



International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Distr.: General
10 July 2023

Original: English

Human Rights Committee 138th session

Summary record of the 4000th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Friday, 30 June 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Abdo Rocholl

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

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

Fifth periodic report of Cyprus (continued) ([CCPR/C/CYP/5](#); [CCPR/C/CYP/QPR/5](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Cyprus joined the meeting.*
2. **The Chair**, welcoming the delegation of Cyprus to the meeting, said the fact that the Committee had reached the milestone of 4,000 meetings was testament to its rich history, the relevance of its work, its willingness to innovate and the high standard it had set in upholding human rights. Committee members were privileged to have inherited a wealth of jurisprudence from their predecessors, to whom she wished to pay tribute. As human rights were increasingly being called into question or restricted in certain parts of the world, the 4,000th meeting was an opportune moment for the Committee to renew its commitment to further improving respect for human rights around the world.
3. **Ms. Olympia Neocleous** (Cyprus), resuming her delegation's response to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting, said that women were active participants in the country's peace process. In the "track one" area of diplomacy, they had assumed roles as leaders, negotiators and members of expert working groups, participating in decision-making, in the implementation of confidence-building measures and in discussions between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot political parties. The technical committee on gender equality was working to implement the action plan launched in 2022 to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women in the peace process. The Government was committed to making swift appointments to guarantee that men and women were represented equally among the Greek Cypriot members of the technical committee.
4. More generally, the number of women in leadership and decision-making posts had been increasing despite the persistence of barriers such as gender stereotyping, sexism and the fact that the burden of care fell disproportionately on women. The National Mechanism for Women's Rights continued to work on mainstreaming gender into all government policies, while all ministries had been required to appoint a gender focal point to implement their equality policies. The Commissioner for Gender Equality was mandated to draft, coordinate and implement the national gender strategy and had also drafted the first national action plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security, on which public consultations had been held with all relevant ministries, departments, trade unions, non-governmental organizations and civil society groups.
5. As a member of the European Union, Cyprus had not acceded to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families as the matter fell within the competence of the Union. However, the country had transposed into national law the relevant European Union *acquis* promoting the rights of such workers.
6. With regard to the citizenship issues faced by children with one Turkish Cypriot parent and one parent from a third country, it was important to bear in mind that, since the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, the Government of Türkiye had systematically and deliberately sought to alter the demographic structure of the island by transferring parts of its civilian population into the occupied territory, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. As a result, it was estimated that the number of Turkish settlers exceeded the number of Turkish Cypriots.
7. **Ms. Christodoulidou-Zannetou** (Cyprus) said that the Cypriot legal community organized regular seminars and conferences on human rights-related matters. Noting the Committee's concern regarding the low number of references to the Covenant in court decisions, she was committed, in her capacity as Law Commissioner of Cyprus, to arranging seminars on the rights protected by the Covenant, the first Optional Protocol thereto and the complaint mechanism under the Protocol. The Committee's concern would be relayed to the human rights division of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order so that the Ministry could act to improve awareness of the Covenant. Furthermore, the Government would consider disseminating information on the Covenant and the first Optional Protocol thereto as part of

its celebration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the thirtieth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

8. With regard to the impact of the reports and recommendations of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights, the Commissioner was empowered to specify a time frame within which the relevant authority should act upon his or her recommendations and to inform the Council of Ministers and parliament if the authority refused or failed to do so. Under Law No. 42 (I) of 2004 on combating racial and other kinds of discrimination, the Commissioner could also make binding recommendations to public or private bodies in order to end discriminatory treatment.

9. The Commissioner was appointed for a fixed six-year term, which would not be affected by any changes in the political situation, and he or she could only be removed from office for very limited reasons. The Office of the Commissioner had full control of its budget and was provided with the financial, technical and human resources needed to fulfil its mandate. While no Turkish-speaking staff had been recruited by the Office, Turkish speakers could apply for positions provided that they possessed the necessary qualifications. When complaints were submitted to the Office in a language other than Greek or English, the Office undertook to translate any relevant documents into the language of the complainant's choice.

