access to reception centres for applicants for international protection, whether systematic risk assessments were undertaken prior to all forced removals from Croatia and whether accessible information was provided to asylum-seekers about their rights in a language they could understand. He would also like to know how the State party intended to improve the protection of unaccompanied and separated children by, among other things, increasing the capacity of the guardianship system and facilitating such children's access to their rights and to services, including family reunification.

19. The Committee would be interested to hear the State party's response to allegations that, even when a perpetrator's guilt had been established in criminal proceedings, property rights claims for damages were routinely denied.

20. He wished to understand why the legislature and the executive were involved in the appointment of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, since the appointment of all other judges was the sole responsibility of the State Judicial Council. The Committee would be interested in the delegation's comments on reports that members of the public had little trust in the judiciary. He wondered what measures were envisaged to promote greater transparency in the selection of members of the State Judicial Council and what measures would be taken to improve the capacity and accountability of judges and prosecutors.

21. How did the State party plan to ensure that legal aid was available across the entire country and that people were informed about how to access it? It would be useful to know

the extent to which the multi-annual financing model for free legal aid introduced in 2023 had been successful.

22. **Mr. Soh** said that the Committee would welcome updated information on the outcomes of the completed Regional Housing Programme projects, the current status of subproject HR9 of the Programme, and the time frame and status of the National Housing Programme. It would also be grateful for further details on the implementation of the Act on Housing Care in Assisted Areas and its 2023 amendments and on the outcomes of the national Assisted Voluntary Return Programme, including the oversight mechanisms used to ensure that returns were voluntary. He wondered what was being done to expedite the resolution of the remaining housing claims and what the status was of reconstruction, re-electrification and water supply system construction in areas inhabited by returnees belonging to the Serbian national minority.

23. In the light of reports that most people who were intercepted after irregularly entering Croatia from Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina were immediately pushed back over the “green border”, he would like to know what measures were in place to ensure access to international protection for all asylum-seekers and what steps were being taken to investigate all allegations of unlawful and violent pushbacks and to penalize the persons responsible for them. He would appreciate further information on the authority of the independent national monitoring mechanism, on any plans to give it legally defined powers and on the reported delay in establishing referral mechanisms to deal with violations identified by the mechanism.

24. He would like to know whether the State party intended to introduce a dedicated statelessness determination procedure and whether efforts were being made to align nationality laws with international standards on the eradication of statelessness. He would be grateful for further details on the mechanism put in place to address Roma nationality status issues mentioned in paragraph 129 of the State Party’s report.

25. It would be useful to obtain statistics on the number of religious hate crimes reported since the implementation of the new Hate Crime Protocol in April 2021 and the number of those cases that had resulted in prosecutions and convictions. What training and resources had been provided to law enforcement agencies to ensure accurate identification and categorization of hate crimes?

26. The Committee would welcome updated information on the status of communal property restitution efforts and on the nature of the obstacles that were hindering resolution of the remaining cases. Were reports or databases indicating the status of restitution cases available to affected communities and the general public?

27. Lastly, it would be of interest to hear what measures were being taken to improve hospital procedures and policies concerning the provision of appropriate health care to patients in accordance with their religious beliefs. He would welcome further information on the referral process for Jehovah’s Witnesses requiring treatment that could not be provided by their local hospitals and would like to know if any mechanisms were in place to monitor cases in which treatment was denied.

28. **Mr. Teraya**, drawing the delegation’s attention to general comment No. 34 (2011) on the freedoms of opinion and expression, said that the Committee remained concerned by continued reports of attacks against journalists and found it particularly worrisome that many cases went unpunished, including ones involving high-ranking officials. He wished to hear what measures were being taken to protect journalists against threats, physical attacks and other forms of intimidation, as well as examples of cases where persons who had committed such acts had been prosecuted and punished.

29. The State party appeared to place more emphasis on the right to honour and reputation than on the right to freedom of thought and expression; the ambiguous wording of the relevant provisions of the Criminal Code had reportedly had a chilling effect on freedom of expression. Against that backdrop, he would welcome information on the precise definitions of the terms “shaming”, “insult” and “the public interest” in the Criminal Code, on the detailed criteria used for determining the public interest and on any plans to decriminalize defamation, as previously recommended by the Committee, and to introduce limits on civil

damages for defamation. He would also welcome data on strategic litigation against public participation (SLAPP) brought in an effort to silence journalists, along with information on how that type of litigation was addressed in the National Plan for the Development of Culture and the Media for the period 2023–2027 and the Media Act.

