



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Summary record of the 2823rd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 29 August 2024, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Skelton

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

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Turkmenistan (continued)
(CRC/C/TKM/5-6; CRC/C/TKM/Q/5-6; CRC/C/TKM/RQ/5-6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Turkmenistan joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Turkmenistan**, responding to questions raised at the previous meeting, said that the Constitution had been amended several times in recent years, including to introduce the position of Ombudsman and to institute a bicameral legislature, although the unicameral system had subsequently been restored. None of the constitutional changes were specifically related to children's rights.
3. Amendments to the law on voluntary associations made in 2020 had simplified the registration process. The number of such associations had increased from 122 to 134 since 2015. Despite the lack of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) devoted exclusively to promoting children's rights, a number of them conducted relevant work; for example, the NGO Yenme provided psychological support, vocational training, leisure activities and other services to children with disabilities.
4. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that children in her country were vaccinated against 14 infectious diseases. Coverage stood at 98 per cent, with only those who had medical contraindications remaining unvaccinated. A number of new vaccines had been introduced in recent years, including the vaccine against human papillomavirus disease. Vaccination against pneumococcal disease had led to significant reductions in prevalence and in hospitalizations for pneumonia among infants and older children. A robust vaccination policy had helped Turkmenistan eliminate measles, rubella, polio and malaria.
5. Health centres nationwide offered physiotherapy and speech therapy for children with disabilities. Health resorts on the Caspian Sea with capacity for over 500 children accommodated children from Turkmenistan and neighbouring countries. A children's rehabilitation centre with a daycare centre, a health centre and an inpatient clinic, equipped with the latest technologies, had recently opened in Arkadag. A newly constructed rehabilitation centre in Ashgabat had 150 beds for children with neurological conditions, and orthopaedic and post-operative child patients.
6. Since 2023, the first cohort of medical social workers to graduate from the State Medical University had been working in primary care settings. As their number increased, they would also be deployed in palliative care units. A fund for needy children had paid for haemodialysis and artificial ventilation machines to be placed in children's inpatient clinics in all provinces. Various strategies and programmes had been adopted to address remaining challenges, such as high neonatal mortality rates. Causes of neonatal mortality included perinatal asphyxia, respiratory disorders, congenital abnormalities and infectious diseases.
7. As part of the national healthy eating programme, flour was fortified with folic acid and iron to prevent birth defects and anaemia and iodine was added to salt. The "Healthy Mother – Healthy Child – Healthy Future" strategy had been adopted to ensure children were born healthy by improving maternal health, with a focus on promoting healthy lifestyles among adolescents. The Government was currently considering a draft State programme on youth and peace and security, with a section on strengthening health and education services for young persons, including in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, mental health and psychosocial support. There were plans to establish the first reproductive health centre for young persons in the country, with a view to improving prevention of unwanted teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. Recommendations related to the new centre would be particularly welcome.
8. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that, in 2021, the Social Protection Code had been amended to bring the legal definition of disability into line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as recommended by the Committee and other treaty bodies. The new Social Services Act allowed the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection to provide home-based assistance to persons incapacitated owing to old age, illness or

disability. In 2020, rules on the organization of social taxi services for persons with disabilities had been approved, including provisions on the necessary equipment.

9. The National Plan of Action on Children's Rights for the period 2023–2028 provided for access to media for persons with disabilities, including the introduction of sign language interpretation on television and the production of print media for blind and visually impaired persons. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection was currently conducting discussions with relevant government agencies and civil society organizations on implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled. Persons with disabilities were exempt from payment for parking for their vehicles or mobility equipment close to their homes.

10. All the country's regions had rehabilitation centres catering for children with disabilities, which were monitored by the Government and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on an annual basis. In the Ashgabat centre, a rehabilitation unit focusing on social inclusion, early intervention and assistive technologies and devices for persons with disabilities would soon open. It would employ various specialists, including an occupational therapist, psychologist, and medical social worker, and would act as a coordination and training centre for the introduction of new services based on the social model of disability at the national level.

11. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the national education budget had increased by 9.3 per cent between 2023 and 2024. Following the adoption of the new Education Act, many new regulations had been developed to promote improvements in areas such as school libraries, official guardianship documents and the guardianship process, the provision of bursaries, education standards, school registration rules and electronic learning. A number of instruments concerning grants for youth enterprise and the promotion of economic inclusion for young persons had been adopted.

