



# International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Distr.: General  
12 August 2025

Original: English

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## Human Rights Committee 144th session

### Summary record of the 4234th meeting\*

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 30 June 2025, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Soh

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

*Fourth periodic report of North Macedonia*

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\* No summary records were issued for the 4232nd and 4233rd meetings.

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

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

*Fourth periodic report of North Macedonia (CCPR/C/MKD/4;  
CCPR/C/MKD/QPR/4)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of North Macedonia joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of North Macedonia**, introducing his country's fourth periodic report (CCPR/C/MKD/4), said that the Committee's previous recommendations had enabled the Government to define strategic priorities and had guided its efforts to reform the legal system, strengthen the rule of law and advance democracy. The State had become a party to several international human rights instruments in recent years, including Protocol No. 16 to the Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights). As a newly elected member of the Human Rights Council for the period 2025–2027, it was committed to strengthening the Council's role in promoting a holistic approach to human rights within the United Nations system.
3. Efforts had been made to strengthen the independence and efficiency of the judiciary in order to improve access to justice for all citizens and increase public trust in the legal system. The implementation of the Justice Sector Reform Strategy for 2017–2022 had bolstered the transparency, efficiency and accountability of the justice system, and a justice sector development strategy for 2024–2028 had recently been adopted.
4. Under the Roma Inclusion Strategy for 2022–2030, funds had been allocated from the national budget to support the implementation of targeted projects in areas such as employment and healthcare. Key legislative developments during the reporting period included the harmonization of the Criminal Code with the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and the adoption of the revised Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services and the Law on Justice for Children. In addition, several laws had been adopted to enhance the accessibility, inclusiveness and quality of education at all levels.
5. The second national action plan on women and peace and security was being implemented. Measures were being taken to strengthen institutional capacities for the support and protection of victims of gender-based violence and to step up the prevention of discrimination and violence against women and domestic violence. A report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action had been produced.
6. North Macedonia remained fully committed to the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. In December 2024, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe had adopted a final resolution confirming the closure of two cases against the country, thus acknowledging the efforts made to implement the Court's decisions in those cases.
7. Measures to combat corruption and organized crime included the implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Corruption and Conflicts of Interest; the drafting of a bill on internal affairs that would introduce mandatory professional integrity checks for all staff of the Ministry of the Interior; and the adoption of a plan for the prevention of corruption in the prison system for 2022–2026.
8. Criminal law protections for journalists had been strengthened in order to safeguard freedom of expression. Steps were being taken to bolster the legal framework and build institutional capacities in the area of torture prevention. A commission on the payment of monetary compensation to victims of violent crime had been established in recognition of the State's responsibility to support victims and provide them with redress. The recommendations of key monitoring bodies, including the Group of States against Corruption and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, were consistently implemented.
9. The Government had demonstrated resilience and determination in addressing the complex challenges that it faced. Nonetheless, given the high public expectations in the area

of human rights, it was aware of its duty to step up its efforts to ensure the timely and effective implementation of its reform agenda. The forthcoming North Macedonia report of the European Commission would provide an objective assessment of the Government's progress in implementing key reforms. The Government remained convinced that full membership of the European Union would serve as a powerful catalyst for the effective realization and sustained protection of human rights in the country. In January 2025, the parliament had ratified the Reform and Growth Facility Agreement to facilitate European Union support for the reforms required as part of the accession process. The composition of the delegation reflected the country's multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society and the Government's commitment to gender equality.

10. **Ms. Tigroudja**, noting with regret that there were no civil society representatives present in the room, said that the Committee nevertheless recognized the considerable efforts made by the State Party to undertake reforms in areas that were essential for the enjoyment of human rights, such as justice and the fight against corruption.

11. She would welcome clarification as to the extent to which the Covenant and the work of the Committee, including its general comments and Views, formed part of domestic law. She wondered whether the Covenant was used by domestic courts and how the Committee's general comments were disseminated. It would be helpful if the delegation could explain, in the light of the Committee's general comment No. 29 (2001) on derogations from provisions of the Covenant during a state of emergency, the State Party's decision to adopt measures that de facto derogated from the Covenant during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic without making the declaration required by article 4 of the Covenant. Given that the Committee had received only a handful of individual communications concerning North Macedonia, she would like to know what was being done to raise awareness of the complaints procedure under the first Optional Protocol to the Covenant and of the Committee's jurisprudence.