30. It would be useful to learn more about the oversight mechanisms in place to ensure the independence of the public broadcasting company HRT and about the extent to which the amendments to the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure adopted in January 2024, which had introduced the new offence of “unauthorized disclosure of the content of an investigative or evidentiary action”, were compatible with article 19 (2) and (3) of the Covenant on the right to impart information.

31. **Ms. Donders** said that it would be helpful to know whether new programmes and strategies on national minorities and Roma inclusion had been adopted since 2020, to what extent minority organizations participated meaningfully in the development, implementation and evaluation of such measures and whether the Italian and Hungarian minorities were included in programmes of that nature. How did the State party ensure that the national minority councils had sufficient capacity to perform their advisory function and that their recommendations were heeded by local and regional governments?

32. In view of the decrease in minority voters and candidates in the 2023 elections from their 2019 levels, she wondered whether the State party might consider producing ballots of the same size and colour for a given election to avoid singling out minority voters and preserve voting secrecy and how it promoted the participation of minority representatives in elections. In addition, she would be interested to hear how the process for obtaining a voting certificate for persons without a valid identification document was publicized and how the State party prevented the voting certificate requirement from leading to the exclusion of certain groups of voters.

33. The delegation was invited to explain how members of minorities were informed of the fact that they had a right to priority consideration for recruitment into the national and local civil service, the judiciary and the police force, why the policy to prioritize persons from minority backgrounds for recruitment was so seldomly applied, whether the policy had achieved its aim of improving employment opportunities for minorities in the public sector and how the State party intended to address ongoing obstacles.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.55 a.m. and resumed at 11.20 a.m.*

34. **A representative of Croatia** said that the biggest challenge in the prison system was that more people were given custodial sentences than there was capacity to house them. The main reasons for the situation were the influx of migrants and resulting detentions under article 326 of the Criminal Code and the destruction of two facilities in the December 2020 earthquake. The Government had spent €11.6 million on energy and reconstruction projects in the nation’s prisons. Additional facilities that met international standards were under construction in Zagreb, Požega and Varaždin, and the improvements being made to three existing prisons should expand capacity by 1,200 places. In the short term, there were plans to increase capacity by between 240 and 270 spaces with the use of modular containers. Overcrowding was also being addressed through the adoption in 2022 of an ordinance allowing release on parole under electronic monitoring systems; judges had received training in the application of that ordinance.

35. A project to reduce inter-prisoner violence, developed in response to several recommendations by national and international human rights organizations, had been relaunched in 2023. The issue was also being tackled through strengthened communication between the judiciary and the police, the installation of modern security technology and the improvement of prison conditions by various means, including by providing the possibility for prisoners to maintain contact with their families using audiovisual technologies.

36. Prisoners were entitled to the same level of health care as the rest of the population. For those who did not have health insurance, the cost of insurance was borne by the State or the institution where they were held. Where a prison could not provide the necessary care, medical attention could be provided at any health-care facility in the country. Where necessary, first aid was administered without delay.

37. **A representative of Croatia** said that, since a significant share of the trafficking victims identified in Croatia were minors, a broad Internet campaign was planned to raise awareness of the issue among children and young people. A national public awareness campaign was also planned in response to the fact that, amid an influx of migrants and foreign workers, Croatia was becoming a country of destination for trafficked persons as well as a country of transit. It was clear that training in the identification of victims would have to be stepped up in the business sector. Each year, many people, including students, prosecutors, health coordinators and diplomatic and consular staff, participated in training sessions on the topic that had been developed in cooperation with the Croatian Red Cross and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

38. **A representative of Croatia** said that special emphasis had been placed on providing training and clear guidelines to the border police to assist them in the detection of migrants who were victims of trafficking. Additional training had been developed for members of the border police deployed to the maritime border and the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, which saw the most arrivals of migrants in an irregular situation. There were also plans to foster cooperation with the tourism board to screen for potential victims. In cases of illegal stay or transit, the police conducted further checks to ensure that the individuals concerned were not trafficking victims. Actions were also being taken in that domain under the programme of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) on human trafficking.

