



# Economic and Social Council

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## Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights Seventy-seventh session

### Summary record of the 15th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 19 February 2025, at 10 a.m.

*Chair:* Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu

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### Consideration of reports (*continued*)

- (a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant  
(*continued*)

*Seventh periodic report of the Philippines (continued)*

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

**Consideration of reports** *(continued)*

**(a) Reports submitted by States parties under articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant**  
*(continued)*

*Seventh periodic report of the Philippines (continued)* ([E/C.12/PHL/7](#);  
[E/C.12/PHL/Q/7](#); [E/C.12/PHL/RQ/7](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Philippines joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of the Philippines**, resuming her delegation's replies to the questions raised at the previous meeting, said that a distinction was drawn under national law between different types of contractual workers: there were those working under arrangements that were trilateral in nature, whereby the principal entrusted to a contractor the completion of a specific job, in which case the worker was employed by the contractor and thus covered by articles 106 to 109 of the Labor Code; and independent contractors, who were directly engaged by the principal in a bilateral arrangement, in which case no employer-employee relationship existed and, therefore, the Labor Code did not apply.
3. The Department of Foreign Affairs addressed labour migration matters and provided on-site assistance to Filipino overseas workers. A law on seafarers' rights had recently been enacted.
4. The strategies under the Philippine Development Plan were consistent with the State party's commitments under the Covenant. Government initiatives designed to benefit vulnerable segments of the population included the enactment of a law on the first 1,000 days of life, the introduction of cash transfers specifically for that period of life and the implementation of healthcare programmes that began at conception and extended through the first two years of a child's life. Senior citizens received various discounts, including on food, medicine and certain forms of entertainment. Under the New Agrarian Emancipation Act, 600,000 farmers' outstanding obligations with respect to indebtedness that they had incurred under an earlier agrarian reform programme had been forgiven.
5. The Government aimed to ensure that 30 per cent of the country's energy came from renewable sources by 2030 and viewed liquefied natural gas – a more environmentally friendly source of energy than other fossil fuels – as a tool for use in the transition period while it worked towards that goal.
6. A memorandum of understanding had been signed by the Department of Energy and private sector firms interested in developing liquefied natural gas projects in the Verde Island Passage, and it contained a commitment to protect the Passage. Efforts were under way to have the Passage declared a protected area under the Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System. In addition, the Government was establishing a marine science biological research station near the area. The secretariat of the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council, comprising the President and selected members of both houses of Congress, had identified the bill on what was referred to as the blue economy as a legislative priority.
7. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, in *Diosdado Sama y Hinupas and Bandy Masanglay y Aceveda v. People of the Philippines*, a case that involved the prosecution of Indigenous persons for illegal logging after they had been caught cutting down a tree, the Supreme Court had accepted the Indigenous persons' argument that they had had the right to cut the tree down because it was located in their ancestral domain, and it had recognized the practices, customs and traditions of Indigenous Peoples.
8. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, while an established framework was in place to assist persons internally displaced by disasters, with, for example, a programme to provide emergency shelter to persons whose housing was damaged, the Government had little experience in responding to internal displacement resulting from armed conflict. The most significant case of such displacement had occurred at the time of the 2017 siege of Marawi. Although the Government had not initiated the siege, it had recognized the need to provide compensation and assistance to the victims.

9. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Philippine Government and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao continued to provide essential support to internally displaced persons affected by the 2017 Marawi siege. The Marawi Compensation Board ensured that compensation was provided, tax-free, for residential, cultural and commercial properties and personal possessions lost during the siege. Two billion pesos had been released by October 2024, and 3 billion had been allocated for additional compensation in 2025. As at September 2024, 29.6 billion pesos had been allocated to the Marawi Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction Program, with 18.2 billion pesos disbursed. Internally displaced persons received various forms of assistance, including housing and education support, primary health and mental health services and psychosocial support.

10. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the executive order on freedom of information covered only the executive branch. It required all executive branch offices to grant the public access to official records, contracts and other documents of public concern, subject to reasonable exceptions.

11. The security of whistleblowers was guaranteed under the Witness Protection, Security and Benefit Program of the Department of Justice, which was open to any person who had testified, was currently testifying or was willing to testify about a crime.

