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SESSIONAL WORKING GROUP OF GOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS ON
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT
ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 5th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 21 April 1983, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mrs. KUROKOCHI (Japan)

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by States parties to the Covenant concerning rights covered by articles 13 to 15
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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1988 (LX)
BY STATES PARTIES TO THE COVENANT CONCERNING RIGHTS COVERED BY ARTICLES 13 TO 15
(continued)

German Democratic Republic (E/1982/3/Add.15 and Corr.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Bollmann (German Democratic Republic)
took a place at the table.

2. Mr. BOLIMANN (German Democratic Republic), introducing the report of his Government (E/1982/3/Add.15 and Corr.1), said that it was one of the achievements of socialist development in the German Democratic Republic to have fully implemented the equal right to education for all citizens without exception. Article 25 of the Constitution provided the foundation for a comprehensive educational system offering full opportunities for a high standard of education and training. In 1982, 93 per cent of all children of the relevant age groups had been attending kindergartens. The development of international friendship and solidarity was promoted among pre-school children by teaching them about children in other countries, and about children who were being suppressed or exploited, for instance Palestinian, South African and Namibian children. They were taught that peace was the most basic prerequisite for the development of mankind.

3. Ten-year general polytechnical secondary schooling was available to all children under the Constitution. Great sacrifices had been made by the working people and their State to achieve that goal. The general secondary schools provided a high-standard scientific general education, meeting social needs and aimed at the all-round development of the personality. The components of that education were defined by article 3 of the Education Act. School lessons were combined with production, and education with productive work, thus encouraging the younger generation to take an active part in social development. Principles such as education for peace, international friendship, active solidarity and respect for human rights and dignities were always included in the curricula. In their history lessons, all children learned about the United Nations and its primary goals of maintaining peace and promoting economic, cultural and scientific co-operation.

4. Article 25 of the Constitution of the German Democratic Republic stated that all young people had the right and duty to learn a vocation. There again, the educational system actually went far beyond the provisions of the Covenant. The constitutional right to pursue a vocation was guaranteed and ensured in practice by the fact that all school-leavers received vocational training. Most occupations were open to both boys and girls, although the training of girls in 30 occupations was not allowed for health reasons. Men and women had equal rights at work, including vocational training; 75 per cent of all vocational training institutions were vocational schools at enterprises equipped with modern training facilities.

5. Questions of career guidance were regulated by special State decrees. After passing the skilled workers' certificate examination, every young person received a job for which he had been trained; there was no unemployment in the German Democratic Republic.

(Mr. Bollmann, German
Democratic Republic)

6. Vocational training for graduates of the general secondary schools normally covered 2 years, and in the case of specialized occupations 3 years, so that every young person received compulsory education for at least 12 years. Vocational training was free of charge and apprentices could use all the social and cultural facilities of the enterprise training them.

7. Various kinds of adult education were available; in addition to correspondence courses and evening classes at universities and technical colleges, there were numerous State and social establishments for adult education. The main establishments for vocational adult education were education centres and schools attached to enterprises and evening schools. In 1980/81, 1.6 million workers, including office workers, had participated in courses to improve their skills or prepare for new jobs. Questions of adult education were regulated by joint decision of the Council of Ministers of the German Democratic Republic and the National Executive of the Confederation of Free German Trade Unions.

8. Higher education was provided in accordance with article 26 of the Constitution. There were various ways of reaching university entrance standard, and there were no social or other barriers. Higher education was free and all full-time students received monthly allowances. The composition of the student body reflected the social composition of the population and the equal status of women in socialist society.

9. The report showed how boys and girls, men and women, had equal status in all spheres of education. Paragraph 21 indicated how the Sorb minority was receiving all-round support in education. There were also equal opportunities for peoples in towns and rural areas. Paragraph 20 of the report described the attention devoted to mentally and physically handicapped children. Thus, in the German Democratic Republic every citizen could benefit from the socialist educational system.

10. The national economic plans made the necessary provision for education and for the construction and maintenance of buildings, the provision of teaching materials and books and the training of teachers. Expenditure on education had increased from 5.8 million marks in 1970 to 10.6 million marks in 1981. Over the same period, the number of full-time teachers in the 10-year schools, schools for the handicapped and extended secondary schools had risen from 138,000 to 180,000 while the number of schoolchildren had decreased from 2.6 million to 2.2 million as a result of demographic developments.

11. The "Volk und Wissen" publishing house, the central producer of textbooks, supplied over 30 million textbooks a year. About 50 per cent of school books were provided free of charge, and the rest at a low cost. In 1980, over 78 per cent of school children had been having school meals and 68 per cent had had school milk. The quality of the meals was being constantly improved and, together with after-school centres, they were of particular help to families in which both parents were employed. School buses operated every day on nearly 7,000 routes.

