



**Convention on the
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COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Thirty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 966th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 1 June 2004, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. DOEK

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

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Second periodic report of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (continued)
(CRC/C/65/Add.24; CRC/C/Q/PRK/2; CRC/C/RESP/61; HRI/CORE/1/Add.108/Rev.1)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. An Myong Hun, Mr. Choe Tok Hun, Mr. Ho O Bom, Ms. Jang Ryong Hui, Mr. Jong Yong Duk, Mr. Kim Yong Ho, Mr. Mun Jong Chol, Mr. Pak Tok Hun and Mr. So Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) took places at the Committee table.
2. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the National Coordination Committee for the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child would hold a conference, which would include representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to discuss measures to implement the Committee's recommendations. The Government was currently considering the ratification of a number of human rights instruments and the optional protocols to the Convention.
3. Statistics were not available on the number of children who had returned from China. The "genius education" system referred to the system of No. 1 middle schools that taught a more advanced curriculum than regular schools; the number of children in such schools varied according to geographic location. Pupils who failed or missed classes because of illness could repeat courses. Since middle school education was compulsory, there were no expulsions.
4. Officials of the National Coordination Committee frequently visited kindergartens and schools to hear the views of children. While corporal punishment was a form of discipline used by some parents, it was not an issue of public concern. Cases in which parents were too severe with their stepchildren were reported to the National Coordination Committee, and such children could be sent to special schools, where they were taught to develop harmonious relations with their step-parents.
5. Ms. SMITH asked whether the special schools for the children of step-parents were residential schools.
6. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that children sent to such schools were able to maintain contact with their step-parents. If children were too young to attend special schools, step-parents received instruction in improving relations with their stepchild.
7. Mr. KOTRANE asked who was responsible for taking decisions regarding adoption. Such decisions should be handled by an impartial judge.
8. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the most important consideration in a decision concerning adoption was the opinion of the child, followed by the opinion of the prospective adoptive parents. The citizen registration procedure, carried out by the local population administration, was required for formal recognition of the adoption. The

local population administration could refuse to authorize an adoption when the prospective parents were considered unsuitable. Adoption, as practised in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, fell into the category of full adoption. Adopted children received the same treatment as other children.

9. The phenomenon of street children had first come to the attention of the Government in 1995. Local population administrations provided food and education for such children, and public organizations, such as the youth league, collected street children and sent them to health-care facilities. There were currently very few street children in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

10. Ms. ALUOCH asked whether the adoption procedure could begin immediately following a child's birth. She wished to know why table 9 on page 32 of the report (CRC/C/65/Add.24) did not include adopted children.

11. Mr. LIWSKI requested additional information on the social security system, particularly with regard to the benefits granted to street children.

12. Mr. FILALI asked how many branches of the youth league existed, how they functioned and what role they played in the adoption process. He wondered whether the decisions of the youth league were taken by adults or children.

13. The CHAIRPERSON wished to know the average age at which children in the State party were adopted.

14. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the legal age for adoption was based on the definition of a child. In order to protect children's rights, it was considered necessary to define a statutory age at which children could seek legal advice or medical consultation. Most children were adopted before their teens. The situation of adopted children was regularly monitored by the population administrations through well-organized neighbourhood units. However, the standards of evaluation used made it difficult to obtain reliable data.

15. The youth league had branch organizations throughout the country and was devoted to promoting the constructive participation of young people in society. The youth league played an important role in addressing the problem of abandoned or street children.

16. Ms. ORTIZ said that the State party's adoption legislation should be brought into conformity with the Convention. She asked whether the State party required assistance in developing its national adoption and foster-care systems.

17. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) reiterated the provisions of domestic legislation on adoption. As a result of the natural disasters that had occurred in the 1990s, many families had volunteered to foster orphaned children in order to relieve the burden on the State. However, since some families were caring for as many as 10 children, the Government had decided to limit the number of foster children to one child for each family. The State provided food and clothing for foster children.

18. Clinics in all primary and secondary schools provided primary health care. Children who required further assistance were sent to hospitals.

19. While the Government encouraged breastfeeding, many parents chose to place their young children in weekly nurseries or kindergartens. Since children who were cared for in those institutions could not be breastfed, the Government recognized the need to find ways of making breastfeeding compatible with nursery education.

20. Ms. AL-THANI requested additional information on the rice powder for babies that had been supplied during the reporting period.

21. Ms. ORTIZ asked whether the Government had considered spending its limited resources on improving essential facilities, such as day care for young children, rather than on less crucial services, such as weekly boarding schools.

22. Mr. LIWSKI asked whether sufficient budget allocations had been made to meet all the targets included in the National Programme of Action for the Well-Being of Children. He requested additional information on health-care priorities at the local level. He wondered what measures had been taken to reduce infant and maternal mortality since the implementation of the National Programme of Action. It was difficult to understand why sex education was not taught before the fifth year of senior middle school and why reproductive health services were not more accessible, particularly to adolescents.

23. Ms. VUCKOVIC-SAHOVIC asked why grandparents and other relatives did not take care of children whose parents worked.

24. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the tradition of the extended family did not exist in his country. When people married, they left the family home and functioned as a nuclear family. While grandparents were sometimes unwilling to allow their grandchildren to attend nurseries and kindergartens, parents often preferred those institutions because they provided early learning opportunities. There was currently much debate in the State party on what form of care was best for young children.

25. Mr. PAK Tok Hun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that measures to improve reproductive health had focused on women. Efforts had been made to reduce the maternal mortality rate. There were maternity wards and hospitals throughout the country, and pre- and post-natal care was available to all women.

