



International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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Summary record of the 3082nd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 7 August 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Balcerzak

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

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention *(continued)*

Combined twenty-second to twenty-fourth periodic reports of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (continued) (CERD/C/VEN/22-24; CERD/C/VEN/Q/22-24)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela joined the meeting.*

2. **Mr. Diaby** (Country Rapporteur) said that the Committee would be grateful for detailed information on the steps taken by the State party to adopt a framework law on consultations with Indigenous Peoples that would ensure that free, prior and informed consent was sought in respect of measures affecting them. He wished to know whether the State party had established a mechanism to bring consultation processes into line with international standards on free, prior and informed consent and whether it was considering incorporating such processes into mining operations. It would be interesting to learn about the State party's policy on the recognition of the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples. In particular, he would appreciate detailed information on the measures adopted by the State party to ensure that Indigenous Peoples enjoyed legal certainty with regard to the lands, territories and natural resources that they traditionally used and occupied, to guarantee access to autonomous organizations for rural Indigenous Peoples and to prevent the adoption of any measures likely to have an impact on protected areas and territories. It would be useful to know how the State party intended to take to clean up land and water pollution in territories affected by gold mining.

3. It had been brought to the Committee's attention that more than 5 million Venezuelans, including Indigenous persons and persons of African descent, had been excluded from the electoral roll, which prevented them from exercising their political rights. He would therefore like to know what action the State party intended to take to ensure that all Venezuelans, including those who lived abroad, were included on the electoral roll.

4. The delegation might provide more information on the measures taken to improve the quality of education in both rural and urban areas with a view to further reducing the education gap between Indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan children and children belonging to other groups. For example, it might describe the measures that had been adopted, including in terms of funding and teacher training, to extend the coverage of intercultural and multilingual education. He wished to know how the State party planned to improve the training of teachers so that they could provide an inclusive education that took into account students' needs and cultures. How did the State party address barriers to access, such as the technological divide that affected Indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan children and children living in remote rural areas?

5. He would welcome information on the number of health centres that had been set up to facilitate access to basic community health care for individuals living in Indigenous territories. He wondered what steps the State party planned to take to improve health services for the whole population and to guarantee the accessibility, availability, quality and cultural appropriateness of health care for Indigenous Peoples. It would be interesting to know how the State party incorporated traditional medicine into its national health plan and what it was doing to ensure the availability of essential medicines in health centres located in Indigenous territories. He would be grateful for detailed information on the steps taken by the State party to train health-care personnel to prevent discrimination and stigmatization, especially in rural areas.

6. The Committee would appreciate information on the State party's efforts to compile and share disaggregated data on employment status with a view to gaining a more accurate picture of the situation of Indigenous and Afro-Venezuelan women. In relation to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, it would be useful to know whether the State party collected disaggregated data on the cultural self-identification of patients in order to guarantee the provision of culturally appropriate services. Did the State party compile information on school dropout rates, disaggregated by state and sex? How had dropout rates had been affected by the introduction of online education?

7. He wished to know what steps the State party planned to take to incorporate the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms into national law and to prevent the criminalization of human rights defenders and guarantee their protection. It would be useful to know whether the authorities had investigated allegations of threats and intimidation against defenders of Indigenous rights by non-State armed groups and criminal organizations and, if so, what the outcome of those investigations had been.

8. The Committee would welcome detailed information on the State party's efforts to develop and implement a procedure for determining statelessness. It would like to know how many individuals in the country were currently stateless or at risk of becoming so, and whether the State party would adopt a national plan for the eradication of statelessness. It would be helpful to hear about the measures taken to ensure that recognized refugees had effective access to the documents they required to enjoy their rights, and to guarantee the protection of refugees who lacked such documents. The delegation might also describe any measures that were being taken to address the obstacles faced by refugees in obtaining temporary visas and identity cards, including the requirement to present a valid passport, delays in issuance, the unaffordability of the process for many refugees and the fact that documents were issued only in Caracas. He wished to know why foreign nationals in an irregular situation were placed in administrative detention pending their removal from the country and what measures were in place to guarantee their rights to due process and to have access to a lawyer during their detention, which would reduce the risk of refoulement for those in need of international protection.