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(Mr. Bollmann, German
Democratic Republic)

12. Socialist society was inconceivable without the stimulating role of the arts, which exerted a considerable influence on the development of attitudes and beliefs and of a socialist way of life and helped to promote a positive approach to culture. The German Democratic Republic had always supported the development of culture and the arts in every possible way. Public spending on cultural activities had nearly doubled since the beginning of the 1970s. All citizens were afforded the opportunity to take part in cultural life irrespective of their material circumstances, and admission charges to places of cultural interest and to cultural events were heavily subsidized. As educational standards had risen, public interest in the arts had increased enormously.

13. With reference to paragraph 52 of the report, active participation in cultural and artistic activities was rapidly developing; there had been a long-standing demand by the German working class for facilities for the development of artistic talents, and more than 1 million people were now actively participating in various fields of popular arts. Over 1,000 houses of culture and youth clubs, with nearly 60 million guests a year, provided numerous opportunities for creative artistic activities. Many professional artists considered it one of their foremost tasks to help in such activities. Factory festivals, national workers' festivals, exhibitions and galleries enabled amateur artists to display their talents before a large audience.

14. In accordance with the Constitution and the general policy of the State, the socialist culture served the aim of contributing to better international understanding and co-operation and thus to the promotion of international security, détente and peace. There were over 50 cultural agreements at the government level providing the framework for the exchange of persons and materials on a very wide scale. Every year some 850 works in more than 40 languages were translated into German and published in the German Democratic Republic. Film distributors, radio and television and record companies relied to a great extent on foreign material. The theatres had in their repertoire plays from over 30 countries. Soloists and ensembles from all over the world appeared in the German Democratic Republic, and national ensembles visited many foreign countries. Artistic exhibitions were exchanged internationally on a wide scale.

15. In accordance with the principles of the Constitution, the distribution of products containing nationalist, racist or fascist ideas was strictly prohibited.

16. With the results achieved in its cultural policy, the German Democratic Republic was not only following the principles of the Covenant but also demonstrating that the provisions of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, as a means of promoting peaceful co-operation between nations, were guaranteed in the German Democratic Republic.

17. Mrs. de los ANGELES GIMINEZ BUTRAGUEÑO (Spain) said it appeared that there were two types of education in the German Democratic Republic: general polytechnic education, and vocational training for workers. Thus, there seemed to be a division similar to that found in all European countries. She asked what age

(Mrs. de los Angeles Gimenez Butragueño,
Spain)

bracket was served by the general polytechnic schools. She also requested further information about what vocational guidance was provided in connection with vocational training, so as to take into account the wishes of the individual.

18. She asked whether women were really on an equal footing with men at universities in terms of participation in the different faculties. Vocational training for women in non-traditional activities was very important in order to avoid discrimination, and she requested information on such training.

19. It was somewhat surprising to read in paragraph 45 of the report that major recipients of budgetary support included cabarets; she asked whether cabarets were considered an aspect of culture.

20. Lastly, she asked whether physically and mentally handicapped children attended the same schools, and what opportunities were available to such children to transfer to normal education.

21. Mr. JOHNSON (Ecuador) asked, in connection with paragraph 4 of the report, whether educational establishments provided teaching based on different religious faiths.

22. Article 25 (4) of the Constitution, quoted in paragraph 6, stated that all young people had the right and the duty to learn a vocation. Apparently, during the period apprenticeship, young people also had the duty to learn a trade; he requested clarification on that point.

23. With respect to paragraph 8, he asked how the educational system of the German Democratic Republic inculcated in youth a spirit of international peace and friendship and the ideals of détente and disarmament.

24. Mr. TEXIER (France) said that in many respects the legislation of the German Democratic Republic went considerably beyond the requirements of articles 13 to 15 of the Covenant; article 14 did not in fact apply, because free and compulsory education was broadly available.

25. In the light of article 13, paragraph 3, of the Covenant, he asked whether education other than State education was available. Public education should, of course, be the primary form of education in all countries, but every society should also ensure a measure of pluralism and offer parents the possibility of giving their children an education other than that provided by the State.

26. In connection with article 15 he said that the figures on the German Democratic Republic's cultural achievements were impressive. However, he would like to know what possibilities there were for non-State cultural activities. For example, was it possible for non-State radio stations to operate, and could broadcasts from abroad be picked up?

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27. Mr. FUJII (Japan) congratulated the representative of the German Democratic Republic on his very informative and helpful introduction of his Government's report, particularly the information on the implementation of article 15 of the Covenant. He commended the care that had been taken to follow the guidelines attached to the Secretary-General's note, but felt that the report would have been easier to read if there had been subheadings identifying the various topics.

