



Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.1164
22 September 2006

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Forty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 1164th MEETING (Chamber B)

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 12 September 2006, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. KHATTAB

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Third periodic report of Ethiopia (continued) (CRC/C/129/Add.8; CRC/C/ETH/Q/3; CRC/C/ETH/Q/3/Add.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Ms. Ahmed, Mr. Gebre Hiwot, Mr. Gutema, Mr. Habte, Mr. Hassen, Mr. Rach, Mr. Tadesse, Mr. Wete and Mr. Wolde-Semaiat (Ethiopia) resumed places at the Committee table.
2. Ms. SMITH welcomed the good work that had been accomplished in education over the past 15 years in Ethiopia, in particular with regard to raising the literacy level. However, the challenges were huge and they would not be overcome overnight.
3. She wished to know whether more government funds could be allocated to education. With 40 per cent of the government budget being funded by donors, she wondered whether that trend would continue. If not, there would be fewer resources available for education. Although there appeared to be a political will to improve education within the Administration, decentralization had hindered progress. She wondered why education was not compulsory, as it was a human right. Speaking on behalf of the Committee, she said that education should be compulsory. Primary education was not free and tuition fees were high, in particular for poor families.
4. She asked whether girl-friendly schools were part of the Government's plans to improve education, which would help close the gender gap.
5. It was encouraging that the enrolment rate of children and girls had increased, but more and more children, especially girls, were dropping out of school. She requested more information on the school dropout rate.
6. She expressed concern that the size of secondary schools was dictated by the demand for trained human resources at middle and higher levels. Secondary education was also a human right to which children were entitled. She wished to know about the availability of textbooks, how many schools continued to offer six years of primary education instead of eight and how much the Federal Government planned to spend on teacher education, as it was principally financed by private means.
7. Mr. ZERMATTEN was especially concerned about juvenile justice in Ethiopia and praised the State party for its establishment of child-protection units. Table 23 (CRC/C/129/Add.8) provided alarming statistics about the number of minors involved in the commission of serious offences, including assault and murder, from 1999 to 2002. Some 70,000 minors had committed assaults, while 4,202 had committed murder, and had been detained in the Juvenile Delinquents Rehabilitation Institute in Addis Ababa. He wished to know what preventive measures were being taken to reduce juvenile violence and whether the State party was planning to institutionalize a juvenile court system. As pointed out during the previous meeting, there was no special juvenile court in Ethiopia. Some judges, four to be exact, worked with children, but that was far too little.

8. The most common type of punishment for 15- to 18-year olds was the deprivation of liberty. It would be interesting to ascertain whether other options besides detention were available and what conditions were like in detention. To his knowledge, there was one juvenile detention centre in Addis Ababa, but many minors shared detention facilities with adults, even though they might receive lighter sentences. He also wished to know whether juvenile delinquents were entitled to free legal assistance and requested information on expedited legal procedures for the youths concerned. Capital punishment had been abolished, but life imprisonment had not, and there was no provision for shorter sentences due to good behaviour. He wondered whether guarantees from the State party were needed for the 15- to 18-year age group.

9. Mr. POLLAR wished to know about practices, legislation and norms relating to the inheritance of girl children. Did they suffer from discrimination in that regard? He requested information concerning the time frame for implementation of the recommendations relating to recovery of maintenance for children.

10. He wished to know whether provision was made for judicial review and if not, whether the State party was considering the establishment of such a mechanism. It would be useful to know what measures were in place regarding international obligations vis-à-vis other States parties and what steps were taken to ensure recovery of maintenance for children whose parents were evading their responsibilities. What would happen when the persons concerned were outside the jurisdiction of the State party and how would other factors affect recovery?