10. **A representative of Cyprus** said that 3,530 naturalization applications submitted by individuals with one parent who had legally entered or resided in Cyprus were outstanding. Most of the individuals concerned had one Turkish Cypriot parent. Under Cypriot law, citizenship was granted to any individual born in Cyprus on or after 16 August 1960 provided that one of their parents was a citizen of the country. However, in cases where the other parent had entered Cyprus illegally, citizenship could only be granted by decision of the Council of Ministers. In a decision of 14 February 2007, the Council had facilitated the registration of certain individuals, including children born in Cyprus on or before 20 July 1974, children with one foreign parent from a country other than Türkiye, children whose parents had married before 20 July 1974 and children whose parents lived in the village of Pyla.

11. **A representative of Cyprus** said that various Police Standing Orders, protocols and training procedures had been implemented to ensure the appropriate and proportionate use of police powers. For example, Police Standing Order 5/50 regulated the use of police weapons and specified the situations in which lethal force could be used, which included the defence of personal property or prevention of the escape of an individual who posed a threat to human life.

12. **Ms. Šurlan** said that she would like to know what had been done to improve conditions in prisons and tackle prison overcrowding, what steps were being taken to reform prison facilities and whether alternatives to detention existed or were envisaged. She would appreciate data on the capacity of all detention facilities and their current occupancy levels. She wished to know what mechanisms were in place for detainees to make complaints and what steps had been taken to encourage them to report cases of inter-prisoner violence. Further information on training for prison officers on identifying and responding to violence would be welcome. Was such training mandatory? How often did it take place? On a different note, she would like to know whether there were separate detention facilities for young people.

13. The Committee would appreciate information on any de facto discrimination faced by Turkish Cypriots. Were they recognized as members of a minority community? It would be useful to hear about the impact of the work placement service for Turkish Cypriots and whether it had led to an increase in the number of Turkish Cypriots employed by the civil service, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. She would like to know what obstacles Turkish Cypriots faced in joining the civil service. Information on the participation of other minorities in the civil service would also be welcome.

14. She wished to know whether specific laws had been passed to support the availability of Turkish-language resources, whether public services were offered in Turkish, and whether the language was taught in primary schools. She also wished to know if a survey on the educational needs of the Turkish Cypriot community had been conducted since 2005. Lastly, she would like the delegation to explain the reasons behind the significant decrease in the number of Roma pupils in schools from 2007 to 2020.

15. **Mr. El Haiba** said that he would like to know what percentage of all detainees were being held in pretrial detention. Noting that, under the Aliens and Immigration Law, migrants who had been declared “illegal” could be detained for a maximum of 18 months but that, in practice, some had reportedly been detained for longer, he would like to know how the provisions of that Law could be considered compatible with the Covenant.

16. The Committee would be grateful for additional information on the average and maximum lengths of time for which migrants had been held in police custody due to a lack of capacity in the Menogeia detention centre and on any measures taken to identify alternatives to detention for migrants. He would like to know whether the delegation could provide more specific information on the requests for legal aid submitted by asylum-seekers, particularly when their asylum applications had been rejected. What was the Government’s position on the matter of legal aid for unaccompanied minors? Lastly, he would like the delegation to comment on reports that migrants had been held at the Pournara reception centre for far longer than the 72 hours required to complete the relevant formalities.

17. **Mr. Teraya** said that he would appreciate clarification on the ages attributed to a “minor”, a “child” and a “juvenile”, as the terms were used in the State party’s report. He would like to know how the State party ensured that children’s right to have a lawyer, parent or other trusted adult present during interrogations was upheld. He invited the delegation to respond to the case highlighted in the 2017 report of the European Committee for Prevention of Torture, in which a young person had been denied access to a lawyer. He would like to know what safeguards were in place to ensure that juvenile offenders were only deprived of their liberty once all alternatives had been exhausted, and he would be grateful for an explanation of the amendments introduced in the 2021 Law on Children in Conflict with the Law and how it was aligned with the Covenant.

