



# Convention on the Rights of the Child

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## Committee on the Rights of the Child Ninety-eighth session

### Summary record of the 2862nd meeting\*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 22 January 2025, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Skelton

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Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

*Combined fourth to seventh periodic reports of the Gambia*

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\* No summary record was issued for the 2861st meeting.

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*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

**Consideration of reports of States parties** *(continued)*

*Combined fourth to seventh periodic reports of the Gambia (CRC/C/GMB/4-7; CRC/C/GMB/QPR/4-7)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Gambia joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of the Gambia**, introducing her country's combined fourth to seventh periodic reports (CRC/C/GMB/4-7), said that in the Gambia, dedication to children's welfare was not merely a matter of policy but was also deeply embedded in the fabric of society. Following the historic transition to democracy in 2017, a Truth, Reconciliation and Repatriation Commission had been established to address past human rights violations. Through its extensive outreach activities, the Commission had provided families across the country with a platform through which to share the profound impact that the previous regime's actions had had on children, including psychological trauma, disrupted education and social marginalization.
3. At the institutional level, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare had been established in 2019 to coordinate and streamline child protection efforts and empower women, which indirectly benefited children. The Ministry's Directorate of Social Welfare focused on social protection programmes for vulnerable populations, including orphans, children with disabilities and families living in poverty. The Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Unit of the Ministry of Justice played a vital role in dealing with cases of violence and abuse affecting children. Child Welfare Units had been set up at major police stations and in offices of the Drug Law Enforcement Agency and the Immigration Department to bridge the gap between law enforcement and social services. At the policy level, the National Child Protection Strategy, the Minimum Standards for Quality Care in residential facilities for children and the Child Labour Policy were being implemented to address critical gaps in child protection, alongside the Gender Management Information System.
4. The Inclusive Education Directorate of the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education was working to ensure that children with disabilities had access to quality education, including through the provision of assistive technologies, the introduction of incentives to increase the number of teachers in rural areas and the opening of special schools. Hardship allowances and the decentralization of teacher training were intended to bridge the education gap between urban and rural areas. Other policies were aimed at improving enrolment and retention rates, particularly for children with disabilities and girls, narrowing the education gap by providing school meals and bridging the digital divide by introducing digital tools and infrastructure. Despite those efforts, the Government required more support from international partners to build capacity and ensure that its inclusive education initiatives were sustainable.
5. Significant improvements had been made in healthcare services for children. Access to essential health services had been expanded to underserved communities through the Maternal, Child, Nutrition and Health Results Project, and the establishment of the National Health Insurance Scheme ensured that children from low-income households had equitable access to healthcare services. Vaccination campaigns had led to a significant reduction in childhood diseases, and reproductive health programmes were providing young people with the knowledge to make informed decisions. One-stop centres for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence offered critical medical, psychosocial and legal support for child victims. An additional toll-free helpline had been set up for the confidential reporting of abuse cases.
6. The Children's Parliament had been established to ensure that children's voices were heard in decision-making processes. Community-based platforms where children could discuss topics affecting them fostered a culture of active participation and empowerment. The Children's Court had been designed to handle cases involving children in a manner that respected their rights and minimized trauma. The use of child-sensitive procedures ensured that children were protected throughout proceedings.

7. While targeted nutrition interventions had led to significant progress in reducing the prevalence of stunting, wasting and underweight among children under five years, such gains were vulnerable to setbacks caused by external factors such as the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, climate change and global economic pressures. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare worked closely with civil society organizations and the National Human Rights Commission to strengthen child protection systems and promote children's welfare through the implementation of child-focused advocacy campaigns, the introduction of capacity-building initiatives for policymakers and law enforcement officers and the provision of reintegration services for vulnerable children and support for families impacted by past human rights violations. The Ministry and the Commission had advanced policy reforms and awareness-raising efforts to address child abuse, exploitation and neglect. As part of its steadfast commitment to creating a future where every child could thrive, the Government was prioritizing a number of actions, namely increased investment in child protection services, robust enforcement of child protection laws, enhanced inter-agency collaboration on cross-cutting issues affecting children, promotion of inclusive education and equitable access to quality healthcare for all children, and fostering partnerships with civil society and international organizations to mobilize resources and expertise.