11. Despite its long history of internal and external armed conflict, the Government of Ethiopia had not yet ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. He wished to know what measures or mechanisms were available to monitor the human rights of children, and to ensure that they did not take part in armed conflict and that civilian children caught up between warring parties were protected. He asked what provisions of international humanitarian law were applicable to children. Were there, for example, peace corridors or days of tranquillity enabling the evacuation of children in time of war? Other requests for information related to psychological recovery, specific programmes for orphans affected by armed conflict and adoption. With regard to the latter, it was essential for children to know their identity and origin. He wished to know whether any measures existed to ensure that no money changed hands during intercountry adoptions.

12. Mr. PARFITT said that he was interested in the range of care available to children in Ethiopia. Since about 1.2 million children had been orphaned owing to HIV/AIDS, it would be useful to know what happened to those children who no longer enjoyed parental care. What kind of support, including traditional family support, was available? He wished to know how many children were in foster care and how it was regulated. There were more than 100,000 children with disabilities in Ethiopia. Three non-governmental organizations had been working on disability, in particular the Cheshire Foundation, which had provided training and education support for children with disabilities and had helped parents of children with disabilities to join saving and credit schemes. He asked whether there were any specialized schools for disabled children.

13. Corporal punishment was another issue of concern. It was commendable that the use of corporal punishment had been banned in schools, but the possibility of such punishment still lingered in the home. It was to be hoped that only light corporal punishment was practised in the home. He wished to know whether the State party provided parents with information on alternative disciplinary measures for dealing with their children and whether the courts had pronounced on reasonable punishment for children.

14. Mr. FILALI expressed concern about the education of female children who married or became pregnant during primary school education; he asked what happened in those cases. Were they allowed back in school?

15. He wished to know whether steps had been taken during the turbulent elections in 2005 to investigate human rights violations perpetrated against children.

16. Sexual exploitation, linked to poverty, was a matter of grave concern. The State party had not yet replied on the issue. It was important to find a way to protect children from the grasp of sexual exploitation and to prevent the situation from worsening.

17. He asked what measures were being taken to fight corruption, another matter of concern.

18. He was interested in learning more about the child-protection units that had been set up in police stations in Addis Ababa (para. 216, CRC/C/129/Add.8). How did they work? Which party, the protection unit or the child, took the first step? Were the units run by officers in uniform? He inquired about the make-up of the units: were the staff all male or did women have a role?

19. He wished to know whether the juvenile justice system included specialized judges for children. Judges had benefited from human rights courses and regional training programmes in Ethiopia. He asked whether children were automatically entitled to legal assistance or whether they had to request it.

20. Child labour was an especially critical issue because children as young as five were working in Ethiopia. Some 62 per cent of children in the 4 to 10 age group were engaged in work; it was not uncommon for older children to hold down two jobs. Unfortunately that left little time for school or preparation for the future.

21. Ms. VUCKOVIC-SAHOVIC expressed alarm at the sale of children in Ethiopia. According to some international organizations, some 20,000 children were being sold to traffickers each year, for as little as US\$ 1.20 per child. She requested further information on the adoption process. There was a clear consensus that poverty was the root cause of trafficking, but it could be halted by sanctions and there was a need to raise awareness of the issue among the population. She wished to know how the State party planned to combat child trafficking.

22. The CHAIRPERSON said that the children's hotline did not provide nationwide coverage. She asked the delegation whether there were plans to extend the hotline to the entire country, whether such plans would include a toll-free number and whether funds would be allocated for that purpose. Were there plans to incorporate the hotline into existing programmes and to build awareness of violations of the rights of the child?

23. Street children were a serious concern as well. Reportedly street children were arrested by police and detained for long periods. Many had been released without charges or had had no trial. She wished to know whether the Government had made provision for social workers to help those children and for the establishment of temporary shelters.

24. Although the Ethiopian Government had shown great generosity to refugees within its borders, the CRC had learned of cases in which refugees had been detained without charges and subjected to ill-treatment. She requested the delegation to elaborate on those points.