12. The Anti-Red Tape Authority and the Commission on Audit played a key role in preventing and addressing corruption and promoting transparency and efficiency in government operations. The Office of the Ombudsman acted on complaints, even anonymous ones. Corruption cases could be brought against individuals after they had left government service and against the estates of individuals who were deceased.

13. **A representative of the Philippines** said that polygamy was illegal under the law of the Philippines. However, Presidential Decree No. 1083 of 4 February 1977 had set out a code of Muslim personal laws. In order for a Muslim man to contract a subsequent marriage, he must have the necessary financial capacity, he must deal with the wives fairly, and the existing wives must give their consent. In addition, while there was no divorce law in the Philippines, the code set out in the Presidential Decree provided for the revocation of marriages.

14. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Philippines was a signatory to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The Government strictly observed international standards prohibiting the military conscription of children under the age of 18 and ensured that members of the armed forces who were under 18 did not take part in hostilities. However, the same could not be said of the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army or the National Democratic Front of the Philippines. The report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Philippines dated 23 September 2024 noted that the New People's Army continued to recruit and exploit children in armed hostilities and that 41 per cent of grave violations against children had been attributed to it. Data from the Armed Forces of the Philippines Centre for Law of Armed Conflict revealed over 575 cases of child involvement in armed conflict and nearly 2,000 human rights violations perpetrated by the terrorist group. Supporters of the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines were now calling for terrorist-linked schools in southern Mindanao, which had been used to groom minors for war and had been closed by the Government in 2019, to be reopened.

15. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, after a bill on comprehensive sexuality education put forward by the Government had met with resistance, it had been decided to change the title of the bill to refer instead to comprehensive reproductive health education.

16. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, since its roll-out in 51 pilot schools in 2021, the programme on comprehensive sexuality education, which was anchored in the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Law, had been expanded to 103 schools, which were linked in a referral network to 111 adolescent-friendly health facilities. An estimated 1.1 million learners had thus far received comprehensive sexuality education. Materials for social and behavioural change, including the Oky menstrual tracker mobile application and the Lusog-Isip mental health mobile application, had been developed in

collaboration with civil society and development partners. Greater support was needed for teachers, particularly in addressing concerns from parents and community leaders regarding the inclusion of comprehensive sexuality education in the curriculum.

17. **A representative of the Philippines** said that all forms of online sexual abuse and exploitation of children were punishable under Republic Act No. 11930. Civil society, the private sector and children had actively engaged in the formulation of the implementing rules and regulations for the Act. The Department of Justice, the Department of Interior and Local Government, the Department of Information and Communications Technology, the Anti-Money Laundering Council, the National Bureau of Investigation and the Philippine National Police worked closely to address the problem. In February 2025, the Department of Justice had used the Act to prosecute a mother who had sold private videos of her minor daughter, leading to the mother's conviction and a sentence of imprisonment.

18. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, prior to the enactment of the Rice Tariffication Law, rice had been subject to a quantitative restriction and could be imported only by the Government or by the private sector with government authorization. At the time of its accession to the World Trade Organization, the Philippines had undertaken to replace quantitative restrictions with tariffs. After obtaining various extensions to allow it to maintain its quantitative restriction on rice, various factors – including the concessions that it had had to make to trading partners in order to be granted those extensions, the decrease in private investment in rice production in the country and the recommendations of the National Economic and Development Authority – had led the Government to introduce the Rice Tariffication Law. The quantitative restriction was removed, and a 35 per cent tariff – the percentage set under the agreements of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations – imposed. A higher tariff, of 50 per cent, could be imposed only on countries without most favoured nation status.

19. The Rice Competitiveness Enhancement Fund had been established under the Law. Tariff revenue was used to provide support to rice farmers, primarily to finance mechanization projects, but also credit, research and fertilizers. According to an evaluation conducted by the Philippine Rice Research Institute, since the enactment of the Law in 2019, the wholesale price of rice had been more competitive than that of imported rice, there had been increases of 7.3 per cent in rice production and of 5.23 per cent in the area planted with rice, and farmers' profits had grown. Although initially intended to run for only six years, the Fund had been extended until 2031 and the amount allocated to it had been tripled to 30 billion pesos.