12. Every year, 25 students enrolled in the university-level psychology programme and 10 began to study social work in line with international standards, helping to strengthen psychological support and social services across the country. As a result of the increased funding and expanded course provision, the number of social workers currently employed had risen to 45, covering 20 districts. The social work curriculum addressed children's rights, child protection, women and social policy, social medicine, social and child psychology, education, social work methods, child protection law, the child protection system and inter-institutional cooperation. It trained students to work with different categories of children, including children from large families or single-parent families, orphans and children with disabilities and to conduct quality control of children's services. The same universities offered refresher training to all specialists working with children, including police officers, health-care workers and sports coaches. UNICEF had played a key role in ensuring that professionals specialized in the fields of social work, psychology and education received high-quality training. Regular training courses addressed topics including the rights of the child, the Convention and best teaching practices. Children were also taught to be aware of their own rights.

13. The State was working hard to ensure a more inclusive system: there were currently more than 24,000 children with disabilities enrolled in school. They could attend general schools, with support from specialist staff or, if necessary, go to one of the 17 special education schools, which followed slightly different programmes. The National Action Plan for the Realization of Children's Rights in Turkmenistan set out clear goals for the social integration of children with disabilities and the realization of their rights, such as through their involvement in sport and the development of rehabilitation services.

14. For the 2023/24 academic year, over 4,800 children with disabilities had been enrolled in the 17 special institutions, where they were provided with tailored assistance to support their learning, rehabilitation and integration into society. Of that number, there were 1,317 with hearing impairments, 469 with visual impairments, 726 with physical impairments, of whom 116 were in residential care facilities, and 2,352 with intellectual impairments, of whom 1,407 were in residential care facilities. Many parents chose to homeschool their children with disabilities; those who could not afford to cover the cost of hiring private educators could request financial and material assistance towards the children's care and

education from the social protection services; support was also available from private businesses and donors.

15. Plans were being developed to improve the standard of living and education of children in need of alternative care, through measures such as systematic monitoring, the identification of vulnerable groups and regular data collection. Public consultations and surveys would be conducted to identify the needs of families in difficult circumstances, and control mechanisms would be put in place to monitor agencies that sent children to boarding institutions or other alternative care establishments. Standards and requirements for fostering and adoption were being developed alongside mechanisms to support children to return to or remain in their own families.

16. Boys' enrolment in military academies was voluntary, as indicated by the high number of applicants per place. There were currently over 1,600 boys enrolled across five military schools. The staff included many women. Students received a comprehensive education, including basic military training, general discipline and specialist courses, three meals a day and support with preparing for university. Time spent with their families during the holiday periods ensured a balance between family life and military discipline. A high level of discipline was expected and any incidents of violence by students or teachers were strictly punished. Cameras were used for monitoring purposes and regular reports were sent to the Ministry of Defence.

17. In collaboration with UNICEF, the Ministry of Education had created two early development centres for young children, including children with disabilities, to help prepare them for school. There were also plans to introduce a "green schools" programme to involve students in tackling environmental questions.

18. Data on school dropouts would be provided to the Committee in writing. While such statistics were undoubtedly necessary to understand the scale of the issue, it was equally important to consider the preventive mechanisms in place, such as home visits and other inspections, involving both the school leadership and the local authorities, and meetings with parents to raise awareness following systematic absenteeism, which made it possible to respond proactively to non-attendance and prevent possible adverse consequences.

19. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that, owing to the favourable and stable socioeconomic situation in the country, violence against children was not widespread; indeed, there had been no reports of violence against children. Any cases would be identified by juvenile affairs inspectors, who conducted inspections and visits. A hotline was available for individuals to report cases of violence against children, and minors could file a complaint themselves.

20. Under the Criminal Code, perpetrators of any unlawful act committed against a minor in the country were liable to prosecution. Such offences included the intentional infliction of medium or severe levels of harm or bullying against a minor, the improper fulfilment of the duty of care for a minor, kidnapping or human trafficking of children, rape, sexual relations with a person under the age of 16, the involvement of a minor in the commission of an offence or antisocial behaviour or engaging a minor in prostitution.