25. Ms. ALUOCH asked what steps the Government had taken to deal with the effects of the civil unrest that had followed the 2005 national elections, particularly the detention of children.

26. Ms. AHMED (Ethiopia) said that, although doctors and health workers could not keep pace with the demand, important strides had been made in improving primary health care, including reproductive health, through the use of extension health workers at the district level. Programmes to advocate family planning, particularly in rural areas where approximately 85 per cent of the population lived, had been successful, and efforts currently centred on finding ways to increase the supply of contraceptives. Over the past five years, the Government had also made progress in improving the population's access to clean drinking water, though much still remained to be done.

27. Mr. GEBRE HIWOT (Ethiopia) said that a clear procedure had been established to process intercountry adoptions, and such adoptions were well documented. Specific legal provisions governing the intercountry adoption process required adoption agencies to be licensed before they could operate in Ethiopia. A monitoring mechanism had also been set up under which reports were submitted on each adopted child up to the age of 18. Moreover, within two years of the adoption, experts were sent to the countries in question to ensure respect for the child's welfare. Intercountry adoption services were provided by the Government free of charge.

28. Mr. ZERMATTEN said that, since intercountry adoptions far outnumbered domestic adoptions, the Government should consider signing the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, as well as intensifying efforts to promote national adoptions. In the event an adoption was revoked, he asked whether the child was returned to his or her family of origin.

29. Mr. GEBRE HIWOT (Ethiopia) said that there was a need to organize campaigns to raise awareness of the formal adoption process and to advocate the processing of adoptions through the courts. Ethiopia's legislation clearly indicated the procedure to be followed in the event an adoption was revoked. Such revocations were aimed at protecting adopted children who were being mistreated.

30. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the Government provided any financial assistance to families wishing to adopt a child.

31. Mr. GEBRE HIWOT (Ethiopia) said that the Government had various programmes to assist low-income families, but none specifically aimed at prospective adoptive families.

32. Mr. POLLAR wished to know whether more domestic adoptions were undertaken than statistics showed, given that, according to local custom, adoptions were not reported to the authorities.

33. Mr. GEBRE HIWOT (Ethiopia) said that, although many Ethiopians had been following such customs for centuries, the Government encouraged the processing of adoptions through the courts in order to protect the interests of adopted children.

34. Mr. LIWSKI asked whether any figures were available for the number of intercountry adoptions from Ethiopia and whether the Government limited the number of adoption agencies that operated in the country. He wished to know whether adoption agencies were in direct contact with the families of children who were being put up for adoption. The delegation should comment on the extent to which the Government had followed the principle, enshrined in the Convention, of using intercountry adoption as a measure of last resort.

35. Ms. ALUOCH said that although traditional practices in Ethiopia had favoured informal adoption, it was important to move with the times. Formal adoption was accompanied by legal rights and responsibilities, and had implications for such issues as children's inheritance.

36. Mr. GEBRE HIWOT (Ethiopia) said that, since most adopted children were orphans, there was no contact between adoption agencies and the biological parents of the child being adopted. The Government did not limit the number of adoption agencies because such agencies often provided other valuable social services to children. There were numerous alternative childcare programmes, including foster care and reunification, which were used before the Government considered the option of intercountry adoption. The total number of adoptions in Ethiopia ranged from 1,000 to 1,400. Even though Ethiopia had not yet assessed whether it had the necessary capacity to ratify the Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, its adoption procedures followed the principles set forth in that convention.

37. Orphans were covered by a variety of governmental and non-governmental programmes, including a National Plan of Action for children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS and a National Plan of Action for Children. Moreover, there were national and regional task forces that coordinated the activities of actors working in that area.

38. In an effort to combat child labour, the Ethiopian Government had ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour and Convention No. 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment. According to a national survey to determine the magnitude and areas of concentration of child labour, more than 85 per cent of Ethiopian child labourers were engaged in family housekeeping and family business activities. Measures taken to address the problem of the sexual exploitation of children included awareness-raising campaigns and the development, with the participation of NGOs, of a national plan of action that emphasized prevention and the rehabilitation of victims. A national steering committee had been set up to coordinate implementation of the plan of action.