39. In 2023, nine cases of religion-based hate crimes had been recorded. A special module to promote a culture of dialogue had been developed for use in areas of the country, such as Vukovar, where there was a higher risk of intolerance. The module was chiefly aimed at young people and was implemented through workshops and in cooperation with young influencers and role models.

40. **A representative of Croatia** said that unaccompanied minors, including migrant children, were appointed a special guardian, who was usually a social worker but could also be an adult from the group among which the child had been found if that was in the child's best interests. Unaccompanied minors were housed in age-appropriate facilities, and efforts were made to find their families. When an unaccompanied youth's age was in doubt, medical examinations were performed and, in cases where his or her age could not be determined, the youth was presumed to be a minor.

41. **A representative of Croatia** said that international protection claims were assessed on the basis of the information and evidence provided by the claimant, and decisions in such cases were appealable. If a person seeking international protection was found to be a victim of trafficking, then, if that person's asylum claim was denied and the denial was then upheld on appeal, the person would be granted a permit on humanitarian grounds. A protocol had been developed to regulate the activities of the half-dozen ministries involved in the cases of unaccompanied minors.

42. **A representative of Croatia** said that 18 flats for returnees had been purchased under the HR9 subproject of the Regional Housing Programme. Completion of that subproject had been hindered by shortages in the housing market. Some 800 of the over 1,300 claims made under the Act on Housing Care in Assisted Areas had been resolved, and amendments to that law were planned for later that year in order to introduce other forms of reparation in cases where housing claims could not be fulfilled owing to supply constraints. All previous tenancy rights holders enjoyed preferential conditions for the purchase of an apartment in or outside areas of special State concern. Thus far, the Government had allocated €3.5 million to support municipal water supply projects.

43. The Ministry of Physical Planning, Construction and State Assets was rebuilding both private and public properties in areas where there were considerable numbers of members of the Serbian national minority. Work was under way on 300 family homes that were to be reserved for returnees, and 12 of the 20 planned apartment blocks had been completed.

44. **A representative of Croatia** said that part of his country's border formed part of the external border of the European Union and, as a result, Croatia was principally a country of transit for migrants. Most migrants travelled through Croatia with the aim of reaching other countries in the European Union; in a survey of migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina carried

out by the International Organization for Migration, only 1 per cent of respondents had indicated that Croatia was their intended final destination.

45. Croatia adhered to the principle of non-refoulement as set forth in the Aliens Act, which applied to all migrants arriving in the country and had been brought into line with European Union legislation on immigration. The Croatian border police respected the rights of all those entering the country and applied the Union Code on the rules governing the movement of persons across borders (Schengen Borders Code) in areas where the national border formed part of the external border of the European Union. Although around 68,000 migrants had arrived in 2023, very few had applied for asylum. Migrants who did submit a request for international protection were entitled to free legal aid and translation services. The national protocol on unaccompanied minors had been updated four years previously with the support of key stakeholders, including the Office of the People's Ombudsperson, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration.

46. In 2022, in line with a proposal put forward by the European Commission in its new pact on migration and asylum, Croatia had become the first member State of the European Union to establish an independent mechanism to monitor police conduct at its borders. The independent teams who carried out monitoring activities under the mechanism included members of medical and legal associations and an association representing the Muslim community in Croatia. The Ministry of the Interior, which had played a lead role in launching the initiative, was in the process of implementing over 20 recommendations which it had received following the mechanism's first year in operation. If the project was judged to be a success, similar mechanisms would be set up in countries throughout the European Union.

47. The public prosecution service had received 21 complaints concerning the treatment of migrants at the hands of police officers. No wrongdoing had been found in 13 of those cases, while the remaining 8 cases were still being investigated. As a result of internal disciplinary proceedings carried out by the Ministry of the Interior, disciplinary measures had been taken in respect of eight police officers, and two officers had been charged with criminal offences in relation to their treatment of migrants. Unfortunately, most reports concerning alleged unlawful treatment and use of force against migrants by police officers did not contain sufficient information to permit a full criminal investigation.

48. The fingerprints of all migrants who submitted a request for asylum in Croatia were registered and stored on the Eurodac system. In practice, that deterred many migrants from applying for asylum since, if they continued their journey, they could subsequently be returned to Croatia as the country in which they had first applied for international protection.