8. Despite the progress that had been made, challenges remained, and constraints on human and financial resources continued to impede the full implementation of children protection programmes. Emerging threats such as the online exploitation of children required innovative and robust responses. The devastating impact of acute kidney injury, which had killed 70 children in 2022, had highlighted the urgent need to strengthen the healthcare system and emergency response mechanisms. The Gambia called upon its development partners to strengthen their support, particularly in the areas of education, healthcare, nutrition and child protection, to ensure the sustainable implementation of policies and programmes aimed at safeguarding children's rights.

9. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that she wished to learn about any concrete measures taken to enforce the amendments made to the Children's Act 2005 to criminalize child marriage, as well as those made to the Women's Act to prohibit female genital mutilation, and how the authorities evaluated the impact of the bans on those practices. The Civil Code and personal law were not in alignment on the issue of child marriage; she wondered which of the two took precedence when conflicts arose.

10. She would like to know what resources had been made available for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the National Child Protection Strategy and the accompanying action plan. An update would be welcome on the progress made in drafting a comprehensive national children's policy.

11. She wondered how the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare managed to operate given that it received just 0.3 per cent of the State budget. She was interested to know what progress had been made in the joint efforts with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to develop budgetary guidelines for ministries responsible for social issues and in efforts to set up a system to track expenditure on children.

12. In the light of the adoption of the Anti-Corruption Act, she would be grateful for details on any measures taken or planned with a view to allocating the resources required to implement the Act, creating a national anti-corruption commission and establishing a mechanism for the reporting of corruption.

13. She would welcome an account of any progress made in improving data collection. It would be interesting to know whether work was under way to set up an information system within the Ministry of Justice to enable it to monitor and report on cases.

14. It would be useful to learn when the State party intended to submit its initial report under the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. She would like to know what was being done to raise awareness of the Convention and its two Optional Protocols among families and children, including vulnerable children and children living in rural areas, and to build capacity among all stakeholders working with children, such as teachers, judges and social workers.

15. The delegation might provide more details about the thematic working group on vulnerable groups, including children, which had been established within the National Human Rights Commission. It was unclear whether children themselves could file complaints with the Commission without their parents or a legal representative. If they could, it would be helpful to learn about any measures in place to guarantee practical and geographical access for all children, as well as to ensure confidentiality and protect children from reprisals. She would also like to know whether children could receive free legal aid.

16. She would welcome an update on the status of the Tourism Code of Conduct with a view to including the issue of child sexual abuse in that industry and would like to know whether there were any plans to adopt legislation on due diligence for businesses.

17. She would be grateful for an account of the action being taken to prohibit corporal punishment in all settings.

18. She wondered whether staff employed to answer the toll-free helplines set up to receive reports of child abuse were given sufficient training to be able to provide children with appropriate support.

19. She would welcome more details of the action being taken to overcome challenges in the provision of inclusive education. Given that the State party had now ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, she would like to know when that Convention would be incorporated into national legislation.

20. **Ms. Sidikou** (Country Task Force) said that, according to a situation analysis conducted in 2022, children in the Gambia were highly vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination and abuse. For example, children with disabilities faced difficulty in obtaining access to basic social services; girls were often subjected to gender-based violence and harmful practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation; and children born out of wedlock were unable to inherit from their Muslim fathers. She wished to know what steps were being taken to put an end to persistent discriminatory practices.

21. The principle of the best interests of the child, although incorporated into national laws and strategy documents, appeared to be neither well understood nor applied in all areas. She wondered whether the State party had developed guidance for all relevant authorities for determining the best interests of the child, as the Committee had recommended in 2015, and what was being done to make the principle better known.