18. He would like the delegation to provide definitions of the phrases “no intellectual disability”, “not being of sound mind” and “incompetent”, as employed in certain legal instruments to determine which individuals were not permitted to vote. It would be useful to have disaggregated data on how many people were considered to fall into those categories. He would appreciate an update on the status of the legal reforms aimed at enabling persons with disabilities to fully participate in elections, as well as details of the efforts to ensure that persons with disabilities were supported during the electoral process and were aware of the support available to them. Lastly, he would like to know what measures were being taken to remove the physical barriers preventing persons with disabilities from accessing certain places.

19. He noted the State party’s argument that constitutional matters could be examined as part of the resolution of the Cyprus conflict, but believed it might be worth initiating separate discussions on equal recognition for all religious communities, given the complexity and expected length of the settlement process. Furthermore, giving religious groups status as non-profit organizations did not confer the requisite rights, in contravention of article 27 of the Covenant. Therefore, and in the light of reports that some religious minorities, such as the Jewish community and Jehovah’s Witnesses, were not recognized by the authorities, he invited the State party to describe any measures, including a review of article 2 of the Constitution, being taken to ensure in law and in practice that all religious communities enjoyed equal recognition.

20. **Ms. Kran** said that she wished to know more about the State party’s plans to establish new crossing points between the northern and southern parts of the island, notably at Kokkina and Athienou, or, in the absence of such plans, how it facilitated the freedom of movement of individuals. In the same vein, she wished to know what measures were in place to enable individuals to enjoy the same mobility they had enjoyed before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. She would also like to know when the State party expected to bring the Refugee Law into line with article 12 of the Covenant and article 26 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees so that refugees could travel freely to the northern part of the island on an equal footing with other foreign nationals.

21. In the light of reported obstacles to the exercise of voting rights by Turkish Cypriots, the Committee would welcome information on the participation rate of Turkish Cypriot voters in the 2016 and 2021 parliamentary elections and the 2018 and 2023 presidential

elections. It would appreciate information on the actions taken to encourage their participation, the measures taken to ensure that all Turkish Cypriot voters were included on the electoral roll, the steps taken to address access to polling stations and the availability of electoral information. Lastly, it would be interesting to know whether the State party was considering repealing the provision of the Constitution that defined the office of President and Vice-President along ethnic lines, which was discriminatory and effectively prohibited anyone who was neither Greek Cypriot nor Turkish Cypriot from serving in those roles.

22. **Mr. Helfer** said that he wished to hear about the State party's plans to expand access to mosques and reduce the social pressure on children from religious minorities to participate in Greek Orthodox religious services and religious instruction in school, and about any guidelines on exemptions from those services and instruction. He invited the delegation to comment on reports that the authorities continued to perform autopsies on deceased members of the Jewish community in cases of non-suspicious death and had not responded to repeated requests to authorize the Chief Rabbi of Cyprus to issue marriage, death and divorce certificates. He would appreciate information on any cases of prison sentences or fines handed down to conscientious objectors.

23. Regarding freedom of expression, it would be helpful to understand how articles 141, 142, 50 (d), 68 and 202 (a) of the Criminal Code were applied in practice, how the State party ensured that their application did not infringe protected speech, to what extent the Law on the Right of Access to Public Sector Information was complied with and how many requests for access had been granted. Furthermore, it would be useful to hear how the Government responded to the threats made against the authors of the glossary of sensitive phrases entitled *Words That Matter* and to incidents of harassment against journalists. The Committee would welcome information on the status of the so-called Fake News Bill, any steps the Government had taken to limit the availability of surveillance technologies such as the Pegasus spyware, and any action envisaged to prevent the Law on the Procedure for the Standardization of Geographical Names of the Republic from being misused to curb freedom of expression. He would also like to hear the delegation's comments on reports that the Auditor General had attempted to invoke that law to withhold subsidies from the *Cyprus Mail* newspaper.

The meeting was suspended at 10.55 a.m. and resumed at 11.15 a.m.