9. While the State party was to be commended on the legal and political measures taken to guarantee universal birth registration and the constitutional rights to identity and nationality, it had been brought to the Committee's attention that many unregistered individuals, especially adults belonging to Indigenous or rural communities, continued to face obstacles in gaining access to late birth registration procedures. He would therefore be interested to know when the State party intended to conduct a new population and housing census so that it could collect data on the number of unregistered adults and children. He wondered what measures the State party planned to take to address the issues identified by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in its 2023 participatory assessment, including the lack of understanding of late birth registration procedures, onerous procedural requirements and difficulties in obtaining Venezuelan nationality for children who had been born abroad and who had not been registered before returning to the State party.

10. The delegation might comment on reports that the Yekuana and Sanemá Indigenous Peoples had submitted an application for land demarcation in 2002 but were still waiting to hear whether that application had been successful. It might also address reports that Indigenous persons living in remote areas had experienced difficulties in obtaining Indigenous identity cards. Regarding the case of the alleged murder of four members of the Yanomami community, it had been brought to the Committee's attention that the prosecutor in charge of the case had noted that no bodies had been found, disregarding the fact that that group's custom was to cremate the deceased and consume the ashes. He would like to know whether the investigation into the killings had nonetheless led to the prosecution of the perpetrators.

11. Lastly, he wished to know what activities the State party had organized to mark the International Decade for People of African Descent and what other initiatives on that topic it planned to implement in the future.

12. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that 62 land titles had been granted to 593 communities in the States of Amazonas, Anzoátegui, Apure, Delta Amacuro, Monagas, Sucre and Zulia, benefiting around 21,800 families and covering approximately 3.28 million hectares of land. The land demarcation procedure was set out in the Organic Act on Indigenous Peoples and Communities, and demarcation commissions had been established at the national and regional levels to oversee the process. The national commission was chaired by the Vice-President of the Republic and comprised 10 Indigenous representatives from the eight states in which Indigenous Peoples made up the majority of the population and 10 representatives of high-level institutions. The work of the

commission's executive secretariat consisted of supporting Indigenous communities in preparing the relevant legal and anthropological report. The commission also had a technical secretariat that was responsible for preparing a technical report, which was discussed and evaluated by the community assemblies of the Indigenous Peoples concerned. In the event that two or more Indigenous Peoples were involved in the process, both groups would hold their own assembly and then come together to reach an agreement. Neither the national nor the regional commissions were authorized to take any action without the approval of the communities concerned. Once the reports had been produced, the relevant regional commission would assess the application and publish a notice in the national and regional press in order to ensure that third parties were aware of the upcoming demarcation and had time to determine whether their property would be affected by the process. Applications that were approved by the regional commission were then sent for approval by the national commission, which verified the boundaries of the land to be demarcated using mental maps developed by the Indigenous communities themselves. The final stage of the process was the issuance of the land title by the Counsel-General's Office. The Indigenous Peoples concerned were involved in every stage of the demarcation process, which had been used successfully, for example, in the case of the Mapoyo territory.

13. The Constitution and the Organic Act on Indigenous Peoples and Communities guaranteed the right of Indigenous Peoples to be consulted on projects likely to affect them. The Government respected the organization of each Indigenous community and was guided by their legitimate authorities, who had their say on which projects went ahead. While efforts to develop a protocol on consultations with Indigenous Peoples remained ongoing, several such consultations had already been held in the Arco Minero del Orinoco strategic development region. Regional, community and sectoral assemblies had been organized in that region in order to set out parameters for coexistence, discuss how the projects should be carried out and secure approval from the Indigenous communities concerned. No projects would be carried out without that approval. It was hoped that the protocol would be adopted shortly after completion of the necessary steps, including the initial consultations and an intercultural dialogue.

14. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the right to asylum was enshrined in the Constitution and regulated by the Organic Act on Refugees and Asylum-Seekers. Over the previous 75 years, Venezuela had welcomed a large number of refugees, most of whom had fled the conflict in Colombia. From the moment they crossed into Venezuelan territory, refugees enjoyed de facto protection and were able to begin the process of regularizing their status through the National Refugee Commission. The Commission, which was made up of representatives of various State institutions and the executive and civil branches of government, was responsible for deciding whether to grant refugee status. Applicants awaiting a decision were provided with a provisional document that enabled them to work, purchase property, gain access to services and open a bank account. Decisions on refugee status were made within three months and were based on the criteria set forth in the Foreign Nationals and Migration Act. Individuals who had been granted refugee status could subsequently apply for permanent residence and nationality.

15. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, to address the technological divide, the Government had implemented a programme for the free distribution of computer equipment to children and adolescents. More than 6.5 million devices, including tablets and laptop computers, had been distributed to students in basic and university education. However, that programme had been affected by the unilateral coercive measures imposed on the country. Most education institutions in Venezuela were public and free, and 93 per cent of public education institutions participated in the School Meals Programme, ensuring children's right to food.

16. The number of health facilities in Venezuela had increased almost five-fold since 1999. As part of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, the State had provided more than 4 million tests, together with comprehensive and personalized health care for 400,000 individuals who had been diagnosed with the virus. Despite the economic embargo, which had prevented vaccine manufacturers from selling their products in the country, the State had distributed 46 million vaccines, so that virtually the entire population was immunized.

17. **Mr. Diaby** said that the Committee would appreciate further details regarding the demarcation of Indigenous territories, including how many applications had been received, how many had been accepted, and how many had been rejected and on what grounds.

18. The Committee would also be grateful for additional information on the late birth registration of Venezuelan children who had been born abroad. Regarding the procedure of the National Refugee Commission for granting refugee status, he wondered whether applicants had the right to appeal against the rejection of their applications.

19. As the Committee had received reports of water and soil pollution caused by illegal gold mining, including the release of carcinogenic substances, he wished to know what was being done to protect the health and well-being of Indigenous communities living in the vicinity of illegal gold mines.

20. The Committee would be particularly interested to know whether any investigations had been conducted into alleged intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders. The delegation might comment on the case of Yendri Velásquez, an activist who had been detained at Maiquetía International Airport.

21. **Ms. Tlakula** (Follow-up Coordinator) said that, in its previous concluding observations (CERD/C/VEN/CO/19-21), the Committee had called for the State party to conduct a thorough investigation into acts of violence against the Yukpa people; to put the perpetrators and instigators of such acts on trial; and to take the necessary measures to prevent such violence by adopting mechanisms to expedite the demarcation of the land and territories of Indigenous Peoples. Although the periodic report contained some relevant information, it failed to address all of the Committee's recommendations. She would particularly like to know what steps had been taken to investigate the killings of members of the Yukpa community.

22. **Ms. Stavrinaki** said that, in 2023, the Pan American Health Organization had declared a health emergency in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, considering that the COVID-19 pandemic had aggravated the humanitarian context in the country, while violence and social conflicts, hyperinflation, political tensions, the persistence of migratory movements and intensification of climate threats and natural hazards had worsened the living conditions and health status of vulnerable groups. The Committee had been informed that persons living in remote areas had to travel for up to two days in order to have access to health-care services and that most Venezuelan women could not afford to buy contraceptive pills. Abortion was outlawed except in specific cases. In that context, she wondered what measures were being taken to improve women's health outcomes and access to quality and timely health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, particularly for Indigenous, Afrodescendent and migrant women.

23. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the Ministry of People's Power for Public Health had established 42 Indigenous Care and Counselling Services in 12 states. During the period 2022–2024, more than 124,000 Indigenous persons had received differentiated health-care services. In 2017, the Government had launched the National Plan for Humanized Childbirth and Breastfeeding, which provided support and guidance for pregnant and breastfeeding women, taking into account the particular needs of Indigenous and Afrodescendent women. The State respected the rights, cultures and traditions of all Indigenous Peoples, in accordance with the Constitution and international laws protecting their rights. The Constitution and laws of Venezuela did not permit abortion. The Government and women's organizations engaged in constant discussions on that issue, but had yet to reach a consensus on the way forward.

24. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that Venezuela was one of many countries that had established conditions for nationals living abroad to participate in elections. Persons living abroad who met the requirement set forth in the Organic Act on the Electoral Process and its implementing regulations – namely, that they were legally resident in another country – could exercise the right to vote in Venezuela.