49. The Ministry of the Interior had established partnerships with two organizations to run reception centres for asylum-seekers, namely the Croatian Red Cross and Médecins du Monde. The Ministry was nonetheless open to the idea of setting up similar partnerships with other organizations, so long as they could guarantee that the services that they would provide would be of a high standard. Non-governmental organizations were also free to work independently from the Government to offer facilities and services for asylum-seekers. Activities organized at the reception centres overseen by the Ministry included Croatian language classes, information technology classes and creative workshops for children, while migrant parents were also provided with support for their children's education. A special project had been launched in collaboration with the Croatian Red Cross to offer psychosocial support for vulnerable groups of asylum-seekers, including unaccompanied children, persons with disabilities and victims of psychological or physical violence.

50. **A representative of Croatia** said that, although dating back to a time when her country had still formed part of the former Yugoslavia, the existing law on termination of pregnancy had been declared constitutional by the Constitutional Court. However, new legislation on abortion was in the process of being drafted. All girls and women had the right to gynaecological care and to select a gynaecologist of their own choosing within the primary health-care system. They also had the right to seek specialized gynaecological care in hospitals.

51. The majority of hospitals in Croatia had the capacity to provide adapted diagnostic procedures and therapy for Jehovah's Witnesses, and hospitals that were not equipped to do

so could refer patients to health-care institutions elsewhere. According to an analysis conducted by the Ministry of Health, institutions with the capacity to provide Jehovah's Witnesses with a full range of health-care services were spread throughout the country. If a Jehovah's Witness was unable to find appropriate treatment in Croatia, he or she could submit a request to the Croatian Health Insurance Fund to be referred for treatment abroad. Jehovah's Witnesses who chose to undergo adapted treatment in a Croatian hospital were obliged to sign a declaration assuming responsibility for all medical outcomes that might result from any changes in the procedure made to accommodate their religious beliefs.

52. **A representative of Croatia** said that the Civil Procedure Act and the Criminal Procedure Act had been amended with the aim of speeding up court proceedings. Precise deadlines were now set for the adoption of decisions by courts of first and second instance, and it was no longer possible for a case to be transferred back from a court of second instance to a court of first instance. Measures had also been taken to develop the use of modern digital technologies, including electronic communication platforms and audiovisual recording and transcription devices. As part of broader efforts to increase the efficiency of the justice system, judges and court clerks had been given pay rises, and significant investments had been made to improve court infrastructure. Following a recent reform, a party who believed that the competent court had not adopted a decision on his or her case within a reasonable period of time was entitled to request compensation at an earlier stage in the proceedings than before.

53. The Supreme Court had adopted and published new guidelines on communication between the judiciary and the public. The Judicial Academy had also taken steps to ensure that at least 30 per cent of the training received by judges was focused on strengthening their communication skills. Under a proposed amendment to the Courts Act, courts of first instance would soon be required to publish anonymized information on all rulings. A digital application designed to anonymize court decisions was currently being tested to facilitate implementation of that reform. The long-term aim was to anonymize the rulings handed down by courts of second instance too, although a selection of those decisions would still be published in full because of their importance for case law.

54. The funds in the State budget allocated for organizing and providing free legal aid had doubled between 2022 and 2023. With respect to the tender procedure for projects by associations and law faculties authorized to provide legal aid, the Government gave priority to organizations that were capable of deploying mobile teams to offer legal assistance to vulnerable groups in remote areas and areas affected by earthquakes. The increased funding had been used to provide better remuneration for the personnel involved in the provision of legal aid, including lawyers, legal experts and interpreters, and to conduct awareness-raising campaigns to inform citizens about their right to legal aid.

55. In order for a person to be found guilty of defamation, it must be proved that he or she had intentionally asserted or spread a falsehood. The law therefore did not restrict freedom of thought or expression.

56. **A representative of Croatia** said that seven cases reported in 2023 concerning threats made to journalists over the telephone or via social media had led to criminal charges, while investigations into a number of similar allegations remained ongoing. As had been detailed in the 2023 Rule of Law Report of the European Commission, journalists and the police cooperated with each other in Croatia, and police officers took the appropriate steps to investigate every report of a threat or attack made against a journalist. In September 2023, two cooperation agreements and two protocols had been signed between the Ministry of the Interior, the Croatian Journalists' Association and the Trade Union of Croatian Journalists. Workshops would soon be held on the implementation of the two protocols, which related to the procedures used by police officers and media representatives at public assemblies and to criminal offences committed against media representatives in the course of their work.