24. **A representative of Cyprus** said that efforts were under way to remedy the problem of overcrowding in prisons, for instance through expanded eligibility for house arrest, sentence suspension or reduction, conditional release, parole and pardons; the use of electronic monitoring; and the adoption of regulatory amendments to authorize the transfer of certain categories of inmates to the Guidance and Extra-Institutional Employment Centre. In addition, the Prisons Department and the National Addiction Authority had reached an agreement on the placement of pretrial detainees with substance abuse problems in drug rehabilitation programmes; 113 individuals had benefited from the arrangement between 2018 and 2022. During the COVID-19 pandemic, prisoners who had served at least half of their sentence and had less than two years left – apart from those convicted of homicide or sexual offences – had been granted early release.

25. The current prison population was nearly 960, for a capacity of 545. On 15 June 2023, the Council of Ministers had approved additional measures to reduce overcrowding, including the conversion of the underpopulated open-regime facility into a closed-regime prison with a further 214 places, the refitting of the Guidance and Extra-Institutional Employment Centre to house the detainees from the open-regime facility, the relocation of the centre and the commissioning of a feasibility study on the construction of a new wing for up to 300 prisoners. Once all those measures had been implemented, the total capacity was expected to reach 1,200, which should significantly reduce overcrowding.

26. Incidents of inter-prisoner violence were rare. The only major incident in recent years had been the killing of an inmate in 2022. Criminal and disciplinary proceedings had been initiated against the inmates and prison staff involved. Violence was forbidden in prison, irrespective of who committed it, and the penalties for such behaviour were dissuasive. Prisoners were allowed out of their cells for most of the day, during which time they were encouraged to take classes or use the gym. They could also communicate with the outside world via telephone and could receive up to 10 visits a month. Mental health services were

available, as were complaint boxes. A number of entities, including the Office of the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights, conducted prison visits.

27. The Government had invested considerably in the training of prison staff, particularly since the establishment of the Prison Officers Training Academy in 2017. Increasing numbers of prison staff attended courses, seminars and conferences, either in Cyprus, abroad or online, on a range of issues including health and safety, terrorism, emergency situations and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons.

28. **Ms. Olympia Neocleous** (Cyprus) said that Turkish Cypriots were citizens of Cyprus under the Constitution – not a minority – and that both Greek and Turkish were official languages of the country. The Constitution provided that 30 per cent of public servants should be Turkish Cypriots; however, pursuant to the doctrine of necessity, any constitutional provisions that could not be applied due to the invasion of 1974, including those on participation in public service, were suspended. Nevertheless, that did not mean that Turkish Cypriots could not apply for public service jobs. Further details would be provided in writing.

29. The Government supported the opening of new crossing points, including at Kokkina and Athienou, and stood ready to examine all relevant proposals in the spirit of ensuring beneficial outcomes for all Cypriots. However, there had not been the necessary engagement on the part of Turkish Cypriots with the technical committee on crossing points. Additionally, efforts were under way to further facilitate crossing through the existing crossing points, including by carrying out improvement works and hiring additional personnel. None of the crossing points had been closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, and all pandemic response measures in place there had been lifted.

30. Third-country nationals who had illegally entered the occupied part of Cyprus, including refugees, were barred under European Union law from crossing into areas where the Government exercised effective control; therefore, amending the law would require approval by all the member States of the European Union.

31. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the 2021 Law on Children in Conflict with the Law took into consideration all the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the relevant European Union directive. In Cyprus, the age of criminal responsibility was set at 14 years. In practice, the Law applied to individuals up to the age of 21, provided that they were being tried for offences committed before they reached the age of majority. A juvenile court had been established and become operational as soon as the Law had been adopted.

32. A juvenile justice unit had been established to oversee the implementation of that legislation and the safeguarding of the rights of children in conflict with the law. Police officers received training on the rights of the child, procedures for the arrest, interrogation and detention of children, and cooperation with other agencies. Arrest, investigation and prosecution procedures complied with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the relevant European Union directive. Children in conflict with the law, their parents or guardians, and their lawyers were required to sign a document that contained, in language understandable to children, information on the alleged illegal act and the child's rights, including information on the right to legal representation and advice, maximum detention periods and complaints mechanisms. Children were not detained with adults, nor were they visible to adult detainees while in detention.

33. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the detention of asylum-seekers and migrants who were not granted the right to remain in Cyprus was a measure of last resort subject to the principle of proportionality. Alternatives to detention, such as the requirement to report to a police station, were being introduced. Asylum-seekers could be detained only if there was a risk of absconding, for the purposes of establishing their identity or removing them, or for reasons of national security or public order. Decisions to detain persons awaiting removal were reviewed each month.

34. All migrants who entered Cyprus in an irregular manner, including unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable persons, were registered and screened at the Pournara reception centre; their time at the centre could not exceed established limits. Unaccompanied minors were housed in designated areas, with girls and boys separated. The centre was operated

according to standard operating procedures, under which the director of Social Welfare Services acted as the guardian of unaccompanied minors and the reception centre was being refurbished, with the addition of quarantine and waiting areas. The standard operating procedures also ensured that accommodation was provided for vulnerable persons, including single mothers with young children and unaccompanied minors, and that their specific needs were assessed by experts and addressed. Asylum-seekers received information on their rights and obligations. The Ministry of Health had drawn up standard operating procedures on the health services to be provided at the centre, which was an open facility.

35. All Greek and Turkish Cypriots residing in areas under the effective control of the Government enjoyed the same electoral rights provided that they had registered on the electoral roll. With regard to European elections, all Turkish Cypriots who held an identity card issued by the Cypriot authorities with a declared address in areas not under the Government's effective control were automatically included on the electoral roll. Nevertheless, only approximately 5,800 Turkish Cypriots had voted in the 2019 European Parliament elections.

36. **Ms. Christodoulidou-Zannetou** (Cyprus) said that the courts had very recently handed down the first conviction for the use of services provided by a victim of trafficking in persons, which had been criminalized in 2019.

37. **A representative of Cyprus** said that although detained migrants subject to deportation orders were generally held at the Menogeia detention centre, that centre was often full, and 62 of the country's 186 police detention cells could also be used for administrative detainees. The authorities aimed to transfer such persons to the Menogeia centre within 48 hours, given that it was the only specialized centre for migrants in an irregular situation. Efforts were also made to ensure that administrative detainees held in police cells could take exercise outdoors for an hour a day and that they were separated from criminal detainees; three police detention facilities had separate wings and outdoor exercise areas for that purpose. A larger detention centre for administrative detainees was under construction. Vulnerable persons, including unaccompanied minors and families with children, were not detained.

38. Detention conditions in police detention facilities and the Menogeia centre were inspected by a committee, which made recommendations for improvements. Detention centres were repainted regularly, and new facilities had been opened. The police had worked with organizations of persons with disabilities to ensure humane conditions for detainees with disabilities. The legal rights of all persons at the Menogeia detention centre were safeguarded. Material conditions such as lighting and ventilation were monitored, and detainees could receive visits from their family, lawyers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They also had access to postal services, telephones, the Internet, legal representation, health services and outdoor exercise areas. Personal hygiene kits were distributed upon arrival, and leisure and educational activities were organized. A document outlining detainees' rights had been translated into 20 languages and had to be signed by all persons held at the centre, who also received booklets that set out their rights. Complaints could be submitted to a complaints committee or directly to the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights.

39. **A representative of Cyprus** said that prisoners had access to laundry facilities, and kitchens, refectories, showers and toilets were inspected regularly to ensure good hygiene. Drinking water and food were subject to regular laboratory testing. All inmates had access to doctors and 24-hour nursing care on entry into prison and during their detention. Many prison officers had received first-aid training.