25. The late birth registration of children born abroad was an issue that had arisen as a side-effect of the political decision taken by a group of States not to recognize the legitimate authorities and institutions of Venezuela – a decision that had led to the closure of Venezuelan

consulates, depriving Venezuelan nationals of access to consular services, including birth registration. Nevertheless, the Ministry of People's Power for Foreign Affairs had established a national committee for the protection of child and adolescent migrants, which worked to ensure the birth registration of Venezuelans born abroad and to prevent statelessness. The committee received technical advice from the United Nations Children's Fund and coordinated with relevant State institutions.

26. The health sector had been among those most severely affected by the imposition of unilateral coercive measures, as the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights had observed during her visit. The exclusion of Venezuela from the international financial system had prevented the Government from making payments to purchase medical supplies, while international laboratories had shut down their operations. As a result, the country had experienced a dramatic reduction in the availability of medicines, although the Pan American Health Organization had delivered some of the medicines needed for the treatment of the population.

27. Venezuela was a participatory and proactive democracy that recognized the right of all persons, including human rights defenders, to freely participate in public life. Any persons suspected of wrongdoing – including trade union leaders, social leaders and human rights defenders – would be brought before the competent institution, namely the Public Prosecution Service, which was responsible for conducting investigations and taking appropriate steps.

28. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the Yukpa were an Indigenous People who spoke a Cariban language and who lived in Venezuela and neighbouring Colombia. More than 36,000 members of the Yukpa, Bari and Wayuu peoples lived in the Sierra de Perijá region of Zulia State, where they held collective title to an area of land measuring 185,241 hectares. Since 2022, the Government had worked with all three peoples through the system of Missions and Great Missions. Socialist Mission Bases had been established to provide communities with social services, health, education and food. The Ministry of People's Power for Education had trained and awarded qualifications to Yukpa teachers and had opened schools in the region, whose names reflected the cultural identity of Indigenous Peoples. Monthly food packages were delivered to Yukpa, Bari and Wayuu families. The Government had renovated housing and health centres in the region.

29. In 2023, at an event in the municipality of Machiques de Perijá, more than 6,000 Indigenous identity cards had been issued to members of the Yukpa, Bari and Wayuu communities. The Identification, Migration and Foreign Nationals Service had established an office for the issuance of such cards. The cards, which carried the name of the Indigenous People and the specific community to which the bearer belonged, had been issued to members of the Wayuu, Pemón, Akawayo, Kariña and Warao peoples, among others, in several states. Over 42,000 Indigenous identity cards had been issued in 2023 and 2024.

30. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, if an application for refugee status was rejected, the applicant could, in the first instance, appeal to the National Refugee Commission. If that appeal was unsuccessful, he or she could take action before the administrative courts. All administrative and judicial proceedings were free of charge, and applicants could turn to the Public Defence Service for legal assistance.

31. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the Public Prosecution Service was investigating a case in which members of the Yukpa community had travelled to Caracas, ostensibly to demand payment for artisanal products. In so doing, they had engaged in violent conduct, blocking public highways and burning vehicles. The Public Prosecution Service had determined that their actions had been funded by certain organizations in order to undermine national security.

32. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, in 2018, the President of the Republic had signed a decree for the implementation of measures under the International Decade for People of African Descent. In 2021, the National Assembly had declared 31 August National Day for People of African Descent and had called upon schools and universities to contribute to the prevention and elimination of all forms of discrimination against people of African descent. The National Assembly had also recognized the struggle

of people of African descent for the emancipation of the Republic from colonialism and neo-colonialism.

33. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said she wished to clarify that, in the event of a project that might have an impact on Indigenous communities, the authorities sought the free, prior and informed consent of the legitimate Indigenous authorities, namely, community assemblies, councils of elders or other community organizations.

The meeting was suspended at 11.20 a.m. and resumed at 11.35 a.m.

34. **Mr. Tlemçani** (Country Task Force) said that he wished to know more about the specific forms of multiple and intersectional discrimination that were faced by people of African descent in the State party. In particular, he wondered how those forms of discrimination affected the ability of people of African descent to gain access to education, health and other essential services and whether any recent studies had been conducted on the scope and impacts of such discrimination. He would appreciate information on specific action being taken to combat multiple and intersectional discrimination against people of African descent, including efforts to gather relevant data and to collaborate with civil society organizations. He was curious to know whether any constitutional or legislative amendments were envisaged to strengthen recognition of the rights of people of African descent and whether any specific judicial mechanisms were in place to enable them to defend their rights. He wondered what impact multiple and intersectional discrimination had on the political participation of women of African descent and on their access to education and health. Were there any specific programmes or initiatives to support women of African descent who experienced discrimination?