21. Alternatives to criminal punishment were available for minors, and children under a certain age could not, in any case, be held liable for crimes. Any children found to have been neglected were placed temporarily in one of two specialized institutions until they could be reunited with their families. Action was then taken to address the issues that had led to their neglect or to them running away. It was not possible to provide data on the number of children in such institutions because of the temporary nature of their stay.

22. Although the minimum legal age for marriage was 18, marriage was permitted at the age of 17 in exceptional circumstances. Military service was possible only from the age of 18 – an amendment made the previous year to the relevant legislation provided that only male citizens aged 18 to 27 who did not have the right to an exemption could be conscripted into the armed forces.

23. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that an assessment carried out in 2021 of the existing child protection system had highlighted the need to review the Juvenile Affairs Commission and certain pieces of legislation on tutorship and guardianship. Recommendations to improve or replace the Commission had been proposed, but an agreement had yet to be reached.
24. The investigative bodies of the Office of the Procurator-General were responsible for investigating cases of sexual violence against children. In the case of the rape of a minor, the Criminal Code required the procurator to receive and record the complaint and to make a decision on its admissibility within three days. Additional material must be collected within 10 days and a decision must be taken on whether to initiate criminal proceedings.
25. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** asked whether girls were permitted to attend military schools, what the minimum age requirement was for enrolment in such schools and whether students were permitted to leave military schools and join mainstream schools instead.
26. **Ms. Beloff** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that the Committee would greatly appreciate receiving data on the number of children in institutions, including care homes and places of detention, and the suicide rate among children in those institutions.
27. She wished to know what progress had been made by the State party in meeting its obligations under the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and in giving follow-up to the recommendations made in the Committee's previous concluding observations (CRC/C/TKM/CO/2-4). In particular, she would welcome details of any measures that had been taken to strengthen the legal provisions prohibiting the sale of children for the purposes of forced labour and the possession of child pornography and to criminalize coerced adoption, the recruitment of children into prostitution and the use of the Internet to disseminate child pornography. Did the State party conduct regular reviews on the use of the Internet to disseminate child pornography and were Internet service providers required to cooperate with them?
28. **Ms. Al Barwani** said that she wished to know whether adolescent health centres provided pregnancy-related and abortion services to teenagers and whether the cost of abortions was covered by the Government.
29. It would be interesting to hear about any studies that had been conducted to determine the drivers behind school dropout, as well as about the relative prevalence of dropout at the different levels of education and in rural and urban areas. It was unclear whether students under the age of 18 years who got married or became pregnant were permitted to remain in school.
30. **Ms. Todorova** said that she wished to know whether military schools in the State party met all the conditions set out in article 3 of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, whether attendance at such schools was subject to the consent of students and their parents and whether the schools also provided civilian education. She would welcome clarification of whether any aspects of military education, such as the handling of weapons, were taught in mainstream schools.
31. It would be interesting to learn about any measures that were in place to prevent early pregnancy, provide sexual and reproductive health education in schools and make contraceptives available to teenagers.
32. She would like to know more about efforts to prevent and combat child labour, especially in the cotton-picking industry, as well as about any relevant cases that had been investigated and any perpetrators who had been sentenced.
33. In the absence of a robust data-gathering system, it was unclear on what basis the Government shaped its policies and legislation. She would be grateful for an account of the Government's views on data collection. She wished to encourage the State party to step up its efforts to strengthen its coordination mechanisms in the area of child protection.
34. **Mr. Van Keirsbilck** said that he would appreciate more detailed information about the places of detention in which children could be held, including whether children were detained alongside adults.

35. The Committee would welcome an account of any further action that had been taken with a view to ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. It would be helpful to know whether the Office of the Ombudsman was granted access to all places where children could be deprived of their liberty, including police stations and psychiatric institutions and, if so, whether the Office staff who visited those places were provided with the relevant training and what powers the Office had to take action if it found evidence of rights violations. He wished to know whether clear and specific complaints mechanisms were in operation in places of deprivation of liberty where children were accommodated.

36. **Mr. Jaffé**, noting that the State party's nationally determined contribution under the Paris Agreement was not particularly child-friendly, said that details would be welcome of the extent to which the authorities had begun to implement the recommendations made by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) concerning research into the effects of climate change on the children of Turkmenistan.