57. In 2021, a working group had been formed to look into the issue of SLAPP in Croatia. The working group was composed of journalists and publishers, as well as representatives of professional organizations, trade unions, the Judicial Academy and the Ministry of Justice, among others. The working group had held five workshops across the country in which it had analysed case law and studied ways to strengthen the legislation on SLAPP lawsuits. An



anti-SLAPP directive of the European Union had entered into force in May 2024, and provisions on SLAPP would also be included in a new national media law that was currently being drafted.

58. In accordance with the Croatian Radio and Television Act, HRT was independent of any political influence. The Ministry of Culture and Media would soon start work on preparing amendments to the Act designed to bring it into line with the European Media Freedom Act and relevant European case law. The amendments would exclude any ambiguous provisions that might give rise to suspicions that HRT could be subject to political influence.

59. **A representative of Croatia** said that the Operational Programmes for National Minorities 2021–2024 were divided into two main components. The first part was made up of general measures that applied to all 22 national minorities recognized in the Constitution, while the second part contained targeted measures that applied to individual minority communities. The Government was proud to promote its system of operational programmes as an example of good practice for other countries to follow when formulating their own strategies in relation to minority groups.

60. **Mr. Teraya** said that the delegation might like to confirm that a person could not be convicted of the crime of defamation unless he or she had intentionally shared information that he or she knew to be false. He also wished to know how, in practice, it could be proved that someone had intentionally spread false information in that way. On a separate note, it would be useful to know whether the human and financial resources allocated for whistle-blower protection were sufficient to permit full implementation of the legislation in that area that had been passed in 2022.

61. **Ms. Donders** said that she wished to know whether the Human Rights Commission established by the State party in 2021 was operational and what its mandate was. She wondered why the right of priority in employment for members of national minorities in the civil service was so rarely exercised and whether the State party had considered other methods of improving minority representation. What did the State party do to further the work of the Council for National Minorities?

62. **Mr. Santos Pais** said that he would like to know which government officials were required to declare their assets and what sanctions had been applied in any cases of non-compliance. He wondered whether the Government planned to use broader media channels, including printed or social media, to raise awareness of the problem of trafficking in persons. He was keen to know whether the training on means of combating trafficking provided to government actors was victim-centred and addressed cultural differences, particularly in the context of harmful traditional practices. He wondered whether there had been any cases in which courts had awarded victims of trafficking damages on the basis of property rights claims.

63. He would like to know whether the measures taken by the State party had succeeded in building sufficient public trust in the administration of justice. He would appreciate a clarification of how members of the State Judicial Council were appointed and whether both judges and prosecutors were sufficiently represented among its members. Had the Council ever sanctioned any judges or prosecutors for misconduct? In line with the Supreme Court's recently issued guidelines on communication with the public, would there be a single Supreme Court spokesperson for the judiciary or would regional courts and prosecutorial services each have their own spokesperson?

64. **Mr. Soh** said that he was eager to learn whether the State party planned to introduce a dedicated procedure for determining statelessness, how many people had benefited from the assisted voluntary return and reintegration programme and what oversight mechanism was in place for that programme. He wished to know what the nature of the nine cases of hate crimes recorded in 2023 had been and whether they had resulted in prosecutions and convictions. He would welcome a response to his earlier questions on communal property restitution.

65. **Mr. Ndiaye** said that he would welcome responses to his earlier questions on the prosecution of past war crimes and on the national transitional justice system. Leaving

victims with the impression that justice had not been and would not be brought could cause resentment, and a failure to establish the truth about historical events could engender revisionism, thus endangering the strides made towards rebuilding national unity.

66. **Mr. Carazo** said that he hoped that the active and thorough promotion of human rights by the State party and its neighbours could serve as a cornerstone for greater tolerance and peaceful coexistence among those living in the Balkans.

67. **Mr. Gómez Martínez** said that, in the past, the Judicial Academy had held public examinations for persons wishing to begin a career in the judiciary, but sitting judges had used a different, more informal, system whereby they had chosen candidates for a career track who then worked their way up to their appointment as a judge. Meanwhile, the Judicial Academy graduates had had difficulties in obtaining such appointments. Had the State party amended that system?