39. The Ethiopian Government had conducted pilot studies to address the problem of internal and cross-border child trafficking. The Government was favourable to the suggestion of expanding the hotline for children since it encouraged children to exercise their right to express their views.
40. Ms. VUCKOVIC-SAHOVIC asked whether the Government operated any shelters for child victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking; if not, she wondered whether it provided support to NGOs that had set up such shelters.
41. Mr. GUTEMA (Ethiopia) said that the Government operated two special shelters for girls and several others for street children.
42. Mr. HABTE (Ethiopia) said that the Federal Government provided adequate budget allocations to the decentralized administrations, but that the amount of the funds allocated to education varied from region to region depending on the priorities of the local administrations.
43. The CHAIRPERSON asked what criteria were used to determine the level of such budget allocations.
44. Mr. HABTE (Ethiopia) said that the main criterion was need. In rural areas, for example, the main need was to build schools, which meant that local governments in those areas might allocate a larger percentage of their budgets to school construction projects.
45. Ms. SMITH asked whether budget allocations varied as a function of decisions made by regional administrations or as a function of those made by the Federal Government.
46. Ms. AHMED (Ethiopia) said that in each of the nine regions, 60 per cent of the total regional budget was allocated directly to the district administrations. Each district decided, on the basis of its own priorities, what amount of funds it would allocate to education, health or other social services. Neither the Federal Government nor the regional administrations could interfere with such decisions. The Ministry of Capacity Building worked at the national level to address the need for increasing the capacity of the district administrations in managing their budgets.
47. Ms. SMITH asked whether the funds allocated to the district authorities were sufficient to provide adequate health and education services, or whether other services, such as the military, were given priority.
48. Ms. AHMED (Ethiopia) said that the budget for social services as a whole was increasing.
49. The CHAIRPERSON asked what percentage of the social services budget was specifically allocated to children's issues.

50. Ms. AHMED (Ethiopia) said that although no specific budgetary allocations were made for children's services or the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, certain elements of social services in general, such as primary education, were specifically beneficial to children. Although the Government did not have sufficient resources to solve all of its problems at once, the provision of primary education and primary health care had increased considerably over the past three years, as a result of legislative amendments.

51. Mr. HABTE (Ethiopia) said that the school dropout rate had been decreasing annually since 1999. The highest dropout rate was in the first year of school, and the lowest rate was in the sixth year. Since the Government and NGOs provided adequate pre-service and in-service training for teachers, there were no specific national programmes for the funding of teacher training. Turning to the issue of disabled children, he said that the Government had a policy for the provision of special education and training for children with special needs. Although the Government had insufficient resources to fully meet the needs of all children with disabilities, it was making considerable efforts in that regard, and was receiving support from NGOs. Efforts were being made at all educational levels to encourage girls to participate in education. A plan for affirmative action in that regard had been developed, and included the provision of additional classes and tutorials for girls. The number of female children in education was increasing annually.

52. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee would appreciate receiving a copy of that plan.

53. Mr. PARFITT asked whether the Government had a policy for the integration of children with disabilities into mainstream educational institutions.

54. Mr. HABTE (Ethiopia) said that the Government did indeed have a policy of inclusive education for children with disabilities.

55. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether parents of children without disabilities had opposed the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schools, and whether awareness-raising measures had been necessary. She also wished to know whether any specific training was provided for teachers in schools with disabled pupils.

56. Mr. HABTE (Ethiopia) said that all necessary measures had been taken to ensure the effective integration of children with disabilities into mainstream education.

57. Ms. SMITH said that the Committee had been informed that many disabled children in Ethiopia did not attend school at all. She wondered if that was indeed the case, and if so, whether the delegation could provide any statistics on the numbers of disabled children in education.

