



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Committee on the Rights of the Child Eighty-sixth session

Summary record (partial)* of the 2483rd meeting

Held via videoconference on Monday, 18 January 2021, at 12.30 p.m. Central European Time

Chair: Mr. Pedernera Reyna

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

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The meeting was called to order at 12.30 p.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chair** declared open the eighty-sixth session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The session, which was being held online due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, would be a limited one.
2. The pandemic was having a detrimental effect on children's rights and had led to a significant increase in the number of children living below the poverty line. Restrictions on the freedom of movement and loss of parental income exposed children to an increased risk of abuse and caused them considerable anxiety. Widespread school closures were having a devastating effect on children's lives, fuelling a rise in school dropout rates and adversely affecting literacy and numeracy rates. Although the shift to online learning allowed some children to continue their education, it excluded those who lacked access to online platforms. Moreover, children who spent long hours in front of a screen were more prone to developing mental health problems and were at greater risk of encountering online predators.
3. Children were the silent victims of the pandemic. They were usually overlooked in decision-making processes, as few Heads of State took the trouble to consult them. It was a mistake, however, not to listen to children or take into account their feelings, fears and proposals.
4. Although the challenges currently facing the Committee were particularly daunting, it had changed its working methods in order to continue fulfilling its mandate. However, the Committee could not carry out its work effectively unless it had the necessary resources. In that regard, the Committee urged the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to continue advocating for adequate funding for the treaty bodies in its dealings with the Secretariat.
5. **Mr. Nowosad** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)) said that the pandemic had reversed decades of progress in children's rights. Within the past year, the number of children living in poverty had increased by 142 million, and child and infant mortality rates were rising as a result of reductions in health-care coverage. Owing to the measures imposed by States in response to the pandemic, nearly 100 million children under the age of 1 year had missed out on life-saving vaccines for conditions unrelated to COVID-19.
6. The number of children not attending school was expected to increase by nearly 25 million, and school closures were continuing to affect the significant proportion of children worldwide who did not have access to remote education. Loss of family income and mandatory confinement to the home had exposed children to an increased risk of violence, sexual exploitation and neglect. The risks faced by children were compounded by the disruptions to violence-prevention services caused by measures imposed in response to the pandemic. The pandemic was having a disproportionate impact on children in situations of vulnerability the world over, including children living in poverty, children with disabilities and children living in countries affected by conflict or in camps for refugees or migrants. States had to take steps to protect the rights of children during the pandemic and mitigate its effect on them.
7. Despite the many challenges facing the Committee during the pandemic, it had managed to take decisions that had promoted school attendance, prevented mothers from being deported and facilitated family reunification. The Committee's draft general comment on children's rights in relation to the digital environment was extremely pertinent to the current situation. In the past year, digital technology had facilitated remote learning and social interaction but had also widened inequalities and increased children's risk of being exposed to harmful online content, sexual exploitation and cyberbullying.
8. The regular budget recently adopted by the General Assembly for 2021 did not provide for the level of staffing that the Committee would require to do all its work. In particular, provision had not been made for the staffing levels that would make it possible to deal with all the individual communications that would be submitted under the communications procedure.