40. **A representative of Cyprus** said that there was no need to establish another Turkish-language school because only a small number of pupils would benefit. The fall in the number of Roma pupils enrolled in school might be due to the fact that their families were moving to areas not under the effective control of the Government. Roma children in primary schools benefited from lessons in the dialect spoken by the Roma community in Cyprus, improved Turkish language teaching for Roma children, workshops intended to persuade Roma parents to enrol their children in school, and training for school staff on diversity and tolerance. Roma students in secondary schools received free Greek lessons, which were also available to their parents and guardians, as well as specialized counselling to assist them in dealing with

personal, educational, professional and social problems. Turkish was an optional subject; the two compulsory foreign languages taught in schools were English and French.

41. Children from the Armenian, Maronite and Latin religious groups enjoyed equal access to education. The Armenian Nareg Schools and the Maronite Saint Maronas primary school were funded by the Government, as was transport to the Saint Maronas school. The school fees of children from religious groups who attended private schools were subsidized by the State. Non-Orthodox Christian pupils could request permission to be excused from religious education. While no such request had been refused in primary schools, 44 of the 1,280 requests made by secondary school pupils in the 2021/22 academic year had been denied; they had all been poorly substantiated requests from Orthodox Christian pupils. There was no government policy on pupils' attendance at Orthodox Christian religious services; such matters were handled by individual schools. No complaints relating to a child's attendance at religious services had been received in the 2021/22 academic year.

42. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the purpose of the Law on the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking and Exploitation of Persons and the Protection of Victims was to prevent and suppress the crime, support its victims and promote international cooperation. It provided for the investigation and prosecution of offenders, compensation for victims and support and protection for child victims during criminal investigations, as well as the establishment of a national referral mechanism that required government agencies and NGOs to refer potential victims to the Social Welfare Services. The Multidisciplinary Coordinating Group against Trafficking had been operational since 2007 and worked to formulate policy and coordinate action. It had devised an updated national action plan based on the four pillars of the Government's anti-trafficking strategy: prevention, prosecution, protection and cooperation. The phenomenon was also addressed in other legislation, such as the Aliens and Immigration Law.

43. **A representative of Cyprus** said that a specialized police department investigated cases of trafficking in persons, assisted divisional police units and used a standardized risk assessment tool to identify victims of trafficking, labour and sexual exploitation and other forms of exploitation. The department cooperated with the European Union and other international agencies. Specialized training was provided to its staff, and all police recruits were taught how to deal with victims, around 90 of whom had been identified over the previous four years.

44. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the Government, in cooperation with NGOs, afforded victims of trafficking in persons immediate assistance, including accommodation and financial, psychological and social support, free from discrimination. A memorandum of understanding on support for victims had been signed between the Ministry of Justice and Public Order and the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare.

45. **Mr. El Haiba** said that he would welcome the delegation's comments on reports that migrants detained under expulsion orders were detained with persons accused of criminal offences in almost all police stations. He also wished to know how the State party was addressing the reportedly poor living conditions of unaccompanied minors at the Pournara reception centre and delays in age assessment processes. He wondered what protocols were in place to ensure that such processes were undertaken only in cases of serious doubt as to a person's age and with his or her consent. It would be useful to understand the procedure for identifying, evaluating and managing the specific needs of asylum-seekers, particularly asylum-seekers with disabilities, and how those individuals' asylum applications were prioritized.

46. **Mr. Ndiaye** said that he would like to know what the State party intended to do, short of ratifying the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, to better protect the rights of migrant workers and stop those in an irregular situation from being treated as criminals. Had the State party entered into any bilateral agreements on circular migration, for example?

47. **Ms. Šurlan** said that she wished to know whether there were any measures in place to ensure juveniles in pretrial detention were kept apart from convicted juvenile prisoners at all times, including during their daily work and education activities. She reiterated her questions from the previous meeting about whether the "certificate of identification" entitled

a person to file a complaint relating to trafficking in persons and whether article 62 of the anti-trafficking law had been implemented and a victim support fund established.

48. **Ms. Kran** said that she would like the delegation to respond to reports that migrants had been detained on deportation orders in police stations together with detainees charged with criminal offences. It was unclear how the rights enshrined in the Covenant had been respected in such situations.

49. **Mr. Helfer** said that he would appreciate responses to the issues he had raised earlier.