22. Regarding the Children's National Assembly, she would particularly like to know what eligibility criteria children had to meet in order to become a member, whether its members included children in vulnerable situations and whether the National Assembly, the Government and other partners followed up on its work. She would be interested to know what progress had been made towards providing the Children's National Assembly with a permanent secretariat and an adequate budget.

23. According to a recent Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, children were often excluded from decision-making in the family and the community. She therefore wished to know what action had been taken to encourage families and communities to take children's views into account, to challenge the social norms that prevented children from expressing their views, and to put in place participation mechanisms at the community level.

24. In the light of reports of children being placed in residential institutions because their parents were incapable of looking after them, she wished to know what was being done, especially among vulnerable families, to promote responsible parenting and children's right to a family life. Did the Gambia have a social protection mechanism to assist vulnerable families in caring for their children?

25. The Committee welcomed the adoption of minimum standards for quality care in residential care institutions; however, the delegation might explain why those standards had not been sufficiently disseminated and did not apply to all care institutions. It would be interesting to know whether the Gambia had a functioning mechanism for the regular oversight of alternative care facilities. The Committee would also like to know what steps were being taken to identify and inspect unauthorized facilities and to close them if they failed to meet the minimum standards. In view of reports of that students in Qur'anic schools

lived in unhygienic conditions and had no access to healthcare or other basic social services, it wished to know what measures had been taken or were planned in order to improve living conditions and to modernize Qur'anic schools.

26. **Ms. Kiladze** (Country Task Force) said that, despite various efforts to promote birth registration, the national birth registration rate remained under 60 per cent and most children under 5 years of age did not have a birth certificate. She therefore wished to know what difficulties the State party had encountered in ensuring immediate birth registration and providing birth certificates for all children. She would be grateful for clarification of whether children who did not have birth certificates could access healthcare, education and other services. She wondered whether the Government saw the potential for an integrated digital birth registration system in line with international standards.

27. The Committee had received reports that foundlings were not issued with identity cards and were not recognized as Gambian citizens because they were unable to prove their parentage. If that information was correct, she wished to know how the State party intended to deal with the challenge so that it fulfilled its obligations under the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Furthermore, the delegation might shed light on the naturalization procedure for children of long-term refugees, many of whom had grown up in the Gambia and had no links with their parents' country of origin. In particular, she wished to know why refugee identity cards were not recognized as proof of residence for the purposes of applying for naturalization, and whether the State party might change its position in that regard.

28. The adoption of the Access to Information Act was welcome; however, she would like to know how the State party protected children from harmful information in the media and on social networks. She was curious to know the time frame for the adoption of the criminal offences bill and the cybercrime bill, which would likely strengthen the rights of the child in the digital environment. Lastly, she asked how the State party intended to ensure access to the Internet for all children, including those who lived in rural and remote areas.

*The meeting was suspended at 3.55 p.m. and resumed at 4.20 p.m.*

29. **A representative of the Gambia** said that the Children's Act of 2015 provided a comprehensive legal framework for the protection and promotion of children's rights and incorporated many provisions of the Convention, including those on child labour, education and health. The development of a comprehensive national children's policy was in progress. The Gambia had already adopted several national strategies aimed at improving child welfare, including the National Social Protection Policy 2015–2025 and a national plan of action on gender-based violence.

30. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare was the lead agency responsible for coordinating efforts related to children's rights. Coordination was enhanced through interministerial committees and partnerships with international organizations, including UNICEF. A national committee met regularly to address issues of concern to children. One challenge for effective coordination was the lack of adequate human and financial resources. The Government did not have a specific budget for children, but the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare allocated resources based on the policies and strategies that were in place for women, children and persons with disabilities.

31. In 2023 and 2024, a total of 912 cases of child abuse had been reported through the 1313 and 199 toll-free helplines. No data on child marriage were available. The Government recognized the importance of data collection and was working with UNICEF to improve it. Various initiatives to raise public awareness of the Convention and its content had been undertaken at the national, regional and community levels.