37. He would be grateful for clarification of whether boys who engaged in same-sex sexual activity were treated as criminals and whether they were provided with support from the social protection services.

38. **Ms. Aho** said that she wished to know whether any studies had been conducted to establish how many children with disabilities there were in the State party, the types of disability affecting them and which type was the most prevalent. She would welcome details of any programmes that were in place to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS and to detect disabilities during the delivery of prenatal care. It would also be useful to receive data on the State party's infant mortality rate and its breastfeeding rates.

39. The Committee would also welcome information on the measures in place to combat online sexual exploitation of children.

40. **The Chair** said that she would be grateful for clarification of the meaning of the criminal offence of antisocial behaviour.

41. She wished to know about the sentencing arrangements that were applied in cases where an adult engaged in sexual activity with a child who was below the age of consent, as well as in cases of sexual offences committed against a child, including cases in which the perpetrator was also a child. She asked whether any special arrangements were in place to handle cases of sexual activity between children who were below the age of consent.

42. **Ms. Correa** said that she would like to receive more detailed information about the circumstances in which the perpetrators of rape and other sexual offences against girls could be absolved of criminal responsibility if they married their victims. In addition, she wished to know more about how the authorities conducted criminal investigations into the sexual exploitation of girls.

The meeting was suspended at 11.45 a.m. and resumed at 12.05 p.m.

43. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that enrolment at military schools was voluntary and competition for admission to them was high, with approximately 15 applicants for every available place. Although girls were permitted to attend military schools, none had applied to do so since the country's independence. Students were free to leave military schools and join mainstream education if they so desired. While military schools delivered the same curriculum as mainstream schools, greater emphasis was placed on physical training. Citizens of Turkmenistan under the age of 18 years were not allowed to have weapons. Thus, as part of their preparation for entering military academies, students at such schools lived in barracks and were taught how to handle weapons using replicas that were not capable of inflicting harm.

44. The Government was aware of the importance of gathering statistical data, which it used to inform policies and decision-making processes. Over the previous eight years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been making great efforts to encourage other ministries to provide more detailed statistics. Turkmenistan had participated in the sixth and seventh rounds of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted by UNICEF and had provided all the necessary information to the relevant international organizations. In addition to studying

statistical information, it was equally important to look at the action taken by States to address particular issues.

45. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that, under the new Criminal Code, perpetrators of trafficking in persons were liable to a sentence of between 4 and 20 years' imprisonment. The Trafficking in Persons Act established the procedural bases for combating the offence and set out a comprehensive set of measures for protecting and rehabilitating victims. The new Criminal Code provided for tougher penalties for persons who forced minors to engage in prostitution and prohibited all the activities covered by the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It also established that aggravating circumstances would be considered to apply in cases where a victim of trafficking was a minor, a woman known to be pregnant, a defenceless person or a person with a serious physical or psychological illness. The sexual exploitation of a minor was considered to constitute a form of trafficking in persons, including in cases where no acts of violence had been carried out.

46. A specialized centre provided victims of trafficking with information on their rights and also organized social rehabilitation services. Over 140 officials of the Ministry of Internal Affairs had participated in activities related to combating trafficking in persons. No cases of trafficking in persons had been reported in the period 2019–2022. The Government was currently implementing its third national action plan to combat trafficking in persons, which covered the period 2024–2028. Under a presidential decree issued in February 2024, the first inter-agency commission for combating trafficking in persons had been established. The commission was chaired by the Procurator-General and drew its members from the law enforcement agencies, government departments and, where necessary, civil society.

47. Under article 162 of the Criminal Code, any person who sold, advertised or disseminated child pornography would be liable to a prison sentence of between 3 and 5 years. Efforts were made to rehabilitate young offenders held in correctional facilities so that they could reintegrate into society. Young persons serving custodial sentences remained in an institution for young offenders until they had served their sentence or reached the age of 21 years. Children in custody were held separately from adults. The delegation did not have any information on the number of suicides in detention facilities. The suicide of an inmate would trigger a mandatory investigation by the procuratorial authorities responsible for monitoring compliance with laws regulating detention centres.

48. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the number of children in street situations was very small. In March 2024, experts from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had conducted an assessment that determined that the number of vagrant children varied from between three and five. Such children were held in centres until their relatives could be located or they could be returned to an institution from which they had run away. Centres for vagrant children held children for up to one month and were not closed institutions.