9. **Ms. Bergh** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that the Human Rights Council had decided that it would adopt a core children's rights resolution every two years. The Council had adopted resolution 45/30, on realizing the rights of the child through a healthy environment, in September 2020. In 2021, the Council's annual full-day meeting on the rights of the child would focus on the Sustainable Development Goals, tying in with an upcoming report of the Secretary-General and General Assembly resolution; in 2022, the meeting would address family reunification. The Council's aim was to reinforce the links between its work on children's rights and that of the General Assembly.
10. The annual report on children's rights to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to be submitted by OHCHR in March 2021, would highlight the challenges that the pandemic had posed for children and means of overcoming them. It would also reflect the views of children. OHCHR had received 58 submissions from States and other stakeholders with comments on the report.
11. Activities planned by OHCHR included the organization of an online meeting of experts to discuss the marketing of products harmful to children and a seminar on challenges and opportunities for young people in the field of human rights. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children was coordinating a task force to follow up on the recommendations made in a global study that had focused on children deprived of their liberty.
12. **Mr. Conte** (Child Rights Connect) said that, while he welcomed the efforts that Committee members continued to make despite the increased workloads and new challenges mentioned by the Chair, it was regrettable that the Committee had decided not to conduct State party reviews online for the moment. It was one of only two treaty bodies to have decided not to hold such reviews. Civil society organizations such as Child Rights Connect, increasingly concerned about the growing pushback against children's rights and acutely aware of the need to hold States to account, were willing to help the Committee find effective ways to conduct State party reviews.
13. Since the Committee's previous session, Child Rights Connect had launched a pilot programme to give children a role in the governance of the organization and had released three publications. One was a set of guidelines on advancing the rights of child human rights defenders, and another – the first of its kind – provided children with comprehensive guidance on the universal periodic review. The third publication was a toolkit that was designed to heighten the effectiveness of efforts to promote the ratification of the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure. Child Rights Connect had also conducted a training session in Latin America on the use of the Optional Protocol in strategic litigation.
14. **Ms. Grandjean** (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that, in 2021, UNICEF would continue to make adjustments with a view to minimizing the impact of the pandemic on children and their families, as it had in 2020. The design of the next strategic plan to be adopted by UNICEF, which would enter into effect in 2022, would be informed by the lessons learned in 2020.
15. There had been significant and well-coordinated pushback against children's rights at the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council in the latter months of 2020. The situation called for greater advocacy for children's rights and was an additional reason for the Committee to resume its dialogues with States parties at its next session, a step that would send a clear message to States that the rights of children were as important as those of anyone else.
16. In December 2020, UNICEF had released a report showing that its work with human rights bodies such as the Committee had had a positive impact on children's lives. It intended to build on that work in 2021, including by organizing a series of regional online events on how human rights bodies or mechanisms could be used to improve children's lives. Committee members were welcome to participate in those events.
17. With the Committee's support, UNICEF had also continued to disseminate a child-friendly version of the Convention. It had also followed up on its commitments under the workplan it had developed jointly with the Committee: it had, for example, prepared a draft note on children's rights to a remedy, revised its internal guidance on reporting under the

Convention and approached several States whose reports were long overdue to suggest that they choose to report under the simplified reporting procedure. Before each session, UNICEF, together with Child Rights Connect and several Committee members, planned to reach out to people in the countries reporting in a bid to ensure that children participated more actively in the reporting process.

Adoption of the agenda

18. **The Chair** said that, as part of the adoption of the provisional agenda, the Secretary of the Committee would provide up-to-date information on the submission of reports of States parties.

19. **Ms. Franchetti** (Secretary of the Committee), giving an overview of developments since the closure of the previous session, said that the number of States that had ratified the Convention was still 196. Ten reports had been received by the secretariat since the previous session, bringing the number of reports that were pending consideration to 73. A total of eight reports had been received under the Convention: the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Armenia, Eritrea and Turkmenistan, the sixth periodic report of Slovakia, the combined sixth and seventh periodic reports of Honduras and Mexico and, under the simplified reporting procedure, the combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of the Netherlands and Switzerland.

20. The number of States that had ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure remained unchanged at 170, 176 and 46, respectively. Bahrain had submitted its initial reports under both the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

21. **The Chair** said that the Committee had been due to consider six periodic reports from States parties during the current session. However, owing to the pandemic, the Committee had amended the provisional agenda for the session in order to postpone its consideration of those reports.

22. Discussions would continue on the Committee's methods of work, as well as on follow-up to the treaty body strengthening process. The Committee would finalize its work on its draft general comment on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. It would also consider any communications or other information received under the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure.

23. At its eighty-first session, the Committee had decided that its next day of general discussion would focus on the rights of children in alternative care. In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, that discussion would provisionally be postponed until 17 September 2021. The Committee's next session would take place from 17 May to 4 June 2021. He would take it that, if there were no objections, Committee members wished to adopt the provisional agenda.

24. *The agenda was adopted.*

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 1.30 p.m.