32. Work to address gender-based violence was ongoing. Gender-based violence had been integrated into the curriculum of the police training academy, and a training manual had been published. Thousands of police officers throughout the country had been trained on gender-based violence. Officers helped to raise awareness of the problem, for example, by participating in radio programmes. The police no longer dismissed complaints of gender-based violence as a family matter. Public confidence in the police had risen and the number of complaints had increased.

33. Much was being done to raise awareness of the law prohibiting female genital mutilation. The Government engaged with traditional and religious leaders, women, young people, teachers and students in order to sensitize communities to the consequences of the practice. The subject had been integrated into the curricula of all nursing schools and the School of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences at the University of the Gambia.

34. The police had been trained to take the necessary action to address the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, although not many cases had been reported. With the necessary information and training in place, the Government was stepping up efforts to ensure that all concerned parties, including communities, the tourism police and hotel staff, were able to identify cases and report them to the authorities.

35. The Gambia had made significant progress in ensuring children's right to life and survival. Child mortality had been reduced through initiatives such as the Expanded Programme on Immunization and maternal health programmes.

36. The Government aimed to ensure that all children born in the Gambia were registered and had taken steps to raise communities' awareness of the importance of birth registration. Birth registration services had been decentralized and were provided at the district level. Some health facilities raised awareness of the issue among pregnant women when they received antenatal care. A digital birth registration system would certainly be useful for ensuring the registration of all children born in the Gambia.

37. **A representative of the Gambia** said that the Government had recently issued a call for applications in order to recruit the members of the Anti-Corruption Commission established under the Anti-Corruption Act of 2023.

38. The Children's Act and the Legal Aid Act provided that children in contact with the justice system who could not afford legal representation were entitled to legal aid, support and counsel at the expense of the State.

39. The Ministry of Justice did not currently have a digital information system; however, it had adopted and was working hard to implement a digitalization policy that would facilitate data collection, case management and the tracking of information.

40. The Constitution guaranteed that personal law prevailed in matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance. The Children's Act provided that child marriage was prohibited and that any marriage contracted by a child was voidable. That meant that any marriage entered into by a child under personal law would remain valid until such time as it was set aside by a court. The fact that marriages entered into by children were voidable, rather than automatically void from the outset, guaranteed certain rights for the girls in question, including the legitimacy of any offspring conceived during the marriage and inheritance rights in the event of the husband's death. The rules governing inheritance matters were set out in personal law, which meant that the situation to which the Committee had alluded was not considered discriminatory under the laws of the State party.

41. It was unfortunate that refugee identity cards issued by the Immigration Department were not recognized as proof of residence for the purposes of naturalization. The situation was under review and would be corrected as quickly as possible. An immigration bill had been drafted and was ready to be submitted to the Cabinet and the National Assembly.

42. The Government expected that the National Assembly would complete its consideration of the criminal offences bill during its forthcoming session in March. The new law should be adopted by mid-2025 at the latest.

43. The National Human Rights Commission had been restructured and a new child rights committee had been established. That committee was headed by commissioner and an alternate commissioner and supported by the Commission's secretariat and child rights experts. Children did not have to be assisted by an adult in order to obtain access to the Commission's services.

44. **A representative of the Gambia** said that one important social protection programme was a cash transfer scheme for vulnerable families, who had been provided with transfers of 3,000 dalasis. The Government intended to continue the scheme and to increase the benefit provided, although doing so would require additional funding.

45. Alternative care arrangements, including foster care and residential homes, were provided across the country. The Government worked closely with care institutions and closely monitored their compliance with the minimum standards. In 2020, a facility that had not complied with the standards had been closed down.

46. **A representative of the Gambia** said that the secretariat for Arab-Islamic education within the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education oversaw teaching and learning in Qur'anic schools and conducted checks to ensure that they provided a suitable environment for children. The schools received a monthly grant from the State to cover teachers' salaries and building upkeep. In the previous academic year, over US\$ 120 million had been disbursed to Qur'anic schools nationwide.

