



Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Fifty-fifth session

Summary record of the 1569th (Chamber A) meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 23 September 2010, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Lee

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties *(continued)*

Third and fourth periodic reports of Sri Lanka (continued) (CRC/C/LKA/3-4; CRC/C/LKA/Q/3-4 and CRC/C/LKA/Q/3-4/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Sri Lanka resumed places at the Committee table.*
2. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka), responding to previous queries concerning poverty in her country, said that programmes for specific poverty groups were in effect. As to why the number of beneficiaries of such programmes had declined, she said that some no longer met the criteria for those categories.
3. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that most of the emergency regulations had been relaxed since the end of the internal conflict and would be withdrawn once the situation had improved. Emergency regulations could be extended by Parliament only and were reviewed on a monthly basis.
4. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) said that social protection measures were being implemented in the north and east of the country by the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment, the Department of Probation and Child Care Services, and the National Child Protection Authority, which worked in close consultation with the United Nations Children's Fund.
5. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur), recalling that most of the northern and eastern parts of the country remained under military control, asked whether families, primarily internally displaced persons (IDPs), felt free to request services provided by the National Child Protection Authority. In addition, aid organizations, such as United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, required government clearance to enter those areas. It was not clear whether conditions were favourable for the delivery of assistance.
6. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) said that the number of IDPs had fallen sharply since the end of the conflict. Some 350,000 IDPs had been resettled, bringing the number down to 25,000, 20 per cent of whom were children.
7. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that a military presence was still required in some parts of the country for security reasons. Post-conflict areas were prone to exploitation by certain groups and also required demining. It was the responsibility of the State to provide a safe environment for its people, and as long as certain dangers existed, complete military withdrawal would not be possible.
8. Some statistics received by the Committee were a cause of concern to the delegation, as they did not tally with government figures. He requested that complete data sources be provided so that the delegation could verify the statistics and respond in an informed and constructive manner to the Committee.
9. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka), in reply to a query on affirmative action, said that trade unions in the public sector were very powerful and worked closely with government authorities and the International Labour Organization to defend children's rights, especially in relation to child labour.
10. **Ms. Dissanayake** (Sri Lanka), responding to earlier questions on early marriage in her country, said that marriage was not allowed under the age of 18, and any such marriages were considered to be null and void in the eyes of the law. Under-age marriages were reported to the National Child Protection Authority, which investigated and prosecuted those cases.

11. **Ms. Al-Asmar** asked whether marriages between under-age Muslims were registered and whether children born to those couples were registered as well.

12. **Mr. Nawaz** (Sri Lanka) said that the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (1951) governing marriage for Muslims in Sri Lanka did not set a minimum age for marriage. Therefore, Muslim marriages were valid even if contracted below the age of 18. A committee on the revision of Muslim law had been consulting with members of the Muslim community on the issue. One member of the committee, a Supreme Court justice, was of the view that the Muslim law in question should be brought into line with the minimum age for marriage set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, the protection of cultural rights also came into play and could not be disregarded.

13. **Mr. Citarella** wondered how the marriage of under-age Muslims could be valid under State law. Did State legislation have special provisions regarding the application of customary law?

14. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that when two laws on the same issue coexisted, general laws — passed by the State — could not detract from special laws such as those derived from Muslim legislation. Therefore, the general State act applied to all non-Muslims while the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act allowed couples to enter into marriage under the age of 18 with the father's consent. The judiciary was aware of those inconsistencies; further discussion would be necessary to resolve the issue.

15. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) said that she was pleased to announce that comprehensive information on children with disabilities would be gathered in a census to be carried out in July 2011. A census was usually performed every 10 years, but the process had been disrupted in 1981 because of the conflict.

16. **Ms. Dissanayake** (Sri Lanka) said that there was a clear connection between child pornography and child sex tourism, and the National Child Protection Authority had collaborated with the Sri Lanka Tourist Board on certain initiatives. Unfortunately, a cyberwatch programme launched by the National Child Protection Authority to monitor child pornography sites — often used as a means of procuring children for sex tourism — had been discontinued due to lack of resources. However, plans were under way to resume the programme.

17. Claims against foreigners engaged in child sex tourism were often filed, and perpetrators prosecuted. The National Child Protection Authority was currently engaged in monitoring cases of sex tourism and worked to prevent children from becoming involved in such practices.

18. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur) said that while legislation criminalizing offences against children was welcome, it was important for children and their families to be aware of those laws. She wished to know what efforts were being made to inform them of their rights and requested data on the number of children, especially boys, who were involved in sex tourism. She asked whether any investigations were being carried out so that perpetrators would be punished, and what services were available to child victims to ensure successful reintegration and psychological recovery.

19. **Ms. Dissanayake** (Sri Lanka) said that child-abuse awareness programmes targeting police officers, lawyers, doctors, judges and educators were being carried out. In schools, principals, teachers, parents and social workers worked together on child committees on how to handle abuse, and one coordinator per district organized awareness programmes in schools as well. Other effective means in use were the media and a hotline for children.

20. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) said that although education in Sri Lanka was free — textbooks and uniforms were provided by the State — hidden and additional costs were inevitable.

21. Out of 9,000 schools in Sri Lanka, one third were small, with enrolment standing at 100 children or less. Roughly 93 per cent of all schools were public; 7 per cent were private. She wished to know the origin of the reference stating that 80 per cent of children with disabilities were not enrolled in school. The education system offered inclusive education programmes for children with minor disabilities, but lacked adequate special education facilities.
22. **The Chairperson** wished to know about corruption in education.
23. **Ms. Ortiz** asked how cultural diversity, especially with regard to the mix of languages and religions of the student body, was handled in schools.
24. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur) asked how many schools remained under military control to host IDPs and how many were operating in environments surrounded by military installations.
25. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that, to his knowledge, only one school remained occupied by the military and the students of that school were being taught in a temporary school. There had been no disruption to children's education in the conflict areas.
26. **Mr. Ranasinghe** (Sri Lanka) said that two new schools had been set up to allow students who had been unable to sit their ordinary and advanced level examinations, but were over school age, to gain their qualifications.
27. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that, while all children were entitled to be educated in the school closest to their home, there was high demand from parents to enrol their children in the most popular schools. Several restrictions and guidelines on the school admission process had therefore been implemented, with a points system favouring those who had lived the longest in the school catchment area. Preference might be given in special circumstances, such as to children who were displaced persons or whose parents had returned to the country after completing official duties abroad. Some parents had resorted to trying to submit falsified documents or bribing the school admission staff. The Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission had made recommendations in most of the cases brought before them to ensure that children went to their second or third choice of school. There had been few reported cases of corruption in education outside the admission process.
28. In order to give people the chance to replace lost identity papers, mobile secretariats had been set up and sent out into communities to complete the necessary paperwork.
29. In the wake of the 2006 amendments to the Criminal Code, there had been increased awareness of child abuse, which had led to a spate of reported cases. Once the cases had been investigated, the findings were sent to the Attorney General's Department, which had a specialist unit dedicated to expediting cases of child abuse. Nonetheless, there was still a backlog of child abuse cases waiting to be brought to court, since there were many other demands on the courts' time.
30. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) drew the Committee members' attention to the information on measures to reduce malnutrition, detailed in paragraph 19 of the written replies to the list of issues. In particular, she noted that the Nutrition Rehabilitation Programme had helped to reduce acute malnutrition in children under 5 from 36 per cent to 13 per cent.
31. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur) commended the State party for its achievements in that regard. She asked what steps it was taking to address the disparities in the reductions in child malnutrition. There was a clear need to target the high incidence of underweight children in some regions, particularly plantation areas and areas affected by the conflict.

32. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) said that, in 2007 and 2008, the therapeutic training programmes and those implemented to address the high prevalence of low birth weight had targeted post-conflict areas and plantations in particular.

33. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that, in most schools, religious education was taught in simultaneous but separate classes, according to students' faiths. There were also several cultural societies within schools, and each society organized celebrations of religious days for the entire school population. That facilitated interaction and understanding between students of different faiths. Clearly, private single denomination schools focused on one religion only.

34. **Mr. Nawaz** (Sri Lanka) said that students who were not offered instruction in their religion had the right to bring a complaint before the Supreme Court for infringement of their fundamental rights. In a recent case, the Court had ruled in favour of a Christian student who had been granted admission to a particular school on the grounds that it provided Christian instruction.

35. **Ms. Ortiz** asked what steps the State party took to promote intercultural understanding and tolerance, and to teach all children about the four national religions. In particular, she wished to know whether there were exchanges between students of different religions and whether they undertook joint activities. It would be useful to learn whether the Convention formed an integral part of the curriculum at teacher training colleges.

36. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that religious education was taught up to ordinary level, at which stage students sat the national ordinary level examinations in their chosen subjects. Students could not therefore be expected to learn about all four religions at that stage, since they sat different papers according to their religion. To diversify their religious education at that stage would jeopardize their chances of success. However, students did integrate when celebrating each others' religious festivals, and at other cultural and sporting activities.

37. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) added that local religious leaders participated in school functions by giving blessings at the beginning of the events. The Government was aware of the need to foster religious and cultural understanding and tolerance.

38. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur) drew the delegation's attention to the fact that in other multicultural countries, religious and cultural education was taught at primary school and in the first years of secondary school, before children had to choose subjects for public examinations. Experience had shown that younger children found it easier than older children to learn about each other's cultures and religions through working and playing together.

39. **Mr. Jauhar** (Sri Lanka) said that students studied all four national religions in social studies classes. Moreover, all the communities interacted by celebrating the festivities of all four religions.

40. While a significant number of students did not attain the grades to enable them to pursue advanced level studies, there were many opportunities available to them in technical colleges. Vocational training was offered in professions such as accountancy, information technology and carpentry. A significant number of Sri Lankan women worked abroad in domestic service. However, the number of skilled Sri Lankan migrant workers was increasing as a direct result of the vocational training offered by the technical colleges. The Open University also provided courses for a nominal fee. Candidates did not need to have passed ordinary level examinations in order to be admitted to certificate level courses. The Open University delivered courses up to degree level. In addition, several foreign universities had satellite campuses in Sri Lanka, most of which required candidates to have passed ordinary level examinations for registration on degree courses. Many young people

who had completed their ordinary level education went on to work in their parents' business. In that regard, not all of those who did not complete advanced level education could be considered to have dropped out of education.

41. **Mr. Abeygunawardhana** (Sri Lanka) said that, in accordance with the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution, all volunteer children's homes were run by provincial councils. There were provisions in place to address the issue of children's homes that were being run without the adequate licence or that were not registered. As a last resort, the provincial authorities could close the homes down.

42. While the Government agreed that community-based childcare was preferable for most children, there were currently some 20,000 children living in institutions. Several steps had been taken to minimize the risk of violence in those institutions, including the introduction of guidelines on minimum standards of care, which had been circulated to all provincial councils. A case management policy had also been introduced and all caregivers were trained, particularly in the emotional aspects of childcare.

43. **Ms. Ortiz** asked whether orphanages were required to comply with any admission regulations, particularly as many children living in volunteer institutions had at least one parent. It would be useful to know whether the State party had taken account of the United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children in drawing up any such regulations. She urged the State party to consider ways of reducing the number of children living in institutions. She asked whether the Orphanages Ordinance No. 22 of 1941 had been amended to criminalize running an orphanage without a licence.

44. She would appreciate updated information on current legislation on adoptions. The State party should bear in mind that the child's best interests should always be the predominant consideration in any adoption process. It would appear that the current system enabled families to find a child that suited their requirements, rather than giving precedence to the child's best interests. She asked why single or widowed persons could not adopt children.

45. **Mr. Abeygunawardhana** (Sri Lanka) said that running an orphanage without a licence had been made a punishable offence. There were 22 State children's homes in the country. Juvenile offenders and child victims of abuse or trafficking were housed in State institutions. Some 14,000 children lived in volunteer children's homes. Most of them had at least one parent, but their families were living in poverty. The adoption rate was low because children could not be put up for adoption without their parents' consent. Only married couples could adopt children.

46. **The Chairperson** asked whether juvenile offenders and child victims were housed together in the same institutions.

47. **Mr. Abeygunawardhana** (Sri Lanka) said that the two groups lived on the same premises, but in separate accommodation units. The Department of Probation and Child Care Services was currently developing deinstitutionalization programmes. It was hoped that many children currently living in institutions could be reintegrated into their families. In addition, child rights promotion officers were working at the community level to prevent children being placed in institutions.

48. **Ms. Ortiz** asked whether it was necessary to obtain a court order before placing a child in an institution, or whether that decision lay at the discretion of the parent or parents. If the parents had sole responsibility for taking that decision, it would be useful to know whether there were any programmes to provide them with State support to enable them to keep their child at home. Was there any legal mechanism in place obliging the authorities periodically to monitor the situation of children living in institutions? If not, how did the State party ensure that the institution continued to be the best place for the children to live?