68. **A representative of Croatia** said that the work of the Human Rights Commission, which was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister for Social Issues and Human Rights, had been delayed by the need to hold parliamentary elections. The right to priority consideration for public employment could only be exercised by members of national minorities who achieved the same scores in public competitive examinations as other applicants. The Government would look at why that right was so rarely exercised in its future analyses of how to improve the employability of members of national minorities. Training was planned for members of the Council for National Minorities in every parliamentary cycle. The Government was aware of the difficulties posed by the advanced age of Council members and had taken steps to encourage young persons to participate in such bodies. The national awareness-raising campaign on trafficking in persons would be implemented on all media platforms, including those most commonly used by target groups.

69. **A representative of Croatia** said that, as with any other criminal offence, the courts determined guilt in defamation cases by examining all the evidence at their disposal. Under the Constitution, the State Judicial Council was an independent body composed of seven judges, two professors of law, one government member of the Croatian Parliament and one opposition member of the Croatian Parliament. Candidates for membership in the Council were nominated from among members of the judiciary and voted on by judges. Judges were appointed on the basis of an objective points system and an interview conducted by the State Judicial Council.

70. **A representative of Croatia** said that the Act on the Protection of Reporters of Irregularities of 2022 provided a sufficient legislative framework for the protection of whistle-blowers. An awareness-raising campaign was being conducted to underscore the importance of providing protection for whistle-blowers, and emotional support services were provided to such persons. The budget for the Commission for the Resolution of Conflicts of Interest had increased, an additional nine staff members had been hired and some of its procedures were being digitalized. Many officials from the executive and legislative branches of government were required to declare their assets; failure to do so was a misdemeanour that was punishable by a fine. Disciplinary sanctions were also applicable for any judicial officials who failed to declare their assets.

71. A strategy for the prosecution of war crimes was in place in the State Attorney's Office, and the Government had improved regional cooperation and introduced targeted policies to facilitate the prosecution of such crimes; more than 700 persons had been convicted of war crimes as a result.

72. **A representative of Croatia** said that the YouTube channel of the Ministry of the Interior informed citizens of the measures taken to combat trafficking in persons, and the Judicial Academy and the Police Academy provided training on dealing with trafficking victims. The Ministry of Justice and Public Administration and the Ministry of the Interior provided information for trafficking victims concerning their rights on their websites and were participating in a pilot project on the use of a national hotline for trafficking victims that would help to empower them and inform them about their rights. Harmful traditional practices were addressed in training sessions on criminal psychology and victimology and in specialized police training courses. Two awareness-raising campaigns on the dangers of forced or early marriage were being conducted, one of which was targeted at vulnerable

groups of women and children. Most of the nine cases of hate crimes committed on the grounds of religious belief recorded in 2023 had consisted of threats and, in all cases, a criminal report had been filed by the police. A total of 18 police training modules were provided to enable officers to better recognize hate crimes; those modules tended to focus on hate crimes committed on grounds of ethnicity and religious belief.

73. **A representative of Croatia** said that all of what were apparently cases of statelessness in his country involved persons whose citizenship could not be determined, usually because they had been citizens of a republic of the former Yugoslavia and their status had not been regularized after its dissolution owing to administrative issues. Those persons could regularize their status under the Aliens Act by following a procedure that involved establishing whether they were truly stateless; no other measure for establishing statelessness was envisaged, but the number of such persons was decreasing annually.

74. Just 10 persons had benefited from the national Assisted Voluntary Return Programme launched in 2021 by the International Organization for Migration, as Croatia was primarily a transit country. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) was collaborating on another reintegration programme that had led to the return of 246 adults and 58 minors to 43 third countries. Frontex also provided counselling to those who wished to voluntarily return to their countries.

75. **A representative of Croatia** said that prosecutors were selected by the State Judicial Council. The State Attorney's Office and the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organized Crime had their own full-time spokespersons, and officials from regional state attorney's offices acted as spokespersons on a rotating basis. Those spokespersons communicated with the media and members of the public.

76. **A representative of Croatia** said that all courts had their own spokespersons. Croatia had great respect for the Covenant and the members of the Committee and had developed efficient mechanisms to respond to human rights issues. The Committee's questions would serve as guidelines for future work towards the protection of the human rights of all persons in Croatia, especially the most vulnerable. The Government was dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights and would continue to do its utmost in that domain.

*The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.*