47. The Ministry aimed to ensure that no child had to travel more than five kilometres to reach his or her school. Schools were being built in all eight of the country's local government areas, with priority being given to rural areas. A new teacher training centre had opened that would provide training tailored to the needs of teachers serving rural areas. All schools built since 2017 had been designed to cater for children with disabilities, and inclusive education was now the institutional policy. The Ministry had begun to mainstream early childhood education relatively recently, following the introduction of the Directorate for Early Childhood and Inclusive Education. The launch of that Directorate had prompted a marked increase in the Ministry's budget, from \$1.23 billion in 2021 to \$1.84 billion in 2025.

48. Corporal punishment was prohibited in schools, and reports of abuse could be referred to either regional offices or the Ministry's headquarters. Information on attendance and punctuality as well as reports of corporal punishment or cases of early marriage could be relayed in real time via a dedicated software application. Civic education classes had been introduced recently and were compulsory at all levels. The Ministry of Education worked with the Ministry of Health to verify that all children registered in the country were enrolled in school.

49. **A representative of the Gambia** said that the members of the Children's National Assembly were selected by their peers, must live in the region that they would be representing and should be active in the promotion and protection of child rights. The Assembly did not have a stand-alone budget, but it received assistance and support, particularly at the regional level, from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare. The Ministry was looking at ways to enhance funding for its activities and build its members' capacity to implement them.

50. **A representative of the Gambia** said that, following the introduction of the electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System, the Ministry of Health had adopted standardized registration procedures, as well as protocols for specific categories of children, including those born to non-Gambian parents, that should help to protect against statelessness. The new procedures had already been piloted and would be rolled out nationwide in the near future. Several decentralized registration campaigns had been organized, resulting in an increase in the registration of children under 5 years old.

51. **A representative of the Gambia** said that ongoing security sector reforms had led the Gambia Police Force to review its capacity-building programmes, particularly those covering child-related issues. Gender issues and human rights had been incorporated into the advanced training modules delivered at the Police Training School. Five child-friendly model police stations with appropriate facilities for interviewing victims of sexual offences had been built and the construction of a further five was envisaged. The Inspector General of Police was doing his utmost to engage with the international community with a view to identifying the best ways for partners to assist with policing needs in the Gambia and ensuring that national regulations and practices were in line with international standards.

52. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she would like to know what the implications of the annulment of a marriage were for any children born during that marriage. For example, she wondered whether rights and responsibilities were shared equally between the two parents, whether the fathers were required to make alimony payments and whether the children's rights of inheritance were affected.

53. Confirmation that a new plan of action against sexual abuse was in the pipeline, as indicated in the periodic report (CRC/C/GMB/4-7, para. 22), would be welcome. If it was, it would be interesting to know whether the new plan would address online sexual abuse. She would appreciate information about the protocols in place to ensure due care and support for child victims and prevent their revictimization pending the adoption of a new plan.

54. **Ms. Kiladze** said that an update on progress towards the amendment of the 1990 Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Act would be helpful. Additionally, she would like clarification regarding whether children's rights in the digital environment, including the right to Internet access, were addressed and protected in the Access to Information Act of 2021, and, if they were not, how access to information was guaranteed for all children, including in remote, rural areas.

55. **Mr. Jaffe** said that he would like to know whether the 199 helpline had nationwide coverage and what training was provided for helpline operators.

56. Since a bill that would have repealed the legislation that criminalized female genital mutilation had apparently been rejected in parliament by only a slim margin, he would like to hear the delegation's views on whether a change of attitude towards the practice across the country was a realistic prospect. Additionally, he wished to know how many convictions for female genital mutilation had been secured in 2023 and how many fines had been levied as a punishment.

57. **Ms. Al Barwani** said that more information about the education provided in Qur'anic schools would be useful. In particular, she wished to know how many children attended Qur'anic schools; whether the Ministry of Education had a say in the content of their curricula; whether students in Qur'anic schools obtained secondary education certificates equivalent to those issued to their peers in State schools and had the possibility of continuing their studies at a university or other higher education institute; and, more generally, whether they were able to reintegrate within society and lead a normal life upon leaving school.