20. The Government took a multifaceted approach to food security and the nutritional status of children. From a quantitative perspective, the focus was on the incidence of malnutrition and stunting. The rate of stunting among children aged 0–5 years had fallen from 33 per cent in 2018 to 23 per cent in the most recent national nutrition survey.

21. Housing had been declared a national concern under the current presidency. The flagship Pambansang Pabahay Para sa Pilipino (4PH) Program was being implemented to address the housing shortfall. Between 2015 and 2022, an average of 42,000 socialized housing units had been provided each year. In 2023, under the country's resettlement programme, a total of 7,269 housing units had been provided to informal settler families living in areas affected by infrastructure projects or the clean-up of Manila Bay, and housing assistance had also been provided to Indigenous Peoples and former rebels. The Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development and the National Economic and Development Authority were in the process of developing detailed guidelines for the 4PH Program. The Community Mortgage Program also supported access to housing for informal settlers.

22. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, in accordance with Republic Act No. 11861, which provided benefits and privileges to solo parents, the Department of Social Welfare and Development was piloting the Strengthening Opportunities for Lone Parents Program to support solo parents in performing their parental roles and planned to scale it up later in the year. The Department had also developed a database containing data on solo parents collected from local government units. In total, 826 local government units provided a social safety net and financial assistance to solo parents, while 524 units had established

solo parent offices and help desks at the level of the barangay, the smallest administrative unit in the country.

23. **A representative of the Philippines** said that there had been a major shift in drugs policy towards a more humanitarian approach focused on demand reduction, prevention, rehabilitation and community engagement. The Barangay Drug-Clearing Program was a unique initiative to combat the drug problem in communities that was based on the Filipino culture of cooperation and respect for human dignity. The ultimate goal was to remove stigma for rehabilitated former drug users and develop drug-resilient and self-policing communities. In 2024, a total of 1,314 barangays affected by drugs had been declared to have been cleared of drugs, while 51 had been confirmed as free of drugs.

24. **Mr. Nonthasoot** (Country Task Force) said that he would appreciate an update on the status and scope of the bill on extrajudicial killings and whether it would reflect a human rights-based approach to drug policy. He would also like to know whether the police were prohibited from reporting drug-related deaths to journalists and whether rehabilitation was actually voluntary or constituted de facto detention for drug users. So long as the Government did not decriminalize drug use, he wondered how it was ensured that people who had a drug record could have access to employment.

25. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that, despite the progress made in reducing the stunting rate, the relevant figures reported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) remained high. He would be interested to hear what was being done to ensure that the cash transfer programme for children in their first 1,000 days and other social security programmes covered all those in need, including internally displaced and homeless persons. Given the persistently high level of poverty among landless farmers, he would like to know what measures were being taken to accelerate the process of agrarian reform, which had benefited only modest numbers of recipients thus far, whether any support was being considered for farmers who had to pay very high rents to landowners and what was being done to stop the reversal of land transfers that was being reported in rural areas. Lastly, he would welcome information on measures to protect small-scale fisheries from the threat posed by large commercial fleets in municipal fishing areas.

26. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that he would appreciate additional information on the strategies for the elimination of multidimensional poverty, including the indicators used to calculate the national multidimensional poverty index and whether they were in line with those used by the United Nations system. It would also be interesting to learn whether multidimensional poverty data were already used in the development and implementation of public policy or whether there were plans to do so in the short to medium term. The State party had reported that the proportion of people living below the poverty line and levels of inequality were declining. However, according to the figures cited, the decline had not necessarily been steady. He would therefore be grateful for further details in that regard.

27. **Mr. Palmisano** said that, while the remittances sent by overseas Filipino workers made a positive contribution to the Philippine economy, the fact that such large numbers of Filipinos worked overseas also had negative social consequences, particularly for the families left behind. As more than half of Filipinos working abroad were women, many children were growing up without their mothers. Unfortunately, fathers were more likely to mistreat their children and neglect their family duties. He therefore wished to know what measures the Government was taking to address the negative social aspects of the overseas Filipino workers phenomenon within the framework of the national policy for families, solo parents and the protection of children.

28. **Ms. El Yedri Afailal** asked how the energy market was regulated to make access to electricity affordable for all, specifically for vulnerable groups.