12. The Committee remained concerned about the status and functioning of the Office of the Ombudsman and would appreciate information on the measures that would be taken to strengthen the legal framework governing its work and to ensure that it had sufficient human and financial resources, that it was fully compliant with the Paris Principles and that its recommendations and reports were acted upon by the relevant authorities.

13. She would be interested to know what stage had been reached in the implementation of the pledges made by the State Party under the Human Rights 75 initiative in relation to the fight against corruption. It would be helpful if the delegation could describe the work carried out and the outcomes achieved by the Public Prosecutor's Office with regard to the prosecution of cases of corruption and money-laundering involving senior officials. In particular, she would like to know the status of the cases involving a former Prime Minister and former ministers, mentioned in paragraph 29 of the State Party's report. She would welcome more information on the mandate and functioning of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, as well as on the progress made, in law and in practice, in the area of sanctions for violations of laws and regulations on conflicts of interest, integrity and corruption since the latest assessment of North Macedonia by the Group of States against Corruption.

14. **Mr. Carazo** said that he would appreciate information on the challenges encountered in the implementation of the Law on Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination of 2020; the staffing and financing of the Commission for Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination; the effectiveness of the remedies available to victims of discrimination; and the measures taken to raise awareness of those remedies and to address the systemic barriers that prevented victims from marginalized groups from gaining access to justice.

15. It would be helpful if the delegation could provide examples of specific and measurable outcomes and indicators that had been identified in the Roma Inclusion Strategy for 2022–2030. He wondered what measures were being taken under the strategy to combat the de facto segregation experienced by Roma and to empower Roma women and girls, taking into account their vulnerabilities. Lastly, he would like to know what measures had been taken to achieve universal birth registration and to facilitate access to identity documents for all persons, regardless of their administrative or socioeconomic status.

16. **Mr. Quezada Cabrera** said that it would be helpful if the delegation could provide information on the main features of the Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination for 2022–2026 and the results achieved thus far, as well as the status of the draft national action plan on the rights of LGBTI+ persons. He would like to know whether the definition of hate crime in the Criminal Code had been amended to include acts committed on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. He wondered whether the delegation could explain why so few of the criminal complaints filed for hate crimes and incitement to hatred against LGBTI+ persons during the reporting period had led to a conviction. He would also be interested to know whether the State Party had considered introducing legislation to ensure the official recognition of same-sex couples.

17. According to the Law on Criminal Procedure, detention during the investigation phase could last up to 180 days, while detention after charges had been brought could last up to 1 year for crimes punishable by up to 15 years' imprisonment, and up to 2 years for crimes punishable by life imprisonment. He would like to know why such long periods of pretrial detention were permissible and how they were compatible with article 9 of the Covenant. He would appreciate clarification as to whether judicial decisions ordering pretrial detention could be appealed; whether pretrial detainees had access to legal assistance from the time of arrest and were given adequate time to meet with their defence counsel; and whether there were alternatives to pretrial detention, such as house arrest.

18. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she would like to know what stage had been reached in the adoption of the bill on gender equality and how the Government was responding to the anti-gender movement, which seemed to be a major impediment to the adoption of the bill. She would be interested to know what temporary special measures had been applied to improve the legislative representation of women from ethnic minorities, including Roma women, in the 2024 elections; and how that issue was addressed in the Roma Inclusion Strategy for 2022–2030. It was concerning that only 2 out of 81 mayors were women and only 36 per cent of managerial positions in the public sector were occupied by women. In view of those figures, she would welcome information on the barriers that prevented women from gaining access to leadership positions in local decision-making bodies.

19. She wondered whether the State Party was considering amending the Criminal Code to make gender-based cyberviolence or psychological violence criminal offences in their own right. She wondered, too, what measures were being taken to enforce existing laws and protect female journalists from gender-based violence. In addition, she would welcome a comment on the obstacles that prevented female victims of gender-based violence from availing themselves of their right to legal aid, the reasons for the ineffectiveness of emergency and temporary measures of protection and the availability of shelters for underage mothers.