58. **Ms. Aho** said that she would like to know the overall rate of birth registration in the country and whether it was rising. She wondered how long after registration birth certificates were issued, whether a registration fee was payable, and, if so, how affordable that fee was. She also wished to know whether any follow-up action was taken in the event that a birth certificate was not collected by the family concerned. She would like to hear about any action being taken to raise awareness about the procedures to be followed to register a birth and obtain the corresponding certificate, particularly in rural areas. Similarly, details of the measures in place to ensure that the public was aware that female genital mutilation was prohibited by law would be helpful.

59. **A representative of the Gambia** said that the child helpline operated nationwide and was staffed by social workers attached to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare. UNICEF and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had provided initial help with staffing and training. At present, there was just one shelter for victims of gender-based violence, located in the urban area. Counselling, healthcare and legal services were available at the shelter, although victims often did not wish to pursue legal action. Work was under way to establish a second shelter in a rural area. Financial constraints had delayed progress and more funding was needed, but the new facility should open in the near future. In the long term, the aim was to have a shelter in every region so that victims could be immediately placed in a shelter, where all interviews and other formalities would be carried out, rather than having to visit a police station.

60. Over two thirds of the country's parliament had voted in favour of the continued criminalization of female genital mutilation. A great deal of work had been put into securing that outcome, including on the part of the President. A special cabinet committee had been established to study the issue and make recommendations, and ministerial representatives had made presentations in parliament to raise awareness of the harmful effects of the practice and make very clear that it constituted a human rights violation. Scholars at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo had also been contacted for input, particularly their help in dispelling the notion that the practice was an obligation in Islam.



61. **A representative of the Gambia** said that the Access to Information Act did not include specific provisions on accessing information digitally, nor did it explicitly address children's rights. However, since it provided a general right to access to information for all persons, children or persons acting on their behalf were not excluded from applying for access to information, provided that such information pertained to public records or was held by public bodies or private entities conducting business with the Government.

62. In cases where a marriage was discontinued, child maintenance arrangements were unaffected. Since paternity was not in dispute, parents were expected to contribute based on their capacity, with fathers maintaining their responsibilities for the children's upkeep. Furthermore, the inheritance rights of the children remained protected. The term "voidable" was deliberately used instead of "void" to ensure that such rights were preserved.

63. **A representative of the Gambia** said that the ministries of gender and education worked closely together to address the issue of child marriage. Cases were often reported to the authorities during the planning stages, enabling them to act swiftly to prevent the marriage from taking place. In most instances, the girl was taken to the headmistress's home to ensure she could continue her education while authorities worked with the family to prevent further attempts at marriage. In 2024, three women had been convicted of female genital mutilation and had been handed fines of \$15,000 each.

64. **Ms. Kiladze** said that the Committee remained concerned about the high child mortality rate, challenges in healthcare services and the inadequacy of resources set aside for health; she would appreciate the delegation's comments in that regard. She wondered about the availability of properly trained medical personnel, equitable access to healthcare across regions and specific measures to improve neonatal and infant healthcare. The recent increase in immunization coverage was commendable, but she wished to know what further steps the State party planned to take to ensure full immunization across the country. An update on progress made in combating HIV/AIDS, particularly in the areas of early childhood diagnosis, prevention of mother-to-child transmission and access to treatment for children and women, would be welcome.

65. She wondered what measures the State party had taken to address undernutrition, stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiencies and to promote diversified diets and exclusive, early breastfeeding. She also wished to know about any actions taken to prevent children from dying of acute kidney injury and whether those found responsible for such deaths in the past had been held accountable. It would be useful to learn whether the Government had undertaken a review of pharmaceutical import licence laws to prevent unsafe products from reaching children.

66. It would be interesting to learn whether the State party had plans to align its mental health legislation, including the Lunatics Detention Act of 1917, with international human rights standards, and to obtain statistical information on mental healthcare and improve data collection on suicide. She wondered whether the Government had plans to develop a comprehensive mental health policy focusing on prevention and rehabilitation services and wished to know more about the availability and training of child psychologists, particularly in rural areas.