28. In connection with article 13, he noted that some aspects of the educational system in the German Democratic Republic were not altogether clear. Article 25 of the Constitution, which was quoted in paragraph 6 of the report referred to "general ten-year secondary schooling" as being compulsory. He assumed that that included the compulsory primary education referred to in article 13, paragraph 2 (a), of the Covenant, and wondered at what age the children received actual secondary schooling. He also wondered what proportion of all children and students received the various types of education available. He would like an explanation of the educational policy of the German Democratic Republic as a whole, and asked whether the term "scientifically-based education" used in paragraph 4 of the report meant that priority was given to science.

29. Mrs. KOLAROVA (Bulgaria) said that the way in which the representative of the German Democratic Republic had presented new data for 1981 when introducing his Government's report should be taken as an example by other countries.

30. The great progress achieved by the German Democratic Republic in the fields described was not surprising, since it was typical of how educational problems were dealt with in a socialist system aimed at ensuring prosperity for all. She had found the remarks about education for peace and international understanding particularly interesting, and would like more details about educational attitudes towards neo-fascism and racial intolerance. In connection with article 15, paragraph 2, of the Covenant, she said that her own country had taken steps in recent years for the conservation of the national culture, and she would therefore welcome more details of the German Democratic Republic's experience in preserving its cultural heritage.

31. Mr. BENDIX (Denmark) said that, in connection with article 13 of the Covenant, he had a number of questions regarding the implementation in practice of the provisions of the Constitution and of the Education Act referred to in the report. Article 25 (4) of the Constitution referred to young people as having "the right and the duty to learn a vocation". He would like some explanation of the term "duty" and to know what sanctions, if any, were applied in case of failure to learn a vocation. Paragraph 16 of the report stressed the close relationship of education-productive work and referred to the polytechnical character of schooling in the German Democratic Republic. He noted, however, that some of the provisions of paragraphs 3 and 4 of article 13 of the Covenant were not covered by the report. The educational system seemed to be very uniform and no provision appeared to be made for the kind of choice stipulated in those paragraphs. He would like more information on the possibilities of choice: for example, whether a musically-oriented child could specialize in that direction from the start, rather than receiving a polytechnical education.

(Mr. Bendix, Denmark)

32. Paragraph 17 described the distribution of subjects in the educational curriculum but not the number of daily and weekly hours of schooling. He also wondered what proportion of students were admitted to higher education and whether academic performance was the only criterion.

33. In connection with paragraph 20, he asked whether mentally and physically handicapped pupils received a segregated education or whether efforts were made to integrate them in the ordinary schools.

34. Paragraph 31 gave the percentages of female students and of children from workers' and farmers' families among those receiving higher education, but it would be helpful to know the distribution of males and females, and of social groups, in the relevant age groups of the total population in order to form a better idea of the significance of those percentages.

35. Paragraphs 35 to 37 referred to stipends for full-time students and to additional grants for good academic achievement. He wondered whether part-time students received similar tuition grants and whether, in view of the fact that decisions on the additional grants were taken by the head of the institution concerned in consultation with youth organization leaders, it was necessary to be a member of a youth organization in order to receive such a grant.

36. Lastly, he would like to know what percentage of the national budget, apart from capital expenditure on school construction, was allocated to education.

37. With regard to article 15 of the Covenant, he said that on visits to the German Democratic Republic he had been greatly impressed by the high standard of cultural life and by the low charges for admission to museums, theatres and so on. However, he would like to know how the right set forth in paragraph 1 (c) of article 15 was applied in practice in the German Democratic Republic, and whether scholars enjoyed freedom of research and publication. He would also like some clarification regarding access by the general public to foreign books and newspapers and cultural programmes. He wondered how many copies of the foreign works published by the special publishing house were printed, and whether they were available in libraries.

38. The report made no mention of any difficulties in regard to education. The only problem referred to was housing, which of course had implications in the educational and cultural fields, but it would have been enlightening to hear more about any problems that had been encountered in putting the guiding principles of the educational system into effect.

39. Mr. SOFINSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) noted that the report so ably introduced by the representative of the German Democratic Republic was that country's third on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It was a further demonstration of the importance attached to the Covenant by the German Democratic Republic and of its concern to fulfil the obligations incumbent on States parties. The report was also to be commended for its close adherence to the guidelines on presentation laid down in the note from the Secretary-General.

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(Mr. Sofinsky, USSR)

40. The substance of the report was equally commendable. It provided information both on the legislation governing education and culture and on the practical implications of those legislative provisions. The German Democratic Republic's successes in the field of education were proved by the fact that article 14 of the Covenant did not apply to it, since it had for long been providing compulsory primary education free of charge. In fact, no fees were payable at any level of education, and the Government even gave allowances to students in the eleventh and twelfth grades and at vocational training schools and universities.

41. The achievements of the German Democratic Republic in respect of culture were also well known. Although they were largely due to State subsidies, the State had no monopoly of support for cultural organizations, which also received subsidies from the trade unions and youth organizations.