58. Mr. HABTE (Ethiopia) said that 10 per cent of children in Ethiopia had disabilities. Between 1 and 2 per cent of those children were receiving formal education. Turning to the issue of compulsory education, he said that although education from grades 1 to 10 had been made free of charge, it had not yet been made compulsory. The children were required to

purchase their own textbooks. Although in some regions the community was asked to contribute financially to the running of schools, most of the funding was provided by the Government. Steps were being taken to make education compulsory.

59. Ms. AHMED (Ethiopia) said that efforts were being made to encourage families to send their female children to school. The main obstacle to the provision of education for girls was tradition, and awareness-raising measures must therefore be taken to change public opinion in respect of educating girls. Efforts were being made to provide counselling and information for women and to address issues such as girls dropping out of school, early marriage and traditional practices, in order to increase the number of girls in education. Girls in higher education institutions were given tutorials on reproductive health, HIV, and other issues that particularly affected women.

60. The CHAIRPERSON requested further information on the provision of pre-primary education.

61. Mr. HABTE (Ethiopia) said that approximately 3 per cent of children of pre-primary age were enrolled in pre-primary education. Pre-primary education was free of charge, and was mostly provided by NGOs.

The meeting was suspended at 4.40 p.m. and resumed at 4.55 p.m.

62. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia), on the issue of juvenile justice, said that under Ethiopian law children had the right to be heard in cases regarding adoption, maintenance and custody. In exceptional circumstances, such cases were considered by judges alone, on condition that their decision took account of the best interests of the child.

63. Mr. FILALI asked whether the child's right to be heard in divorce cases was exercised in practice, as well as being guaranteed by law. He wished to know whether children were heard directly by the judge, or in a separate hearing, whether they were heard in private or in public and whether they were required to sign statements to be used in court. He asked how much importance judges attached to statements made by children.

64. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that in the majority of cases, judges were present at children's hearings, which took place in private. Although Ethiopia had not ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the provisions of that protocol had been incorporated into the new Criminal Code. Efforts were being made to inform law enforcement officials about those new provisions of the Criminal Code. A committee had been established at national level to study the routes for trafficking in children, particularly in respect of domestic trafficking. That committee also followed all cases of trafficking that came before the courts.

65. Mr. PARFITT asked whether Ethiopia had concluded any bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries in respect of trafficking in persons.

66. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that trafficking in persons was an extraditable offence under an agreement concluded with the Government of Sudan. The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime was currently before Parliament, pending ratification.

67. Turning to the issue of substance abuse, he said that, pursuant to the Criminal Code, substance abuse by children was a criminal offence. The revised Criminal Code included increased penalties for selling drugs.

68. Ms. VUCKOVIC-SAHOVIC asked whether minors could legally purchase cigarettes and alcohol.

69. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that, although children were not permitted to consume alcohol, the sale of cigarettes and alcohol to children was not prohibited. Responding to the questions on corporal punishment, he said that corporal punishment had been found to be unconstitutional, and was therefore prohibited by law. Corporal punishment was not included in the disciplinary measures permitted under Ethiopian family law.

70. Ms. ALUOCH asked why corporal punishment was not specifically mentioned in domestic legislation.

71. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that corporal punishment had been declared anti-constitutional and its prohibition was implicit in legislation on disciplinary measures. Pursuant to Ethiopian legislation on juvenile justice, special treatment was provided for minors aged between 15 and 18 who were involved in criminal legal proceedings. Judges could freely mitigate penalties in respect of minors in that age group.

72. The CHAIRPERSON asked how often judges applied that practice.

73. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that the practice was widely applied.

74. Mr. ZERMATTEN requested specific examples of the measures applied to minors aged between 15 and 18 during criminal proceedings.

75. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that in the event that an offence carrying a minimum punishment of 10 years' deprivation of liberty had been committed by a minor aged between 15 and 18, the judge could reduce that penalty if he or she deemed it excessive. Special correction measures could also be imposed, in lieu of deprivation of liberty.

76. Under Ethiopian family law, domestic adoption was given priority over intercountry adoption. The revocation of adoptions only occurred under exceptional circumstances, when the child had been subjected to cruel treatment by his or her adoptive parents.

77. Ms. ALUOCH said that since adoptions were informal, and were not completed through the courts, she wondered how adopted children's inheritance rights were guaranteed.

78. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that, since the lack of formal recognition of adoptions had caused problems in the past, particularly in respect of the enjoyment of the right to inheritance, family law had been amended to ensure the legal recognition of traditional adoptions. Adopted children should apply to the courts to claim inheritance of the property of their deceased adoptive parents. Concerning minors in detention, he said that efforts were being made to increase the number of detention institutions with special facilities for child offenders.

79. The CHAIRPERSON inquired whether there were special units for children within prisons, and whether rehabilitation services were available.

80. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that until recently there had been no special units for children. Regional prisons had begun to develop facilities for children and to provide rehabilitation.

81. Mr. FILALI, turning to the question of adoption, said it was essential for the courts to recognize an adoption, acknowledging the rights of the adopted child; the system should be regularized. He observed that it should not be permissible for adoptive parents to change their minds and send an adopted child back to his family.

82. Mr. LIWSKI inquired what were the requirements for adoption; and in particular what were the legal processes by which domestic and international adoptions were carried out. He asked under what circumstances a child could be removed from his or her biological family and put up for adoption and whether poverty was a factor in offering children for adoption. Was it necessary for a judicial authority to acknowledge that a child was in an irreversible situation of abandon and need in order for a family to offer him or her for adoption? In addition, he sought clarification about what was meant by revoking an adoption and returning a child to his or her biological family.

83. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that the law was clear: after adoption, a child had to live with the adoptive family, which was obliged to care for him or her. However, that did not mean that the child could have no connection with his or her original family; under the law, the child must be provided with all pertinent information regarding his or her origins. Furthermore, traditional adoptions could be confirmed by the courts, thereby protecting the child in such matters as inheritance.

84. The CHAIRPERSON inquired how many families in fact legalized a traditional adoption before a court.

85. Ms. ALOUCH said she was pleased to learn that traditional adoptions were confirmed by the courts. The State party should make efforts to ensure that the public was aware of that possibility.

86. The CHAIRPERSON invited the Ethiopian delegation to reply to questions raised concerning the minimum age for recruitment into military service.

87. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that children under the age of 18 were not recruited into the armed forces. It was widely accepted that children were not recruited; Ethiopian children did not serve in the military.

88. The CHAIRPERSON, observing that Ethiopia had no effective system of birth registration, inquired how the Government knew that it did not have an under-age recruitment problem.

89. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that in order to be eligible for military service, young persons were required to produce documents testifying to their age. In a number of cases, the military authorities had refused to permit children to enlist. The same age requirement was also strictly observed by the police force and the civil service.

90. The CHAIRPERSON asked the delegation to discuss the problem of the prolonged detention of street children. In particular, she wished to know whether charges had been lodged against members of the police force for the detention and mistreatment of children.

91. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that the law was clear: any person detained must be brought before the courts within 48 hours. The remedy of habeas corpus was also available, and had recently been invoked. In addition, the prosecutor participated in police activities. During the recent civil disturbances that had resulted in the arrests of many children, both the prosecutor and the courts had played an important role. A national committee had been set up to investigate those events, and in several cases the prosecutor had dropped all charges; in others, the court had made the decision to release suspects.

92. Ms. ALOUCH said that large numbers of children had been arrested. The delegation had asserted that the children had been detained for only 48 hours, and that habeas corpus was available. But how could children themselves invoke the remedy of habeas corpus before the courts?

93. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that families had brought their children's cases before the courts, invoking habeas corpus. If they could demonstrate that the arrests had been made without reasonable grounds, their children had been released and the charges dismissed. Almost 300 cases had been dropped.

94. Ms. ALOUCH asked the delegation to discuss the problem of the mistreatment of street children by members of the police.

95. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that a committee, made up of the prosecutor and members of the police, had been set up to investigate crimes committed by street children; when it determined that a suspect had been detained without reason, charges were dropped. The prosecutor made the rounds of the police stations, giving detainees the opportunity to discuss their cases, and could take action as he saw fit. In Addis Ababa, members of the police were required to present reports to the prosecutor.

96. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Ethiopian police reportedly placed street children in detention for several days at a time without entering charges against them. She inquired whether the Government expected street children themselves to protest their mistreatment before the courts. She also wished to know what programmes had been developed to protect such children.

97. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that non-governmental organizations concerned with human rights provided assistance to street children; such organizations played a major role in Ethiopia.

98. Mr. ZERMATTEN said that there was a disturbing tendency to equate street children with criminality. Street children were not criminals: they were children deprived of a home environment and suffering from economic difficulties. Solutions must be found to assist and protect them.

99. Mr. WOLDE-SEMAIAT (Ethiopia) said that there were many street children in Addis Ababa, and the police detained only those suspected of involvement in crime.

100. The CHAIRPERSON said that reports indicated that many street children were held for long periods of time without charges, raising concerns about mistreatment in custody. That was a common problem in countries with large populations of street children; Ethiopia was not alone in that respect. The Committee sought to emphasize that such children were victims, not criminals, deserving rehabilitation and reintegration into society on a par with other children.

101. Mr. TADESSE (Ethiopia) said that, as a justice of the Federal Supreme Court in Addis Ababa, he could attest that in cases concerning the custody of children, the judge questioned the child in private in an effort to understand his or her needs within the family. Very often, the views of the child affected the judge's decision.

102. Mr. FILALI asked whether in such cases children were informed of the importance of their statements to the judge.

103. Mr. TADESSE (Ethiopia) said that the Supreme Court did not, of course, hear fresh cases; children were often aware of what was at stake. Parents sometimes brought children to the courtroom, a practice that the Court discouraged.

104. The Court sought the views of a child in cases of adoption as well. Placing a child in a new family for adoption was a complex administrative procedure, involving many steps. A document concerning "possession of status" was used to demonstrate family status; it had to be produced in disputes regarding inheritance rights.

105. It was true that many civil and criminal cases were lengthy. The reform process was, however, beginning to show results. In Addis Ababa, a civil matter might take several days; a criminal case several months. In the regional courts, cases moved more quickly. The Government had conducted a study to identify the reasons for delays and backlogs in law enforcement institutions, and was using the results of the study to clear up problem areas.

106. There were only 2,000 judges in Ethiopia, and many regions therefore had only one judge. Providing specialized judges was considered impossible, and the Government instead focused on training judges in various facets of the law.

107. The CHAIRPERSON said that a number of questions raised by the Committee had not been discussed, due to lack of time. She requested the State party to provide written answers during the current session, so that the Committee could consider them before drawing up its concluding observations.

108. Ms. ALOUCH said that in her view the dialogue had been informative and fruitful. Many questions had arisen from the report, and the delegation's replies had given the Committee a much better understanding of the situation of children in Ethiopia.

109. Ms. AHMED (Ethiopia) said that the discussion had been a constructive one, and would assist Ethiopia in improving the lives of children in that country.

110. The CHAIRPERSON said that she hoped that the Government of Ethiopia would read the recommendations of the Committee in the spirit in which they were made: with a view to ensuring the rights of children in accordance with the terms of the Convention. Ethiopia had been a model performer in its efforts to combat poverty; she hoped that it would now become a model performer in improving the lives of its children.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.