35. He would welcome information on the public policies that had been adopted to promote the rights of peoples of African descent, including information on mechanisms for monitoring their effective implementation and on the successes that had been achieved and the challenges that had been encountered. It would also be useful to know whether there were any specific initiatives to foster the economic and social inclusion of people of African descent.

36. He would be interested to know what measures had been taken to encourage the political participation of people of African descent, whether there were any quotas or positive measures in place to ensure their representation in legislative and executive bodies and whether the Government partnered with relevant representative organizations to promote the political participation of people of African descent.

37. The Committee would be interested to know what measures had been taken by the State party to combat impunity in cases of violence, including sexual violence, against Indigenous and Afrodescendent women and girls, including where such violence had been perpetrated by members of armed groups; what was being done to ensure justice and redress for victims; whether there were any programmes providing psychological and social support for victims; and what efforts were being made to raise awareness and build the capacity of law enforcement to address such violence.

38. Lastly, he would be grateful for clarification of the primary functions and responsibilities of the National Council for the Development of Communities of African Descent. He would like to know what programmes and projects the National Council had developed to support communities of African descent; what challenges it had faced in their implementation; the extent to which it cooperated with national and international institutions; whether it had published any reports on the impact of its activities; what specific policies it had adopted to improve access to education, employment and health care for people of African descent; and how it supported women of African descent in their fight against violence and discrimination.

39. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, in addition to national, state and municipal elections, Indigenous persons living in their ancestral areas could participate in the election of Indigenous representatives to municipal and state legislative councils.

40. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, in October 2023, the Government had launched the “Venezuela Women” Great Mission, which represented a major institutional effort to strengthen plans, policies and programmes for the promotion and protection of the rights of all Venezuelan women. Millions of women had signed up to participate in the Great Mission’s seven lines of action. In addition, the Ministry of People’s Power for Women and Gender Equality had two coordination units – one for women of African descent; the other for Indigenous women – that worked towards gender equality and non-discrimination. Some 1,300 Indigenous women and 1,700 women of African descent had received training at the Argelia Laya Feminist School of the South to become community advocates for women’s rights and advancement. The Ministry cooperated on a regular basis with women’s movements working to empower women of African descent and with representative organizations of Indigenous women.

41. Various measures had been taken to ensure the participation in political and public life of Indigenous women and women of African descent. Women accounted for 24 out of 39 Indigenous deputies in the National Assembly and two thirds of Indigenous members of state legislative councils.

42. Public policies and programmes aimed at Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent included those run by the National Institute of Indigenous Languages. The Institute was responsible for 112 *nichos lingüísticos* – spaces in which children were taught Indigenous languages – in 12 states. It had more than 400 employees, almost 60 per cent of whom were women. Other initiatives by the Government included the provision of training in robotics for some 600 Indigenous persons, almost half of whom were women and girls; a programme for women miners; and workshops and courses for Indigenous women to train as knowledge multipliers on topics such as environmental sustainability.

43. On the subject of health, the José Gregorio Hernández Mission provided comprehensive care to persons with disabilities, including Indigenous women with disabilities. The National Plan for the Prevention and Reduction of Early and Teenage Pregnancy had been relaunched in 2022, and the first line of action of the “Venezuela Women” Great Mission was to protect the health and the lives of women. Free access to safe and quality contraceptives had been negatively impacted by the universal coercive measures.

44. Another of the Great Mission’s lines of action was the eradication of violence against women, which entailed the need to implement gender mainstreaming and strengthen the judicial system. For that purpose, in accordance with the Act on Women’s Right to a Violence-Free Life, the Government had created the National Commission on Gender Justice, which was composed of representatives of various government institutions. The Commission had developed a single form for the reporting of violence against women, which included a specific question on whether the victim was Indigenous or of African descent. The National Office for the Defence of Women’s Rights had assisted a number of Indigenous women who had fallen victim to domestic violence or gender-based violence, providing them with legal assistance, guidance and representation. The country had more than 20 offices for the defence of Indigenous rights, whose multidisciplinary teams included bilingual intercultural experts.

45. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the Supreme Court had issued various rulings recognizing the traditional justice systems of Indigenous Peoples, in accordance with international standards. Nevertheless, it was of paramount importance that the justice administered by those systems was consistent with the human rights principles enshrined in the Constitution. For that reason, in 2023, it had been decided that cases involving the sexual abuse of Indigenous children or adolescents would be tried by the ordinary courts, in particular by the special courts for offences involving violence against women, rather than under the Indigenous justice system.

46. The right of Indigenous women to a violence-free life was protected by offices for the defence of Indigenous rights, whose staff included Indigenous women belonging to the Indigenous Peoples living in the state or territory where the office was located. The Act on Women’s Right to a Violence-Free Life had been translated into several Indigenous languages. Furthermore, the Ombudsman’s Office had set up an observatory to monitor the human rights of Indigenous women, and the Supreme Court had established a coordination unit on Indigenous issues. The “Mobile Court” initiative of the Supreme Court had brought

justice services to remote communities, including Indigenous communities, benefiting over 160,000 people in 2024.

47. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, in the case involving the deaths of members of the Yanomami community, a complex investigation was under way to determine who was responsible. The investigation had been complicated by the fact that the bodies had been cremated in accordance with Yanomami custom. Under Venezuelan law, witness testimonies alone were insufficient to establish the perpetrators of such a crime; expert opinions and crime scene analysis were among the types of evidence needed.

48. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that, regarding measures for people of African descent, it should be noted that all social policies were cross-cutting in nature and were applied without discrimination. A sectoral plan for the development of people of African descent contained specific actions for the period 2015–2031. Self-identification by people of African descent posed a certain challenge, partly owing to historical factors, which meant that a large number of people had mixed ancestry. Some 13,000 musicians and artists self-identified as being of African descent, bringing their culture to younger generations who, as a result, were beginning to recognize their heritage. The National Institute against Racial Discrimination was conducting several lines of research, including on themes such as “Mother Africa”, African descent, cultural identity, migration and structural racism. Studies were also being undertaken on the phenomenon of return migration in the framework of the “Return to the Homeland” (Vuelta a la Patria) Plan, with a view to promoting tolerance and acceptance, given that Afro-Venezuelans had often faced racial discrimination and xenophobia in other countries.

49. **Mr. Tlemçani** said that some of his questions had gone unanswered, including those on the National Council for the Development of Communities of African Descent and on the next national population and housing census.

50. **Mr. Diaby** said that he would be grateful if the delegation could explain the difference between the categories “black” and “of African descent”, which had been used in the 2011 national population and housing census. It would be useful to know whether any specific measures had been taken to increase literacy among Indigenous women and girls and to promote tertiary education uptake among Indigenous women and girls. He was curious to know how many regional commissions for the demarcation of Indigenous lands had been established and how many were operational.

51. **Ms. Tebie** said she wished to know how the State party’s public policies addressed the issue of reparations for slavery and colonization, in accordance with the final declaration of the 2018 International Meeting on Reparations. It would also be helpful to find out whether the State party envisaged amending its legislation to remove the prior authorization requirement for public gatherings and protests.

52. **Ms. Stavrinaki** said that she would be grateful if the delegation could provide data on women’s access to health, justice and other services, disaggregated by region or ethnic origin, so as to enable the Committee to assess the extent to which the measures taken benefited Indigenous women and women of African descent. Notwithstanding the impact of sanctions on the State party’s capacity to deliver on its commitments, the Committee still needed to know how the authorities ensured that the situation did not disproportionately affect persons protected under the Convention. While she noted that abortion was illegal in the State party, and that it took time to change laws and mindsets, she wondered whether courts might at least desist from imposing criminal penalties for termination of pregnancy, given the difficult situation faced by Venezuelan women.

53. **Ms. Shepherd** said she was curious to know whether any goals had not been realized during the current International Decade for People of African Descent and what measures the Government might take during a possible second international decade.

54. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the establishment of the National Council for the Development of Communities of African Descent in 2012 had been a major achievement. The Council was attached to the Office of the President, had its own budget and a flexible organizational structure, and comprised

representatives from 12 ministries and the Network of Afro-Venezuelan Associations. One of its functions was mainstream the concerns of persons of African descent across public policies. The Council administered the financial and economic resources allocated to the global plan to restore the rights of Afrodescendent and African peoples, in close cooperation with the National Institute against Racial Discrimination and the National Council for Human Rights.

55. Affirmative action measures had been introduced to combat structural discrimination affecting people of African descent in the fields of work, education, health and housing. Health policies incorporated the knowledge and practices of people of African descent, and educational curricula had been reformed to promote tolerance, non-discrimination and interculturality. Legislative and other measures had been taken to prevent and combat racial discrimination, including training and awareness-raising on discrimination in the workplace.

56. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that Indigenous peoples, people of African descent and local communities were actively involved in climate change-related decision-making processes. Their involvement ensured that their traditional knowledge and relationship with nature were taken into account and allowed the veritable custodians of ecosystems to shape climate policies.

57. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that the rights to freedom of assembly and to protest were fully guaranteed. Law enforcement agencies were trained to police public assemblies and protests in accordance with international human rights standards. Relevant domestic standards and protocols had been reviewed in cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The 30,191 public protests that had been held between 2017 and 2021 were ample proof that the right to freedom of assembly was alive and well.

58. The category “black”, as used in the 2011 population and housing census, related to physical attributes and kinship, whereas the category “of African descent” was linked to the perception and assessment of historical, generational, territorial, cultural and genetic and environmental aspects. The latter category covered the descendants of slavery survivors and members of the African diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean. Detailed information on the categories used in the 2011 census would be provided in writing.

59. In 2019, the National Institute of Statistics had been instructed to prepare the fifteenth national population and housing census. Its roll-out had been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but the project remained in the pipeline.

60. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said the “Venezuela Women” Great Mission drew on broad participation from civil society. It was a crucial time for Indigenous women and women of African descent, whose contributions to the design of public policies would help to meet the challenges at hand. Additional efforts were needed to develop specific policies for Indigenous peoples and people of African descent, but the authorities engaged closely with communities to strengthen that work. The Great Mission was being rolled out by local committees across the country; over 137,000 such committees had been registered in the states where most Indigenous Peoples lived, namely Amazonas, Anzoátegui, Apure, Bolívar, Delta Amacuro, Monagas, Sucre and Zulia.

61. Targeted efforts had been made to improve access to health-care services for women in those states. During 2024 thus far, 22,917 women had received health-care services in Amazonas, 82,897 in Anzoátegui, 36,415 in Apure, 108,841 in Bolívar, 19,490 in Delta Amacuro, 35,092 in Monagas, 42,498 in Sucre and 55,791 in Zulia. Of the 42 Indigenous Care and Counselling Services, which provided health services specifically for Indigenous women, 1 centre was in Aragua, 3 in Apure, 2 in Amazonas, 4 in Anzoátegui, 4 in the Capital District, 7 in Bolívar, 1 in Delta Amacuro, 6 in Monagas, 1 in Miranda, 3 in Sucre and 10 in Zulia. In recent years, particular emphasis had been placed on improving access to health care for Indigenous communities. People of African descent typically lived alongside the majority population and did not face discrimination in obtaining access to health services.

62. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that one of the main achievements of the International Decade for People of African Descent had been the establishment in 2016 of a chapter of persons of African descent within the National Congress

as a forum for ongoing discussion with civil society. The initiative had succeeded in raising Venezuelans' awareness of an issue that had long been ignored. Other important steps had been the creation of a commission for the clarification of the historical truth, justice and reparation for colonial rule and its consequences, and the establishment of a national fund for science, technology and innovation to support relevant research projects.

63. **Mr. Diaby** said that he wished to thank the delegation for the frank and sincere exchange. Any divergences in the views of the Committee and the State party testified to the vitality of the treaty body system. Although the Committee remained concerned by reports of intimidation and reprisals and would monitor developments closely, it was encouraged by the State party's stated commitment to protect human rights defenders and civil society organizations that cooperated with the Committee.

64. **A representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela** said that her delegation had strived to provide a true picture of the situation in Venezuela. The Government attached the utmost importance to dialogue with the Committee and was firmly committed to implementing its recommendations.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.