20. She wished to know why, against the backdrop of increasing numbers of reports of domestic violence, so few of those reports ultimately led to prison sentences for the perpetrators. She also wished to know whether the funds to implement the national strategy and first national action plan for prevention of and protection from gender-based violence 2026–2033 had been set aside and, if so, whether such funds provided for the collection of data on all forms of violence and on convictions of and sentences given to perpetrators. Lastly, it would be helpful to know whether the Government had plans to make a comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare package an integral part of the universal health benefits to which the people of the State Party were entitled.

21. **Mr. Yigezu** said that he would welcome comments on reports that migrants and asylum-seekers were subjected to excessive force at the State Party's borders. In that connection, he wondered what steps the State Party had taken or intended to take to ensure that complaints of excessive use of force by the police were investigated in a timely and comprehensive manner and that the prosecutorial and administrative offices that looked into such complaints had the human resources and training they needed. He wondered, too, what progress had been made towards conducting effective investigations into allegations of violence, torture and inhuman conditions in the context of efforts to push migrants and asylum-seekers back from the State Party's borders.

22. He would like to know what measures the State Party intended to take to ensure that allegations of torture and ill-treatment made by members of the Roma community and other minority groups were investigated promptly, thoroughly and impartially. He would also like to know what plans had been made to enhance training for law enforcement officials on the rights of minorities and ensure that investigative agencies, in particular the Office of the Ombudsman, which had been designated as the national mechanism for the prevention of torture, worked more effectively. It would be interesting to learn whether any consideration was being given to ensuring that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) representing the Roma community and other minority groups had a voice in the Office of the Ombudsman unit referred to as the Civil Control Mechanism.

23. As the State Party's prisons were reportedly overcrowded, understaffed and riddled with corruption, he wished to know what plans it had made to consider additional alternatives to detention. He wished to know, too, what measures it intended to take to provide gender-, age- and disability-sensitive health and sanitation services, including access to clean food and water, in places of deprivation of liberty and to ensure that prison staff were made familiar with international standards for the treatment of prisoners.

*The meeting was suspended at 3.55 p.m. and resumed at 4.10 p.m.*

24. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the international legal instruments her country had ratified, including the Covenant, were an integral part of its domestic legal framework. Rights enshrined in the Covenant – to trial within a reasonable time, for example – had been set forth in national laws. The Constitutional Court was more likely than any of the country's other courts to refer to the Covenant in its rulings.

25. The Ministry of Justice and an NGO had drafted guidelines setting out the steps a person who believed his or her rights under the Covenant had been violated needed to take to submit a communication to the Committee. One of the aims of the guidelines was to raise awareness of the communications procedure, including among judges and prosecutors, who were required by law to act on the recommendations made by the Committee in its Views.

26. A parliamentary group had recently proposed amendments to the Law on the Ombudsman with a view to expanding the mandate of the Ombudsman's Office. When the amendments were made law, the Office would, in addition to its current responsibilities, monitor the country's fulfilment of its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto.

27. In recent years, action had been taken in follow-up to just under three quarters of the recommendations made by the Ombudsman's Office. The creation of mechanisms to ensure that effect was given to an even greater number of the Office's recommendations was being considered, and plans had been made to set up a system, of which domestic NGOs would be a part, to monitor the steps taken in follow-up to recommendations made by international bodies.

28. In addition to the information about the authorities' efforts to combat corruption that could be found in her country's periodic report, it was worth noting that the budget of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption had recently been increased by nearly half. The Commission had a number of tools with which to fight corruption, including the performance of anti-corruption checks of proposed legislation. A government body including representatives of the government council for cooperation with NGOs was responsible for coordinating efforts to promote good governance. Work on a central database, which was expected to conclude in 2026, was being done in a bid to combat money-laundering and organized crime. In addition, amendments to the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest were being drafted, steps were being taken in follow-up to the recommendations made by the Group of States against Corruption and the penalties for corruption had been stiffened.

29. The Whistle-Blower Protection Law had been invoked in three court cases since June 2022. Assets were seized by the authorities when the legal requirements for such seizures were met. In its most recent report on the effectiveness of the framework in place in North Macedonia to prevent corruption in respect of persons entrusted with top executive functions,

the Group of States against Corruption had concluded that her country had fully or partly implemented 13 of 20 of the Group's previous recommendations.