50. **Mr. Teraya** said that he, too, would appreciate a response to the questions he had raised earlier. He also wondered, in reference to the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, whether the reason the rights of religious minorities were not fully respected was that those minorities were not involved in the process.

51. **A representative of Cyprus** said that asylum-seekers who committed crimes were protected by habeas corpus and their expulsion was subject to a final court decision. The principle of non-refoulement was respected at all times.

52. The age assessment procedure, which was based on the guidelines of the *Practical Guide on Age Assessment* of the European Union Agency for Asylum, could be used if there was uncertainty concerning the age of an asylum-seeker, for example when an alleged unaccompanied minor did not possess genuine documentation indicating his or her identity and age, when the age assessment interview left serious doubts about the person's age or when a request for family reunification was submitted under the Dublin III Regulation and the refugee-receiving country requested a medical examination to determine the applicant's age. The procedure was carried out as quickly as possible. After examining relevant documents gathered in interviews, medical examinations could be carried out, if necessary, subject to the individual's consent or that of their guardian. In the case of alleged unaccompanied minors, the Social Welfare Services also sent an assessment report to the Asylum Service considering the application and, once again, medical examinations were used only if the applicant's age was disputed after considering statements and other relevant information.

53. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the Social Welfare Services supported unaccompanied minors at the reception centre for asylum-seekers in Pournara. Conditions for unaccompanied minors there had been improved since 30 children had held protests. Persons with disabilities at Pournara reception centre were deemed to be vulnerable people under national legislation. Assistance was provided to help them find accommodation that met their needs.

54. **A representative of Cyprus** said that asylum-seekers who committed criminal offences were not deported simply on the basis that they had committed a criminal act. They were processed in the same way as any other person and, if found guilty in a court of law, served their sentence in prison. The court decided whether deportation should follow. Juveniles in pretrial detention were sent to special police detention cells, where they were kept separate from convicted juveniles. Nor were the latter group put in prison; rather, they were subject to alternative measures.

55. On occasions when the Menogeia detention centre was fully occupied, detainees awaiting deportation needed to be placed in detention centres holding criminal detainees. Where possible, they were kept separate in police cells with outdoor access, and efforts were made to transfer them to the Menogeia detention centre within 48 hours. New detention centres were being constructed to increase the country's capacity to cope with illegal migration flows.

56. The certificate of identification issued by the police to recognize victims of human trafficking gave the latter access to a wider range of social services.

57. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the Government had signed a memorandum of understanding with the International Organization for Migration in February 2023 aimed at improving the management of increased migration flows. It covered processing and coordination operations, support for vulnerable groups, housing for unaccompanied minors, assistance with relocation procedures and the social integration of migrants. Upgrades

costing 25 million euros and covering an area of 56,500 square metres, including a 14,700 square metre buffer zone, had been deemed necessary to ease overcrowding at the Pournara reception centre. The International Organization for Migration had overseen the planning and tendering processes and was monitoring the upgrade project, which was being financed by the Ministry of Health and the European Commission. The total capacity of the new centre would allow it to accommodate approximately 1,000 people during periods of increased migration flows. When completed, it would also be used for asylum procedures carried out by the Asylum Service, the police and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, and would include a waiting area for persons arriving outside opening hours, a zone for minors, residential zones and an examination centre.

58. The State party did not treat irregular migrant workers as criminals in respect of their employment situation; the laws it had passed in that area were in line with European Union principles and legislation.

59. **Mr. Gómez Martínez** said that he would like to know whether, when completed, the migrant reception centres would be subject to judicial oversight or only administrative supervision.

60. **A representative of Cyprus** said that the centres would be subject to administrative supervision only, although police were present if required.

61. **Ms. Christodoulidou-Zannetou** (Greece) said that it had been an honour discussing her country's fifth periodic report with the Committee. Written replies would be submitted within 48 hours to questions that had not been answered during the meetings, including questions related to surveillance concerns, the so-called Fake News Bill, the freedom of religious minorities and the standardization of geographical names.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.