42. It seemed that the more comprehensive a report was, the more questions it gave rise to. He himself had been particularly interested by the reference in paragraph 21 to children and young people of Sorb nationality and to the Government's efforts to keep their traditions and language alive. He asked how many Sorb citizens there were and what ethnic group they belonged to.

43. Teachers being the most important element in the educational system, it would be of interest to have details of how teachers and lecturers were trained, what their backgrounds were and what measures were taken to ensure that they enjoyed an appropriate status in society. Family life also affected education. In what ways did schooling and family upbringing affect each other?

44. The current international situation was tense, with certain States organizing boycotts and breaking off cultural, economic and trading relations. Cultural relations were particularly important, since they promoted international understanding, which led to détente, friendship and peace. It was gratifying that the educational system in the German Democratic Republic was imbued with a spirit of humanism, peace and understanding between peoples. The fact that economic productivity was stressed, which meant that education was not just for a pampered few, also contributed to international peace and understanding. The policy of the German Democratic Republic in promoting international friendship was in stark contrast to that of certain Governments which sought to destroy links between peoples.

45. Mr. BOUZIRI (Tunisia) said the fact that article 14 of the Covenant did not apply to the German Democratic Republic indicated the substantial progress achieved in providing free education. The country could serve as a useful model to other Governments in that area. Considerable progress had also been made in the cultural field.

46. The Human Rights Committee established under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights performed a task comparable to that of the Working Group. Representatives of States parties appearing before that Committee did not indulge in politicking, and the Committee sought to receive reports which contained

(Mr. Bouziri, Tunisia)

facts rather than polemics. The report submitted by the German Democratic Republic to the Working Group gave cause for concern in that regard. The references in paragraph 6 of the report to article 25 of the Constitution were disturbing. Members of the Working Group were there to consider economic, social and cultural rights, and exchanges of views should take place outside any ideological context.

47. Paragraph 17 of the report gave precise percentages for the amount of time devoted to various subjects in the German Democratic Republic's socialist system of education. But there were no absolutes in education; the weight assigned to particular subjects depended on a given country's situation. A majority of the States represented in the Working Group were socialist, and there were as many different kinds of socialism as there were States which called themselves socialist. Socialism had to be viewed without regard to a particular ideological context of political framework.

48. It seemed from the report that the study of Russian was given preference over that of other foreign languages. In Tunisia, French occupied a special place because of the country's history of colonialism under France. It would be of interest to know what was the situation in the German Democratic Republic which had caused Russian to be accorded so dominant a status.

49. There were repeated references in the report to the "socialist State", to the point where one might be forgiven for concluding that there was a parallel, non-socialist State in the German Democratic Republic. The report also gave the impression that all problems had been solved. In practice, there were always problems; indeed, the more developed a society became, the more problems it encountered. The report submitted by the German Democratic Republic demonstrated a lack of modesty and a somewhat self-satisfied attitude.

50. Paragraph 21 of the report stated that citizens of Sorb nationality had the right to cultivate their mother tongue and culture. It would appear that what was involved was a duty rather than a right, just as it was the duty of German children to study the German language and culture. Why was a distinction made in the case of the Sorbs?

51. The reference in paragraph 25 to career and study guidance services which helped to reconcile personal interests and social requirements when young people were choosing their future occupation also raised doubts. Young people could not be asked to do work which they disliked; they should be able to choose. If someone was unable to pursue his chosen career, was there any right of appeal?

52. Paragraph 30 indicated that the State ensured the possibility of transference to the next higher stage of education in accordance with the performance principle, social requirements and with due regard to the social structure of the population. That was laudable in so far as it meant that those who wished to better themselves could do so, but social requirements could restrict those who wanted to move to a higher stage. Was there any appeal for an individual who was prevented from moving to a higher stage of education? The comments in paragraph 31 regarding admissions to branches of study smacked of elitism.

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(Mr. Bouziri, Tunisia)

53. While he agreed with the view, stated in paragraph 84 of the report, that the escalation of the arms race and the concomitant politics of threat, boycott and interference in the internal affairs of other States, as pursued by forces hostile to détente, were the main obstacles to the development of fruitful and close international co-operation in the fields of science and technology, such a polemical approach was highly inappropriate in the context of consideration of the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The report submitted by the German Democratic Republic contrasted with that submitted by Yugoslavia, also a socialist republic, which had been noteworthy for its modesty and its frank admission that there were still problems to be solved. The authors of that report had not felt any need to apologize for socialism in their country.

54. Mr. SOFINSKY (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said he trusted that any failure by the representatives of the German Democratic Republic to follow the example set by the representative of Yugoslavia when answering questions raised by members of the Working Group would not be viewed as indicating a lack of modesty.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.