She would appreciate information on any complaints mechanisms that enabled children living in institutions to report abuse or ill-treatment in a confidential manner.

49. **Mr. Guráň** asked whether parents' consent was required before children could be placed in institutions. He asked the delegation to comment on the differences between information from European Union countries concerning the adoption of Sri Lankan children in that region and that provided by the State party. He wanted to know whether a well-functioning central authority for intercountry adoptions existed that provided reliable statistics and ensured that procedures were in line with the Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (the Hague Convention). He asked the delegation to comment on information that approximately 100 adoptions of Sri Lankan children by nationals of European Union countries had not been recorded in a central registry.

50. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur) asked whether children's homes were monitored, how such monitoring took place and who was responsible for it.

51. **Ms. Dissanayake** (Sri Lanka) said that district coordinators, volunteers and members of the boards of management of children's homes carried out monitoring visits to the homes. During those visits, children could report abuse or other issues. Sri Lanka also had a free helpline for children and children in homes were given stickers displaying the number of the helpline.

52. **Mr. Abeygunawardhana** (Sri Lanka) said that the Department of Probation and Child Care Services was the central authority for intercountry adoptions. Sri Lanka had signed the Hague Convention and between 40 and 50 adoptions of Sri Lankan children generally took place every year by people in European Union countries. Priority for adoption, however, was given to Sri Lankan people and more than 1,000 children were adopted nationally every year. Following an adoption, the Department of Probation and Child Care Services and the district courts requested a quarterly follow-up report from the relevant agencies in the destination country. Probation Officers and Child Rights Promotion Officers monitored the situation of children in homes and provided assistance for education and vocational training at the community, district and divisional level. Health services and financial and social benefits were provided to children in poorer families, including materials for use at school.

53. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) said that the Family Health Bureau, which came under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, provided adolescent-friendly services through selected tertiary-care institutions, although they were not yet available everywhere in the country.

54. A Presidential Task Force had been created to address the high suicide rate in the State party, in particular among young people. Following the actions implemented by the Task Force, suicide rates had decreased, although the problem had not yet been fully addressed. A helpline, run by a non-governmental organization (NGO), offered support for young people with emotional problems. Mental health-care workers were attached to all major hospitals and family health workers provided mental health services in the community. Sri Lanka had very few psychiatrists and psychologists; however, public health workers were being trained to deliver basic mental health services at the community level. Counselling services were available through government-funded programmes, NGOs and religious organizations.

55. Studies by the World Bank and similar organizations had concluded that the Sri Lankan primary health-care system and programmes such as immunization were highly cost-effective. Tertiary care was expensive to provide, but it had been free for the Sri Lankan people for many years and it would be difficult to withdraw it. However, it was increasingly reinforced by services provided by the private sector.

56. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that the budget of the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs did not represent the entire national budget for children; a component of the budget of various ministries was specifically allocated to children's services.

57. **Mr. Citarella** asked whether the State party envisaged increasing the minimum age of criminal responsibility and whether Sri Lanka had a specific juvenile justice system. He requested information on language and communication problems arising from the fact that juvenile justice actors in the Tamil region, such as police officers and judges, did not always speak Tamil. He requested information on how many sentenced children and children awaiting trial were in detention, and clarification on whether children aged 16 to 18 were treated as adults and detained with them.

58. **Mr. Kotrane** asked whether the State party had considered establishing specialized structures for investigating and prosecuting offences committed by children. He asked for more information on the treatment of children at all stages of the criminal justice process.

59. **The Chairperson** asked for information on the results of the disciplinary action ordered by the Commander of the Sri Lanka Army, as described in paragraph 44 of the written replies. Were any convictions handed down? Had measures been put in place to prevent such abuse occurring again and were peacekeepers given training on the Convention and the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict?

The meeting was suspended at 4.50 p.m. and resumed at 5.05 p.m.

60. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that most of the individuals from the peacekeeping force accused of sexual exploitation and abuse in Haiti had been recalled to Sri Lanka. The cases had been examined to ascertain whether enough evidence existed to try them under ordinary law, or whether they should be tried under military law. Some of the information about the cases was unsubstantiated and the Sri Lankan authorities had been unable to question some of the people who had made accusations. He acknowledged the difficulties in asking people who had been subject to sexual exploitation and abuse to travel in order to testify in court, but said that due process and the rights of the defendant had to be respected. Under Sri Lankan criminal law, direct evidence had to be provided and the defence had to have the opportunity to cross-examine witnesses and victims. As that was not possible in the case cited by the chairperson, all those persons against whom there was credible evidence had been subject to disciplinary measures under military law. A legal adviser was now sent on large-scale peacekeeping missions so that any cases in which there was sufficient evidence could be dealt with in the national territory in question.