29. **Ms. Rossi** said that she would welcome information on how the maternal mortality rate had evolved in recent years, how the absolute prohibition of abortion affected the mortality rate and what the social background of the women who died due to pregnancy or childbirth was. She would appreciate details of the follow-up given to the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women regarding the persistently high maternal mortality rate, specifically the recommendations to improve women's access to antenatal, perinatal and postnatal health services to reduce the high rates

of maternal mortality, to amend articles 256–259 of the Revised Penal Code so as to legalize abortion in cases of risk to the life or health of the pregnant woman, and to collect data, disaggregated by age and region, on unsafe abortion and its impact on women's health, including maternal mortality.

30. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the 1,000-days targeted conditional cash transfer was for the beneficiaries of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Programme (4Ps), many of whom had children under the age of 2. Previously, the 4Ps had provided cash transfers only for school-age children, but a transfer to cover the first 1,000 days of a child's life had been added. Throughout the country, the maternal and child health programme of the Department of Health covered prenatal and postnatal care as well as immunization. The Department would be provided with additional resources to offer services for the first 1,000 days of a child's life from 2025 onwards.

31. It was true that progress had slowed down under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program. The distribution of the first parcels of land had been relatively straightforward, as the land had mostly belonged to absentee landlords. However, subsequent transfers had met with greater resistance. Many of the parcels initially transferred had now been subdivided by the descendants of the original beneficiaries into very small pieces of land. According to the results of the 2022 census of agriculture and fisheries, the average area of a farm was now 0.83 hectares. Consideration was being given to the conclusion of usufruct agreements in respect of publicly owned land, often owned by State universities and colleges for research purposes or for the expansion of their campuses. When it came to farm leasing, it was often corporate farms that leased small pieces of land directly from several farmers.

32. The Philippines had been among the first countries to pilot the use of the multidimensional poverty index. The methodology for the index was being revised and would soon be submitted to the Philippine Statistics Authority. The multidimensional poverty index would facilitate the establishment of lines of accountability among the various departments and agencies involved, including those responsible for water, education and employment. Data collection was under way and would provide all of the indicators necessary for the index, disaggregated by region and province. Inequality was measured with respect to income rather than consumption, with a focus on the increase in the per capita income of the bottom three deciles compared to the top two deciles. Between 2021 and 2023, the increase in income had been approximately 7 per cent per annum overall; it had been above 9 per cent for the bottom three deciles and about 5 per cent for the top two deciles.

33. The Government was cognizant of the negative social consequences on the families of overseas Filipino workers. In 2006, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had conducted a study on the situation of children whose mothers were working overseas; in most cases, it was the grandparents who cared for the children. The report had included a recommendation that teachers should look out for signs of abuse among such children. The local government units ran family circles to foster a supportive community for overseas workers and their families. The Department of Migrant Workers organized pre-departure financial literacy sessions for overseas workers so that they could identify their financial goals and make plans to return once they had achieved them.

34. With regard to access to electricity, the objective of ensuring 100 per cent electrification of rural areas had been achieved. The focus was now on ensuring connectivity in all households within communities. The energy sector was regulated by the Energy Regulatory Commission. High electricity costs were a source of complaint in the business sector, as electricity was not subsidized. A wholesale electricity spot market was operated to enable contracting between energy producers and suppliers.

35. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority, the maternal mortality rate had been steadily decreasing, falling from 2,478 maternal deaths in 2021 to 1,868 deaths in 2023. To further reduce maternal mortality, the Government continued to strengthen maternal and newborn care services at facilities offering basic and comprehensive emergency obstetric care and had expanded access to skilled birth attendants and facility-based deliveries, improved antenatal and postnatal care coverage, and enhanced family planning services to prevent unintended pregnancies and reduce unsafe abortions. The goal was to achieve 95 per cent coverage in maternal healthcare

services by 2030, ultimately ensuring safer pregnancies and reducing maternal mortality rates.

36. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the question of access to municipal waters by commercial fishers was under discussion by the executive branch and a case had been filed with the courts on the subject. Opinions differed on the matter. One view was that municipal waters were home to spawning grounds that were best left untouched. Programmes for fisherfolk included the Fisheries Management Areas mechanism, which aimed to reduce illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing by improving compliance with fishery regulations, fostering sustainable resource management practices and boosting community development. Specific programmes were run for small-scale fishers during the closed fishing season. The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources evaluated abandoned and unregulated fish ponds to ascertain whether they were still viable for fishery activities, which would help fill the gap during the closed fishing season. Comprehensive support was provided to fisherfolk affected by reclamation, including financial compensation and livelihood programmes.

37. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, noting that the State party continued to spend only around 3.2 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on education, which was below the 4-6 per cent recommended by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), said that she wished to know whether the State party planned to increase expenditure on education in the coming years.

38. According to information in the Committee's possession, the quality of education in the Philippines remained alarmingly low, which suggested that existing resources were not being successfully leveraged to improve educational outcomes. She would appreciate more information on the measures envisaged in the Basic Education Development Plan 2030 to improve access to and the quality of primary and secondary education and the steps taken to maximize the impact of available resources.

39. The Committee had received reports that children with disabilities and Indigenous children often struggled to gain access to education. She would be interested to know whether the impact of the Five-Year Development Plan for Education for Children and Youth with Disabilities (2014–2019) had been assessed and, if so, what conclusions had been drawn and what measures had been taken to expand access to education for those two groups of children.

40. Alarmingly, the Committee had been informed that 84 per cent of female adolescents between 16 and 18 years of age in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao were not attending school. The delegation might explain what was being done to remedy that situation.

41. The strict lockdowns that had taken place during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had had a severe impact on the academic attainment of children, particularly vulnerable children. The Committee would welcome details of the specific measures taken by the State party to address the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to education for all children, in particular children with disabilities and Indigenous children.

42. In the light of the attacks and threats of attacks on schools and teachers and the closure of 54 schools in Mindanao, the Committee would like to hear more about the implementation of the National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zones of Peace, which primarily covered students and schools in situations of armed conflict, and the results that it had yielded.

43. Act No. 12027, which discontinued the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction from kindergarten to the third grade, had been described as regressive, as it made optional the use of regional languages in the classroom. She would be interested to learn more about why that law had been adopted and its intended purpose.

44. Lastly, despite the State party's efforts to expand Internet access and to improve connectivity, it seemed that, in the Philippines, only the wealthiest segment of the population had access to broadband Internet. She wondered what steps the State party was taking to narrow the digital divide between the rich and the poor in respect of access to broadband Internet and to improve Internet access in schools and in low-income households.

45. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, although the General Appropriations Act stipulated that 5.5 per cent of GDP was to be spent on education, that level of expenditure was seldom reached. The second congressional commission on education, which had undertaken several in-depth studies on underspending in the education sector, had made specific recommendations aimed at ensuring the availability of educational materials. The new education secretary was exploring the possibility of reforming the procurement process for textbooks and computer equipment, which were often in short supply. The size of the country, too, had an impact on the procurement and delivery of essential educational materials.

46. The decision to discontinue the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction from kindergarten to the third grade had been made because over 100 languages were spoken in the Philippines and it was simply not practicable to develop learning materials to cover them all. Moreover, students often spoke one language at home and another at school, and Filipino, the country's official language, was not the mother tongue of many students. It was therefore easier to make English the official language of instruction in schools and to start teaching students English earlier so that they were better prepared to sit the international examination in English in the fifth grade.

47. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, under the Bangsamoro Autonomy Act No. 18 of 2019, the ministry of education in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao was responsible for, inter alia, ensuring that the education dispensed was culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of the Muslim and Indigenous communities. To that end, the ministry oversaw the development of programmes to promote the use of regional languages and Islamic education. Alternative learning programmes in the region were being strengthened to reach marginalized groups, including out-of-school young people and children who had been displaced by conflict. Peace education, which focused on conflict resolution and the promotion of mutual understanding among diverse communities, had been introduced in schools to help to promote harmony and reduce tensions within the region. Efforts were being made to rebuild and repair schools damaged by conflict and to engage local communities in the educational process to ensure better learning outcomes for children.