49. There was only one place of detention for children in Turkmenistan. In that centre, no children deprived of their liberty had committed suicide over the previous 20 years. The number of children held in detention had fallen in recent years. The Ombudsman was authorized to visit freely all closed and open detention facilities in the country, including rehabilitation centres, police custody facilities, jails and military units and facilities.

50. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that any adult who had sexual relations with a child under 16 years of age was considered to have committed a criminal offence.

51. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that there were around 85 detainees currently being held in facilities for young offenders in Turkmenistan, of whom approximately 35 were minors, a figure lower than those for neighbouring countries. The remaining 60 per cent had reached the age of 18 but had only a few years of their sentences remaining and had therefore not been moved to adult facilities.

52. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the percentage of girls aged between 15 and 19 years who had given birth had fallen significantly between 2015 and 2023. Disaggregated data with the relevant figures could be found on the website of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, in the report submitted as part of the country's

second voluntary national review in July 2023 of the progress made in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

53. The Ministry of Health had been making efforts to raise adolescents' awareness of issues surrounding reproductive health and pregnancy. Staff from the country's 95 reproductive health clinics visited schools to educate teenagers about reproductive health, and lessons on reproductive health were mandatory for all children in seventh to eleventh grades in State schools. Teenagers aged between 15 and 19 years had the right to receive free contraceptives from reproductive health clinics.

54. In 2016, a law aimed at preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS had been adopted. All pregnant women, blood donors, recipients of blood donations and persons with serious illnesses, including cancer and tuberculosis, were screened for HIV/AIDS free of charge. The Breastfeeding Promotion and Support Act had been adopted in 2016 to promote breastfeeding in Turkmenistan. Measures had been taken to promote breastfeeding in State institutions, including hospitals, almost all of which had been classified as having good breastfeeding practices. In 2016, just over 56 per cent of children had been exclusively breastfed for the first six months of their lives, while 78 per cent of children had mainly or exclusively been breastfed during that period. In 2021, Turkmenistan had been ranked as one of the top five countries in the world for its policies on breastfeeding.

55. Official figures for children with disabilities showed that around 3,200 children had been newly registered as having a disability in 2023.

56. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that, over the previous few years, the Government had developed a strong partnership with the International Labour Organization that had resulted in the adoption of two road maps relating to employment policies and practices, including the prevention of child labour. The road map that was currently being implemented contained a compilation of the recommended legislative amendments that the Government would need to make to bring its employment laws into line with international standards. It also included an updated list of hazardous jobs that persons under 18 years of age were not permitted to undertake. The list included cotton-picking. Law enforcement agencies monitored the implementation of the regulations set out in the road map.

57. Since June 2024, training sessions, workshops and consultations had been conducted with local authorities, businesses and individuals to raise awareness of laws prohibiting child labour, particularly in relation to the cotton harvest. No complaints relating to the violation of child labour laws had been received, possibly owing to the low level of awareness of existing complaints mechanisms and to the fact that few labour inspections had been carried out. A simple and effective complaints mechanism would be established in line with the road map currently in force. During the current cotton harvest, violations of labour law could be reported to the Office of the Ombudsman or to the International Labour Organization.

58. The Code of Administrative Offences contained around 50 different articles that addressed the protection of the environment and set out the punishments applicable to persons who violated environmental regulations. An entire chapter of the Criminal Code was devoted to offences against the environment. Specific rules governed the transport of harmful substances and the punishments applicable to persons who polluted the soil, water or air. The Government had recently begun developing legislation relating to natural disasters.

59. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that the mandatory school curriculum covered key aspects of reproductive health, including the prevention of early pregnancy, contraception, and the physical changes associated with puberty, as well as health-related matters such as the importance of diet and exercise and the harmful effects of smoking and drinking.

60. **The Chair** said that any other information that the delegation wished to provide should be set out in writing and submitted to the Committee within 48 hours.

61. **Ms. Beloff** said that she wished to thank the delegation for its very comprehensive answers to the Committee's questions. The dialogue had been extremely useful in giving the Committee a clearer picture of the situation of children's rights in Turkmenistan.

62. **A representative of Turkmenistan** said that he was grateful to the Committee for its constructive approach to the dialogue and its valuable recommendations, which would be carefully considered.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.