



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
26 November 2013

Original: English

---

## Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

### Fifty-first session

#### Summary record (partial)\* of the 52nd meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 20 November 2013, at 3 p.m.

*Chairperson:* Mr. Kedzia

## Contents

### Consideration of reports

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

*Initial report of Gabon (continued)*

---

\* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

---

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of this document* to the Editing Unit, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

### **Consideration of reports**

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

*Initial report of Gabon* (continued) (E/C.12/GAB/1; E/C.12/WG/GAB/Q/1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Gabon took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Martynov** requested specific details relating to the Government's agrarian reform policy and its efforts to regulate the informal economy.

3. **Mr. Ribeiro Leão** (Country Rapporteur) asked whether albinos suffered discrimination in Gabon.

4. **Ms. Shin** asked whether prisoners were forced to undertake unpaid work for private companies, as reported by the International Labour Organization Committee of Experts.

5. **Mr. Mancisidor** asked the State party to include school failure and dropout rates disaggregated by gender in its next report. He sought information regarding the State party's experience of formal and informal human rights education.

6. **Mr. Dodo Bounguendza** (Gabon) said that there was no discrimination against albinos, who were fully fledged members of society. Some organizations existed to support albinos, particularly in coping with the effects of heat and sun exposure. Being an albino did not have negative connotations and albino children were thought to bring prosperity to their families. To his knowledge, prisoners were not forced to carry out unpaid work for private companies.

7. According to the most recent statistics available, there was no real gender disparity in school dropout and failure rates. Girls were well represented in schools throughout the country, except in the Estuaire and Moyen-Ogooué provinces. Failure and repetition rates were slightly higher among boys, but rates of graduation to the next level of education were equal. However, in higher education boys accounted for 65 per cent of students, compared with 35 per cent of girls. Literacy rates stood at 83 per cent for males and 77 per cent for females.

8. In conjunction with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, a human rights manual for the education system had been produced, but had not given the desired results. As part of the Directorate-General of Human Rights national plan and jointly with Government bodies, the higher education system and civil society, human rights teaching modules had been created, along with fact sheets to aid teaching staff. The project was still in its initial phase and would shortly be the subject of consultation with various stakeholders, given that the project was financed by the State. The project was due to last three years and would lead to the expansion and standardization of human rights education throughout Gabon. It would also benefit from the expertise of international organizations and the international community.

*The meeting was suspended at 3.30 p.m. and resumed at 3.45 p.m.*

9. **Mr. Dodo Bounguendza** (Gabon) said that the country's economy had been based on its oil resources for decades, to the detriment of agriculture. As a result, agricultural development had fallen behind and the sector was dominated by subsistence farmers. Agriculture represented just 3 per cent of gross domestic product and Gabon was dependent on food imports. In order to reduce its reliance on imports and to fulfil its national and international commitment to devoting 10 per cent of the national budget to agriculture, the

Government had substantially increased investment in the sector. Meanwhile, several reforms had been made aimed at encouraging citizens to work the land, including the establishment of a national agency for agriculture, the opening of six farms and the setting up of farming cooperatives.

10. Aware of the need to regulate the informal economy, the Government had introduced a system of taxation and facilitated the registration of companies; both measures had produced promising results, although more initiatives were required in that respect.

11. Female genital mutilation was not a Gabonese tradition; it had been brought to the country by foreign nationals, particularly from West Africa. However, given the size of the West African population in Gabon, the Government had adopted legislation prohibiting the practice. To combat other harmful traditional practices, legal arrangements for the benefit of minors had been adopted, along with a law providing for their protection. The provision of food for children had been addressed through legislation that protected breastfeeding and regulated the importation of salt and baby food. Furthermore, under amendments to the Criminal Code, forced marriage for minors, sexual intercourse with minors, incest, sexual assault, gender-based violence and the denial of inheritances to women had been made criminal offences.

12. Turning to the question of corruption and illicit gain, he said that since the accession to power of President Ali Bongo Ondimba in 2009, attitudes towards the issue had begun to change in his country. There had even been court cases involving high-level defendants. For example, a case involving acts of corruption by a Government minister was pending in court. In another case, involving judicial officials and misappropriated family allowances, the perpetrators had been sentenced to prison terms. A high-level banking official had been prosecuted, among other things, for involvement in fraud in the amount of US\$ 132,000. Three high-level Treasury officials had received convictions of 10 to 20 years for embezzling sums totalling more than US\$ 2 million. In yet another case, Government officials who had misappropriated funds earmarked for local development had been obliged, after a judicial inquiry, to reimburse the money.

13. Regarding his country's progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, he said that in some areas Gabon scored relatively well in comparison with African averages.

14. According to the most recent statistics, primary school attendance figures and dropout rates for girls were roughly the same as for boys. In some provinces, especially those with extensive mining, forestry or oil extraction activity, the dropout rates were in fact higher for boys.

15. **The Chairperson**, speaking as a member of the Committee said that, as there were no follow-up questions from the experts on what they had just heard, he would pose one of his own. Had Gabon ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption? If so, was the State party considering establishing an anti-corruption commission, as required by that Convention? Also, given that lack of transparency in policies and in project management was a recognized source of corruption, he wished to know whether the State party envisaged steps to ensure that transparent procedures were in place for all stages of projects, especially large-scale infrastructure projects and those involving foreign aid.

16. **Mr. Dodo Bounguendza** (Gabon) said that his country had ratified the Convention concerned. The National Commission against Illicit Enrichment, an independent body, had just embarked on its third five-year mandate. To reduce the risk of corruption, all members, including the chairperson, were only allowed to serve a single five-year term.

17. Reverting to the question of the delay in submitting the initial report, he said that the committee responsible for preparing reports on human rights issues had finally received an operating budget only in 2010, at which point it had done its utmost to make up for lost

time by preparing reports for a number of international human rights bodies. He wished to assure the Committee that his Government was committed to carrying out its obligations under the Covenant. The interactive dialogue had been a valuable learning opportunity for his delegation, and its outcomes would be communicated to the Government and to civil society.

18. **Mr. Ribeiro Leão** said that the interactive dialogue had revealed that the State party faced many challenges in its efforts to implement the Covenant. The Committee looked forward to receiving written responses to its outstanding questions before finalizing its concluding observations.

19. **The Chairperson** reminded the delegation that the concluding observations were meant to assist countries in implementing the Covenant's provisions and should therefore be viewed as part of a cooperative process. The Committee stood ready to provide further advice on the implementation process and on the preparation of the State party's next report, which would, he hoped, be submitted on time.

*The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 4.35 p.m.*