48. The Government of the Philippines continued to promote the concept of schools as zones of peace in conflict-affected regions such as Mindanao to ensure that educational institutions remained safe and free from armed conflict, violence and political unrest. The Department of Education had strengthened that initiative by adopting policies establishing school premises as neutral territory and worked with local authorities to broker peace agreements between warring groups. The Government, in cooperation with the security forces, had taken steps to make schools located in conflict zones safer, including by setting up security perimeters around school premises, providing security escorts for teachers and putting in place emergency evacuation plans. The measures taken to ensure the continuity of education during armed conflict included the creation of temporary learning spaces for displaced students and the expansion of alternative learning programmes. Schools in conflict-prone areas were encouraged to incorporate peace education into their curricula. The Government continued to receive support from international partners in implementing the National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zones of Peace, including in the form of psychosocial support for children and teachers affected by violence.

49. **A representative of the Philippines** said that a series of measures had been taken to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational outcomes. The Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan had provided for several flexible learning options so that every student could continue learning at home. During the pandemic period, the national curriculum had been simplified to prioritize the acquisition of fundamental skills. Learning resources had been distributed nationwide and local governments had formed partnerships with private organizations to provide disadvantaged students and students living in remote areas with the resources that they needed to keep learning.

50. The Department of Education was advancing with its five-point reform agenda to address long-standing challenges in basic education, which provided for the strengthening of foundational skills; the construction of more classrooms and the modernization of existing ones and greater investment in digital infrastructure and learning materials; the upskilling and reskilling of teachers through targeted teacher training programmes; the promotion of the



holistic development and well-being of students through improved programmes on values, mental health and nutrition; the introduction of health and social services in schools to further support vulnerable students; and the fostering of multisectoral collaboration to mobilize resources and expertise.

51. The Quality Basic Education Development Plan, which would remain in force until 2035, had been adopted to guide and expedite the implementation of the proposed reforms and established milestones and key indicators to that end. The goal was to recalibrate, modernize and future-proof the country's basic education system, ensuring accountability and transparency and promoting decentralization, public private partnerships and digitalization.

52. The alternative learning system, which had evolved significantly since its introduction in 2004, provided flexible, accessible and inclusive education for out-of-school young people. While alternative learning programmes had initially focused solely on promoting basic literacy, they were now aligned with the national curriculum and were designed to allow students to acquire a broader, more modern skill set, including digital literacy skills, to complement their basic education.

53. The Indigenous Peoples Education Program ensured that Indigenous communities had access to a basic education by institutionalizing rights-based partnerships with the communities, making the curriculum culturally relevant, building the capacity of educators and developing learning resources in Indigenous languages. The Program now covered 482,000 students in 3,763 public schools. At least 75 Indigenous languages had been maintained as a medium of instruction, literacy assessment tools had been developed in 11 Indigenous languages and 11,899 teachers and 3,500 headteachers had received training on how to implement the Program. An additional 4,000 teachers had been hired to teach in Indigenous schools and over 150 million pesos had been allocated for the Program's implementation.

54. **A representative of the Philippines** said that, in the Philippines, telecommunications services were classed as a public utility and, prior to 2022, could only be provided by firms that were majority owned by Filipino citizens. The Government, aware of the limitations of the domestic telecommunications market and of the need to invest capital in order to expand the sector, create competition and improve the quality and drive down the prices of telecommunications services, had amended the Public Service Act to ease foreign ownership restrictions while taking into account national security considerations. The rules and regulations for implementation of the amended Act were still being finalized. The national fibre Internet network was being rolled out gradually and high-speed Internet access was available even in remote areas via Starlink, which utilized satellite connectivity. The country's common tower policy had likewise served to improve access to telecommunications services. Foreign telecommunications companies offering broadband and wireless Internet services were offered generous incentive packages to invest in the Philippine telecommunications sector. The Government's free public Wi-Fi initiative, which had first been rolled out during the pandemic, was gradually being expanded to cover all public spaces, including healthcare facilities and schools.

55. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the ongoing campaign against illegal drugs now placed a greater emphasis on community-based treatment, rehabilitation, education and reintegration as means of curbing drug dependence among the population. The bill to classify extrajudicial killings as heinous crimes was currently being examined by the House Committee on Justice. The Government supported the passage of the bill and the Office of the Solicitor General had already suggested that the revised Penal Code be further amended to include extrajudicial killing as a crime against the person under the terms set out in the bill, which would make it easier to hold public officials who committed the crime to account. The Office had argued that, even if all the constituent elements of the crime of extrajudicial killing could not be proven, defendants could still be convicted of murder under the relevant article of the revised Penal Code. The alternative of adopting a special law on extrajudicial killing, which could give rise to jurisdictional conflict, had been discounted.

56. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the third National Plan of Action for Children set out key objectives for improving the situation of children with disabilities,

including expanding access to early intervention and other healthcare services and improving the accessibility of public spaces and schools. The implementation of the Inclusive Education Act, which mandated the inclusion of children with disabilities in the mainstream education system, was under way. The National Council on Disability Affairs had developed a manual for the roll-out and operation of disability support services in higher education institutions and organized yearly information technology-related competitions for young persons with disabilities.

57. **Mr. Bouzid** asked how section 7 of article XIV of the Constitution, which provided that the use of Spanish and Arabic was to be promoted on a voluntary and optional basis, and the Arabic Language and Islamic Values Education Program were implemented.

58. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken** said that the delegation might explain how the State party went about protecting the cultures, traditional knowledge and heritage sites of Indigenous Peoples from exploitation, cultural appropriation or destruction and involving Indigenous leaders in decision-making processes related to matters affecting their communities and cultural rights. It might also indicate whether there were legal or administrative provisions in place to protect Indigenous languages and to ensure their use in the mainstream education system and local governance structures.

59. **A representative of the Philippines** said that Arabic language classes were offered at special schools in Mindanao. Spanish was an optional language in schools countrywide. Although there was no law to protect Indigenous languages, instruction in Indigenous languages, which included relevant instructional materials, was offered. A map of the country's cultural assets and expressions was being drawn up under the Philippine Innovation Act.

60. The launch of development projects was invariably preceded by consultations. Local development councils in local government units often included representatives of Indigenous Peoples.

61. **A representative of the Philippines** said that Islamic education had been integrated into the study programmes of the schools in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. Mindanao State University offered a four-year programme in the study of Arabic.

62. **Mr. Fiorio Vaesken**, noting that the Optional Protocol complemented national legal mechanisms, said that he wondered how often the victims of violations of economic, social and cultural rights had been made whole by the State party's courts.

63. **Mr. Nonthasoot** said that he wished to know what steps were being taken to ensure that companies in the private sector undertook human rights due diligence, whether the Commission on Human Rights had a mandate to address all relevant issues, including by providing non-judicial recourse in the event of employment-related complaints, and whether consideration was being given to adopting a less punitive approach to illegal drugs.

64. **Ms. Lee** said that she wished to know, as she had noted at the previous meeting, whether internally displaced persons, including people who had fled the violence in Marawi, had access to social services, water, sanitation services, healthcare and education. It would be helpful to learn, too, whether such people had been able to return home safely or whether any other durable solutions had been found.

65. **Mr. Windfuhr** said that he wondered how, if commercial fishing fleets were to be allowed into municipal waters, the livelihoods of local fishing families would be protected. He wondered, too, what was being done to eliminate the many threats to land rights defenders resulting from their activities and to environmental rights.

66. **Ms. Rossi** said that she wished to know what the State party had done to legalize abortion in cases of risk to the life or health of the pregnant woman, rape, incest or severe fetal impairment and decriminalize it in all other cases, as had been recommended by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

67. **Mr. Hennebel** (Country Task Force) said that he would welcome further information on the measures being taken to protect the rights and freedoms of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons.

68. **A representative of the Philippines** said that his country had the mechanisms it needed to provide relief to victims of violations of the rights enshrined in the Covenant. Writs of *kalikasan*, remedies unique to Philippine law, for instance, provided a swift avenue for individuals to obtain judicial relief from environmental harm. On more than one occasion, the courts had cited the Covenant to emphasize the State's duty to uphold and protect the rights to an adequate standard of living, education, labour and social security. Specific cases that, in view of the rights on which they had a bearing, might be of interest to the Committee included *Resident Marine Mammals of the Protected Seascape Tañon Strait v. Secretary Angelo Reyes*, *West Tower Condominium Corporation et al. vs. First Philippine Industrial Corporation*, *First Gen Corporation et al.*, and *Paje v. Casiño et al.*

69. The Commission on Human Rights, which needed a new charter, had initially focused on civil and political rights, but the scope of its activities had since been expanded, with State support, to include the protection and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights. The Commission even had a centre that specialized in the rights of the child.

70. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the executive authorities had filed a motion for reconsideration of the decision in which the Supreme Court had given commercial fishing vessels access to municipal waters, some of which were spawning grounds. The bill on the blue economy provided another possible avenue for protecting the livelihoods of local fishing communities.

71. The new Government had pivoted away from its predecessor's punitive approach to drug use. In some cases, drug users, many of whom chose to seek treatment, did not have to leave their communities for rehabilitation centres elsewhere. Once they completed treatment, the crime of the use of dangerous drugs would be expunged from their records.

72. There was not yet a comprehensive bill on internal displacement. Groups of internally displaced persons were dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Efforts to resettle the people displaced as a result of the siege of Marawi, which was being rebuilt, were under way. In the meantime, those people, who had received compensation, had access to water, electricity and other basic services.

73. **A representative of the Philippines** said that the Government protected the rights of legitimate defenders of the environment. The defence of the environment was one of the pillars of the National Security Strategy approved by the President.

74. **A representative of the Philippines** said that a special committee on LGBTQIA+ affairs, which ensured that policies, plans and programmes promoted equality, equity, non-discrimination, inclusion and well-being, had been created pursuant to an executive order issued in 2023. The rights of members of the LGBTQIA+ community were also protected under a number of legal texts, not least article II of the Constitution, Republic Act No. 9710 – the Magna Carta of Women – the Anti-Bullying Act of 2013 and the Philippine National Police Reform and Reorganization Act of 1998, under which the National Police Commission was mandated to formulate a gender-sensitivity programme to include the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of gender or sexual orientation. Internationally, his country had voted in favour of a Human Rights Council resolution to renew the mandate of the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

75. **A representative of the Philippines** said that measures had been taken to improve access to prenatal health services, ensure that children were born in health facilities, increase the number of skilled birth attendants and make postnatal care more robust. The focus of the efforts made by the Department of Health to promote high-quality maternal care was on increasing access to skilled healthcare providers. To that end, doctors, nurses and midwives were deployed to priority areas, including geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. Maternal health services were an integral part of the initiative that the Department had launched to make essential health services available countrywide; mobile clinics deployed by the Department reached underserved communities.

76. In 2023, more than 90 per cent of births had taken place in health facilities; skilled birth attendants had been present for a similar percentage of births. Nearly 81 per cent of

pregnant women and girls had received antenatal care in 2022, but that percentage had fallen slightly in 2023.

77. Although abortion was prohibited, measures had been taken to ensure that post-abortion care was provided without legal consequences. Compassionate, high-quality and non-judgmental healthcare for women experiencing pregnancy-related complications, including those from unsafe abortions, was promoted, and the Government's commitment to protecting women's health and rights had been reinforced. Mental health support and counselling were provided in an attempt to help lessen the psychological impact of post-abortion complications.

78. **A representative of the Philippines** said that human rights due diligence by private businesses was one of the areas of focus of the fourth Philippine Human Rights Plan, a comprehensive plan in which all the Government's human rights priorities were identified. Indigenous Peoples and their rights, including the right to free, prior and informed consent, were another of the Plan's areas of focus.

79. **Mr. Caunhye** (Country Rapporteur) thanked the delegation for the wealth of information it had provided in response to the questions that Committee members had asked about the range of pressing rights-related issues confronting the State party.

80. **A representative of the Philippines**, expressing appreciation for the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue with the Committee, said that both her Government and the Committee were clearly united in the goal of advancing economic, social and cultural rights. Her country, as President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. had said in a 2022 address, would focus on employment and livelihoods, food production, efficiency, improved access to education and health, health care, economic growth, environmental and climate change mitigation and peace and order. It had taken legislative steps and developed plans and policies to protect and promote economic, social and cultural rights, but words had to be followed by deeds. After all, as the President had also noted, how passionately justice was spoken of was of less import than how resolutely it was pursued.

*The meeting rose at 1 p.m.*