61. He said that 8 was the age of criminal responsibility and 12 for sexual offences. In the State party, the number of cases involving juveniles aged under 12 was very low. The Attorney General could exercise discretion in cases involving children in conflict with the law and could decide not to prosecute or to halt prosecution proceedings, depending on the age of the accused, the gravity of the offence and the consequences for the victim.

62. Any person who had sexual relations with someone under the age of 16, even with consent, could be charged with statutory rape. Persons accused of a crime under the criminal justice system who were aged under 21 were treated differently and safety mechanisms were put in place. No one under 18 could be given a capital sentence.

63. **Mr. Kotrane** said that the Committee wished to know whether the State party would consider increasing the minimum age of criminal responsibility from 8 years to 12 years. Juvenile justice should apply to all offenders under the age of 18 years.

64. **Mr. Citarella** said that while the State party's criminal law provided lesser sanctions for children up to the age of 16 years, he wondered whether those sanctions also

applied to offenders aged between 16 and 18 years, or whether they were considered adults under Sri Lankan criminal procedural law.

65. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that the minimum mandatory sentence for the offence of statutory rape was not applied to offenders aged between 16 and 18 years. Minors under the age of 18 years convicted of statutory rape were sentenced at the discretion of the court.

66. **The Chairperson** asked whether that was also the case for minors aged between 16 and 18 years convicted of other offences.

67. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that in such cases the Children and Young Person's Ordinance (CYPO) would be applied.

68. **Mr. Nawaz** (Sri Lanka) explained that the CYPO, which was the foundation of the juvenile justice system, had been enacted in 1939, before Sri Lanka had obtained independence. Further legislation defining the juvenile justice system had been enacted since that time. The Government recognized that there were deficiencies in the CYPO, and a judicial commission had therefore been established to revise it. On becoming party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Sri Lanka had become increasingly sensitive to issues of juvenile justice. A juvenile court had been established in Colombo, as a direct result of which the number of juvenile offences had decreased. The Government intended to establish more juvenile courts outside Colombo.

69. **Mr. Citarella** asked whether a minor aged between 16 and 18 years alleged to have committed homicide would be brought before the juvenile court in Colombo or an ordinary court.

70. **Mr. Nawaz** (Sri Lanka) said that in such cases the accused would be heard by a magistrate, following which a dossier on the details of the offence would be submitted to the Attorney General's Department. The information in that dossier would be used to decide how the accused would be tried. Juvenile offences were rare, and juvenile courts were being established in order to meet Sri Lanka's obligations under the Convention, rather than as a response to juvenile crime.

71. **Mr. Kotrane** said that the term "young persons" should be redefined to include minors up to the age of 18 years, and legislation must be adapted accordingly.

72. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur) said that while she welcomed the State party's intention to establish juvenile courts outside Colombo, she wondered whether the Government had overcome the deficit in human and financial resources required to achieve that.

73. **Mr. Nawaz** (Sri Lanka) said that Sri Lanka was emerging from a long-running conflict, and could now mobilize greater resources to develop its systems, including the juvenile justice system. His delegation had noted the Committee's concerns regarding the minimum age of criminal responsibility and the age of legal majority. Turning to the question of Tamil-speaking judges, he said that the Supreme Court had the capacity to address any number of cases in Tamil, since three of its nine judges were Tamil-speaking. Tamil-speaking judges had also been appointed to a number of courts in the eastern and northern provinces. Interpretation services were provided for witnesses where necessary.

74. **Ms. Dissanayake** (Sri Lanka), responding to questions on pretrial detention, said that children were remanded in custody separately from adults. Efforts were made to hear children's cases as swiftly as possible, in order to prevent prolonged periods of pretrial detention.

75. **The Chairperson** asked whether the State party had given any consideration to increasing the minimum age of criminal responsibility, since the Committee had made

recommendations to that effect three times. She hoped that in its forthcoming fifth periodic report the Government would be able to report that the situation had been rectified.