30. The 2024 report of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption was currently being considered by lawmakers. Most of the 65 cases it had reviewed in 2024 involved alleged violations of the Electoral Code. Where appropriate, the Commission, which was a member of the European Union network against corruption, recommended the institution of criminal proceedings.

31. Psychological violence had not been made a specific criminal offence in her country's criminal law. It had, however, been made a factor that aggravated the severity of other criminal offences.

32. The Civil Control Mechanism of the Office of the Ombudsman had received 25 applications for relief from individuals in 2025, more than in previous years. The applications that had been received during the period under review concerned such issues as ill-treatment or excessive use of force by prison police or other police officers, as well as torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In most of those cases, no rights violations had been found.

33. Under the Law on Prevention and Protection from Discrimination, victims of discrimination could avail themselves of legal remedies including applications to the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination and civil litigation. The challenge currently was to raise public awareness of those remedies and build the institutional capacity to combat discrimination effectively. Prospective judges and prosecutors learned about the legal aspects of discrimination during their studies.

34. **A representative of North Macedonia**, noting that there was still much to be done to eliminate corruption in her country's prison system, said that the legal framework for the fight against corruption had been strengthened. The Directorate for Enforcement of Sanctions had developed a plan for the prevention of corruption in the prison system (2022–2026). Proposed amendments to the Law on Enforcement of Sanctions had been drafted, and steps were being taken to bring the Law into line with the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest. In line with the new measures, all prison officials, including administrative officials at the Directorate, would be required to make asset declarations. Increasingly, moreover, the Directorate was informing the public of the steps it took to fight corruption in the prison system.

35. Prison intelligence units, which were responsible for searches and other relevant activities, had been set up in the country's prisons pursuant to legislative amendments adopted in 2024. The number of disciplinary proceedings instituted against prison officials had increased to around a hundred in 2024. Thirty-two cases had been brought against prison police officers under article 91 of the Law on Enforcement of Sanctions. Proceedings had been initiated against two former prison administrators based on allegations that they had abused their official position. In addition, officers had been designated to receive reports from whistle-blowers.

36. Prison overcrowding continued to be an issue despite the adoption of several amnesty laws. Further efforts included the drafting of laws on prison infrastructure and on the use of probation, as well as improved electronic surveillance. The Government was also seeking to enhance material conditions in prisons; the Council of Europe Development Bank was expected to contribute further funding to the renovation of prisons and, it was hoped, would help to fund the construction of new prison facilities in the coming year.

37. Notwithstanding the reports received by international treaty bodies and the Ombudsman's Office regarding torture and violence in prison, the Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions had received no formal complaints of excessive use of force against inmates. Prison officers must follow standard operating procedures when using any means of coercion, and prisons had a legal obligation to keep registers of complaints; in addition, unannounced inspections were conducted in prison facilities. With the support of the Council of Europe and in cooperation with the Ministry of Health, a registry of injuries among inmates would soon be established. The number of disciplinary proceedings against prison police officers had increased and cooperation with the Public Prosecutor's Office was being

strengthened. NGOs were permitted to conduct visits in prisons. The Government cooperated with the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of Macedonia and the Macedonian Association of Young Lawyers, both of which monitored cases of torture in prisons. With support from the Ministry of Education, education services would soon be offered to inmates.

38. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Roma Inclusion Strategy, which was aligned with European standards and had been developed with the participation of civil society, was designed for implementation at the highest political level, and its budget allocation had been increased in 2025. To address housing issues, which remained a persistent challenge regarding the Roma community, a strategic approach had been adopted in respect of social housing programmes, as a result of which the number of applications by members of the Roma community had increased, as had the number of such applications that were granted. Other efforts included a model for temporary housing and independent housing and a new social housing bill, which was being drafted together with experts and civil society. The number of Roma employed by the public administration had increased, and Roma women specifically continued to be targeted in related efforts. It was expected that 700 to 800 additional Roma would enter the labour market in 2025. As for the problem of undocumented persons, the parliament had adopted legislation that made it possible for every child born in the country to receive a birth certificate within 45 days of birth, regardless of his or her parents' legal status.

39. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Government had taken action in follow-up to the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the case concerning *Elmazova and others v. North Macedonia*, including by adopting amendments to the law on primary education, the drafting of which had benefitted from the input of civil society. In addition to addressing the specific cases involving segregation of Roma students mentioned in the ruling, the Government sought to prevent similar cases of segregation of and discrimination against Roma students in other municipalities and schools. As part of such efforts, the Ministry of Education had sent an official letter outlining the legal obligations of schools when forming classes and grades and had made mentoring and tutoring services available to Roma students. Roma education mediators had been hired to assist in the prevention of discrimination and segregation and help Roma pupils to transition from primary to secondary school. The situation had improved overall, with 97 per cent of Roma pupils graduating to secondary school, as against 94 per cent previously.

40. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that clinical guidelines had been adopted for medically induced abortion, and the necessary medicines had been procured as part of the budget allocated to a programme for mothers and children. Such abortions must be carried out by professionals in strictly controlled conditions. Healthcare mediators facilitated Roma access to medical services, including antenatal and postnatal healthcare. Neonatal screenings were fully funded by the State. Door-to-door vaccination campaigns were carried out throughout the country, including in Roma settlements.

41. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that, while the national coordinating body responsible for upholding the right to non-discrimination was composed of representatives of government bodies, a large number of NGOs also contributed to the development of anti-discrimination policies. The national coordinating body had adopted a policy on the promotion of equality, as well as a policy and guidelines on the prevention of discrimination. Awareness-raising activities on the issues of discrimination and equality were regularly held for public servants. A number of laws had already been brought into line with the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and with the national action plan for 2025–2026, and further amendments were in the pipeline. It was hoped that the current focus on gender-responsive policies and budgeting would help to reduce discrimination against women. A report was being drafted on the implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality in 2024.

42. Specialized services had been set up for women victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence throughout North Macedonia. In addition, an action plan had been drafted on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

43. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that an internal control department in the Ministry of Internal Affairs was responsible for processing all complaints of torture and

ill-treatment and excessive use of force by police officers in the performance of their official duties. For every complaint that was received, a criminal investigation was launched to collect material and verbal evidence, in accordance with the law. It was only in cases where no evidence was found that no further proceedings were instituted. However, all complaints were reported to the Public Prosecutor's Office. When material evidence was found, disciplinary and criminal proceedings were instituted in respect of the police officer involved. A special department in the Skopje Public Prosecutor's Office was responsible for processing and prosecuting cases against police officers; cases were then tried by the relevant courts. The Ministry of Internal Affairs treated all complaints equally, regardless of the ethnic affiliation or immigration status of the complainant.

44. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that the Criminal Code had been amended to incorporate a new definition of the term "journalist", pursuant to which journalists were recognized as individuals who performed duties in the public interest. That amendment meant that crimes committed against journalists could no longer be tried in private prosecution proceedings and should, instead, be handled by the Public Prosecutor's Office. Insult and defamation had been decriminalized and a law on civil liability for insult and defamation had been adopted.

45. **Ms. Tigroudja** said that she would appreciate receiving written information with specific details of cases before the Constitutional Court and other national courts in which the Covenant and the Committee's jurisprudence had been referenced. She would be interested to know what efforts were being made with a view to ensuring that the Ombudsman, which was currently accredited with category B status, meaning that it only partially complied with the Paris Principles, could achieve category A status. Lastly, she would welcome information on the outcome of the proceedings initiated in corruption cases and whether any senior civil servants, judges or high-ranking politicians had been convicted and, if so, what penalties had been imposed.

46. **Mr. Quezada** said that he would be particularly interested to hear a response to his questions on hate speech and hate crimes and on what seemed to be excessively long periods of pretrial detention. He would also like to know how the national action plan 2025–2026 fit into the Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination for 2022–2026, what impact the associated measures had had, and what activities the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination had carried out.

47. **Ms. Leinarte** said that she would be grateful for a response to her question on whether the national strategy for prevention and protection from gender-based violence provided for the collection of data on violence against women and domestic violence, including convictions and sentences imposed on perpetrators. She would also be interested to hear the delegation's comments on the anti-gender movement in the State Party.

48. **Mr. Carazo** said that he would like a response to his question on the staffing and financing of the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination and on the challenges faced by the Commission in establishing the existence of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and of socioeconomic status. The delegation might also comment on the diverging figures given for the size of the Roma population, which ranged from 2.5 per cent of the overall population according to the census to 12 per cent according to other sources. It might also provide details of the participation of representatives of the Roma community in political life.

49. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that efforts to upgrade the current status of the Ombudsman included reviewing the good practices of countries whose Ombudsman had been accredited with category A status. Work was under way on strengthening the government mechanism for the application of the Ombudsman's recommendations by the relevant institutions, and there were plans to introduce a deadline for the Government to report to the parliament on the activities undertaken to implement recommendations made by the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's budgetary resources were established in the law on the national budget. Further consideration would be given to the issue of the Ombudsman's financial independence and the status of its employees.

50. Between 2017 and 2024, a total of 412 corruption cases had been opened. Sixty-two of those cases were high-profile cases involving a former Prime Minister, former mayors,



former judges, public prosecutors, municipal employees and members of management boards. Criminal convictions had been handed down in a significant number of cases, and perpetrators had received prison terms of between 8 and 15 years. Millions of euros' worth of assets had also been confiscated.

51. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that significant progress had been made in recent years in tackling hate crime. Previously, it had been difficult for the police and the Public Prosecutor's Office to identify hate crimes as such because they were not properly defined, and hate-based motivation had been only an aggravated circumstance envisaged under the then applicable Criminal Code. Following the necessary amendments to the Criminal Code, 19 individual hate crime offences had been defined, making it easier for cases to be investigated as hate crimes. The characteristics of hate crime had been expanded, and gender identity and sexual orientation had been added to the grounds motivating hate crimes. A series of training sessions on the new provisions had been organized for judges and public prosecutors.

52. Hate speech was not defined as a single crime in national criminal law. Instead, there were eight separate crimes that contained the element of hate speech. Following several years of work, the new draft Criminal Code was in the final stages and due to be submitted to the European Commission for opinion.

53. With regard to attacks against journalists, in 2025 there had been only one case in which the victim was a woman. In 2024 there had been attacks against two male and two female journalists. Attacks against journalists were, of course, prosecuted by the courts.

54. It was true that there were problems with court-ordered pretrial detention, although all relevant laws were reviewed by international organizations. The initial 30-day period of pretrial detention during the investigative stage could be extended for an additional 30 days or, in some cases 60 days, which in turn could be extended by up to 90 days. Once charges had been brought, pretrial detention could last for one year for crimes that carried a prison sentence of 15 years and up to two years for those punishable by life imprisonment. According to the Law on Criminal Procedure, all pretrial detainees had the right to a defence lawyer and were appointed one by the court if they did not choose their own.

55. **A representative of North Macedonia** said that there had been an evaluation of the degree of implementation of the Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination. The Government was focused on harmonizing all relevant national legislation with the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and raising awareness among the general public and all civil servants of how to recognize discrimination. An analysis of a number of laws had been undertaken with a view to bringing them into line with new European Union directives in that area and avoiding overlapping responsibilities. A number of laws had already been successfully amended in cooperation with the international community and the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination.

56. In accordance with the national strategy for prevention and protection from gender-based violence and domestic violence, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy collected data from 30 social work centres. In the first quarter of 2025, 391 new victims had been registered, the majority of them women. Data were also collected on perpetrators and on the type of violence committed – psychological, physical, sexual or economic. Between 2023 and 2024, there had been a 14 per cent increase in the number of cases of domestic violence. In cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, social work centres worked to promote a multisectoral approach to dealing with cases of domestic and gender-based violence, and dedicated teams had been set up in different regions of the country. Several public awareness-raising campaigns had been conducted for the prevention of domestic violence and promotion of a new reporting mechanism. Information on the new mechanism for reporting domestic violence was available on all social networks.

57. According to the 2024 report of the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination, the lack of human resources had regrettably persisted, and the Commission had only 35 employees. Nonetheless, the Commission was highly effective and achieved positive results, for example organizing public debates and awareness campaigns. The Commission was trusted by the public as a reliable institution and was receiving increasing numbers of cases filed by citizens.

58. With regard to the anti-gender equality movement, a bill on gender equality had been drafted and was awaiting analysis. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy was making every effort to cooperate with NGOs to improve the situation and involved them in the development of all strategic documents in that area.

*The meeting rose at 6 p.m.*