67. She also wished to know about the measures taken to strengthen family and parenting support and provide age-appropriate reproductive health education in schools and to ensure equitable access to hygiene products for girls, particularly in rural and underserved areas. She wondered whether the State party had plans for sustained investment in health education and the provision of menstrual hygiene kits. She also wondered what actions had been taken to prevent adolescent pregnancies and improve access to education on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections for adolescents, as well as testing, counselling and treatment. It would also be interesting to learn about the Government's stance on the legalization of abortion.

68. She would be grateful for information on data collection concerning drug and substance abuse, the training of medical personnel in that regard, funding for rehabilitation programmes and the accessibility of rehabilitation services for children, especially in rural areas. She would also appreciate information on the legal mechanisms in place to address drug-related crimes involving children and to sanction perpetrators, as well as on the procedures established to handle child offenders recruited into drug-related criminal activity.

Additionally, it would be useful to receive information on the State party's strategy for addressing extreme child poverty and to improve access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, including any cash allowances or social assistance programmes for the most vulnerable and marginalized children.

69. **Ms. Otani** (Country Task Force) said that she would welcome more information about legislation and policies relating to natural disasters and climate change. She wondered whether the Government had any plans to study the effects of water and air pollution on children's health, in order to develop strategies to address those effects, and it would also be useful to know whether health professionals received training on the impact of pollution on children's health. On a similar issue, she wished to know whether children and adolescents were informed about and prepared for risks related to climate change and how they were engaged in community-based climate change and food security initiatives.

70. She wished to know about measures taken by the State party to address the root causes of the abandonment of schooling, such as financial constraints, early marriage, child labour and long distances to school, particularly in rural areas. She also wondered whether hidden educational costs, such as uniforms or textbooks, remained a burden on families. It would be useful to receive clarification regarding the implementation of the Women's Act, which prohibited the expulsion of pregnant girls from school, and also to learn whether school staff, parents and girls themselves were aware of the Act, how the cases of girls who were expelled or pressured to leave school because of pregnancy were handled and whether the Act also protected married girls who wished to continue their education.

71. She wondered whether the education in Qur'anic schools, or *majalis*, met national curriculum standards and whether the State party had considered integrating Qur'anic schools into the mainstream education system.

72. **Ms. Sidikou** said that, in the light of reports that children continued to be engaged in the worst forms of child labour, she wished to know why the national child protection system appeared to be failing and wondered whether it was due to insufficient qualified human resources, inadequate budget allocations, a lack of political will or other factors. She would welcome information on the enforcement of the 2016 amendments to the Children's Act, which criminalized certain forms of child labour, including in family enterprises and the formal sector. It would be useful to learn whether there existed monitoring mechanisms to identify child labour in family businesses and the private sector and whether the State party was considering raising the minimum age of employment to align with the end of compulsory schooling.

73. She wondered whether the State planned to conduct a study on child trafficking to gather more information and better address that phenomenon and what measures were taken to provide holistic care for child victims of trafficking. She wished to know what local measures were being taken to prohibit and prevent families in poverty from encouraging their children to engage in sex tourism for financial gain, whether there were social protection measures in place to support impoverished families engaged in such practices and improve their living conditions and what efforts were being made to raise awareness among families and communities regarding child trafficking, sex tourism and the importance of reporting cases. Information on the prosecution of the persons thought to be responsible in cases of trafficking and sexual exploitation would also be welcome.

74. She wondered what measures were being taken to make existing children's courts functional and improve support for children in conflict with the law. She also wished to know whether there were plans to build the capacity of actors in the juvenile justice system on children's rights and to equip police stations with separate facilities for children to prevent them from being detained alongside adults. It would also be useful to know whether the State party planned to increase the budget of the National Agency for Legal Aid to enable it to provide effective assistance to children in conflict with the law. Lastly, she wished to know whether alternative measures to incarceration for children existed in the Gambia and, if so, how such measures were implemented.

*The meeting rose at 6 p.m.*