76. **Mr. Nawaz** (Sri Lanka) said that he had taken note of the Committee's concerns, and asked that the Committee take into consideration the context of the conflict situation that had prevailed in Sri Lanka until very recently.

77. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) said that the revision of the CYPO, which was currently under way, was an opportune moment to change the minimum age of criminal responsibility. The revision process was also giving rise to a discussion of the implementation of children's rights, at the local and national levels, between government authorities, NGOs and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

78. Turning to questions on child labour, she said that Sri Lanka had been cooperating closely with the International Labour Organization (ILO) for many years, through the ILO International Programme for the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). The majority of children involved in child labour in Sri Lanka, including the children of plantation workers, were engaged in domestic work. The numbers of child domestic workers had fallen over the past five years as a result of efforts undertaken by the child protection authorities.

79. The majority of child victims of sexual exploitation were boys, rather than girls, since they did not run the risk of falling pregnant. The Sri Lanka Tourist Board had appointed a special police force to address child prostitution, in cooperation with UNICEF and the local Child Rights Promotion Officers. Although the Government was aware of the areas where such exploitation was taking place, ongoing surveillance was required to eliminate the practice. Tackling child prostitution remained an ongoing priority for national child protection mechanisms and the Sri Lanka Tourist Board.

80. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur) asked whether the tourist industry was cooperating with the Government's efforts to overcome the sexual exploitation of children.

81. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) said that the Sri Lanka Tourist Board had an ongoing campaign with the hotel industry and other elements of the tourist industry. Sexual exploitation of children, however, usually did not take place in the formal hotel sector, but rather in guesthouses, which made it particularly difficult to gather information on the situation. NGOs were monitoring the areas where such exploitation was most common. The Government was aware that efforts to tackle the situation must be strengthened.

82. **The Chairperson** asked what the status of the Witness and Victim Protection Bill of 2008 was.

83. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that the Bill had been pending discussion in the previous Parliament. It would therefore be considered by the new Parliament in its forthcoming session.

84. **The Chairperson** emphasized that the Government must ensure that Parliament was made aware of the urgent nature of the Bill.

85. **Mr. Fernando** (Sri Lanka) said that the financial implications of the Bill were considerable. Witness protection remained, however, a priority area of concern to the Government.

86. **Mr. Ranasinghe** (Sri Lanka), answering questions on demining, said that all the mines laid by the Sri Lankan security forces had been cleared. The remaining unexploded ordnance was being cleared meticulously by a number of demining agencies. Almost 80 per cent of internally displaced persons (IDPs) had been resettled, and awareness-raising programmes had been conducted in IDP centres, schools, resettlement centres, and villages. Mechanical mine clearing equipment was being used and a large number of military

engineers had been deployed. It was hoped that the demining process would soon be completed.

87. **Ms. Aidoo** (Country Rapporteur) said that the Committee had noted the significant achievements made by the State party, in particular in respect of human and social development, as well as its ongoing legislative reform. She emphasized the importance of enforcing legislation. Information on resources had been lacking, although it was clear that financial constraints resulting from the prolonged situation of conflict in Sri Lanka had restricted activities. She expressed hope that the end of the conflict would enable resources to be redirected and that a children's rights perspective would be applied to the national budget, with particular attention being given to budget allocations to bodies dealing with protection for disadvantaged children, particularly in times of crisis and emergency. Structural issues remained to be addressed, such as ensuring that protection was afforded to children in conflict-affected zones, IDP camps and resettlement centres, since those children were particularly vulnerable. The State party should consider how to overcome the socio-economic, regional, ethnic and other disparities that resulted in discrimination. The State party should consider whether its NGO registration requirements constituted an obstacle to NGOs wishing to work with children in conflict-affected areas.

88. **Ms. Wijemanne** (Sri Lanka) thanked the Committee for its comments and observations, which had been made in a spirit of helping the children of Sri Lanka. The post-conflict situation was an opportunity to build a new Sri Lanka, with children at its centre.

89. **The Chairperson** said that the Committee recognized the difficulties faced by the State party in respect of the destruction caused by the 2004 tsunami and decades of conflict. Nation building was a difficult yet exciting process, which afforded a window of opportunity to focus on children's rights. Efforts should be made to ensure horizontal and vertical coordination in order to eliminate any disparities between regions and to guarantee that all the children of Sri Lanka enjoyed the rights guaranteed to them under the Convention.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.