26. Reproductive health education was taught from the third year of primary school onwards, in the context of hygiene and anatomy lessons. Sex education was introduced in the fifth year of senior middle school. Publications on women's hygiene were widely available. Under the household doctor system, every family received regular visits from a medical practitioner, whose main concern was the health of women and children. Household doctors referred persons with health problems to specialists.

27. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea was grateful for the humanitarian assistance that had been received from NGOs and other agencies. Whenever assistance was provided, the Government would allow agency staff to monitor distribution of aid. Assistance was not accepted for certain restricted access areas, particularly military facilities.
28. Western media reports of experiments with chemical weapons on humans had been based on documents forged in China. No such experiments had taken place in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a fact that had been recognized by several European Union ambassadors to the reporting State.
29. Ms. LEE asked whether it was the Government or the aid agencies that decided which parts of the country should receive humanitarian assistance. Since the Republic of Korea was one of the largest donors of aid to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, she wished to know what more could be done to assist the population of the reporting State.
30. Mr. PAK Tok Hun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the Government and the aid agencies took joint decisions on where to direct international humanitarian assistance. The Government informed the international community about areas that required aid and notified agencies of the restricted areas.
31. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether the Government provided aid in the areas that were inaccessible to the international community. He wondered whether the country had sufficient medical supplies.
32. Mr. PAK Tok Hun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the Government provided food aid to the restricted areas when necessary. Although medical supplies were insufficient, many countries and organizations had donated medicine and other medical equipment following the railway disaster in April 2004.
33. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether information on civil rights was accessible through the Internet and libraries.
34. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that every county had at least one children's library. Under the National Programme of Action for the Well-Being of Children, three new children's libraries were expected to be built in the near future.
35. Although the Internet was not widely used in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, computers with Internet access were available in certain specialized educational institutions in Pyongyang and other major cities. The only restrictions on children's access to information were imposed by the Government in order to protect children from harmful information. The Government had tightened its customs laws to prevent the import of inappropriate materials.
36. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether foreign newspapers were readily available to students learning a foreign language.

37. Mr. KRAPPMANN asked how many children in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were learning a foreign language. He would be interested in knowing which languages were being studied.
38. Ms. OUEDRAOGO enquired whether any steps had been taken by the Government to obtain educational materials, such as library books, from other countries.
39. Mr. AL-SHEDDI asked how the Government prevented children from gaining access to harmful information. He also wished to know more about how the concept of human rights was taught to children in schools. He wondered whether the Government had introduced a national plan of action for human rights education in the context of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004).
40. Mr. CHOE Tok Hun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that language learning began in the first year of middle school education. English, Russian and Chinese were taught. The Government was considering the possibility of introducing foreign language instruction at the primary level; a pilot project had already begun in certain schools. The Government had taken steps to increase the amount of time devoted to foreign language learning in schools. Some specialized language schools offered students an opportunity to choose from among eight languages. Universities offered up to 20 different languages.
41. Although the shortage of foreign currency hindered the procurement of foreign books and periodicals, a number of foreign publications were used in the academic field. Under a number of cultural exchange programmes, reading materials were exchanged with countries such as Russia and China. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other international agencies donated books to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Pursuant to a recent agreement between his Government and the Government of the United Kingdom, English teachers from the United Kingdom would be sent to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The Government had also requested the United Kingdom to donate reference books to secondary schools. Recently, a group of Canadian experts had visited the country to set up training courses for Korean teachers who taught English as a foreign language.
42. Magazines containing information that was considered useful for children were distributed on a regular basis to children in kindergartens and schools. Every day, educational programmes for children were broadcast on radio and television. A considerable amount of information was made available to children by the Grand People's Study House.
43. Human rights education was introduced in the fourth year of primary school as part of the social sciences and law curriculum. Children were made aware of the provisions of the Convention and other international human rights instruments. Human rights education was an essential component in the training of medical and legal professionals. All textbooks were prepared by the Ministry of Education.
44. The CHAIRPERSON asked how students were selected to attend "genius education" establishments. He requested additional information on vocational training establishments and reform institutions.

45. Ms. KHATTAB requested information about the State party's Chinese schools.
46. Mr. CITARELLA asked whether young people had the freedom to choose whether to attend a regular university, a specialized university or a vocational training establishment, or if that decision was made for them by their families or by the authorities.
47. Mr. CHOE Tok Hun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that children were selected to attend the "genius education" establishments on the basis of their performance in two entrance examinations. All young people had the right to attend university, whether or not they had attended a "genius education" establishment.
48. Most of the population of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea completed 11 years of free and compulsory education. Those who did not go on to higher education usually enrolled in a vocational training course. There were two types of vocational training: first, there were specialized vocational training schools, which were operated by the Ministry of Education and which provided two and a half to three years of full-time education in such subjects as mechanical engineering, computer technology or food processing; and secondly, there were skills training centres, which were run by the Ministry of Labour and provided short-term training for factory and other skilled workers. Before entering the labour market, all workers had to receive some form of vocational training.
49. After completing secondary school, a child was free to choose its own career path. Inevitably, the child's parents influenced that choice. Representatives from the Ministry of Education made regular visits to schools in order to review current career trends among young people.
50. The low female enrolment rate in the country's universities was attributable to the fact that very few women chose to study industrial subjects such as engineering. Traditionally, female students chose vocational training. A higher percentage of female students attended medical schools and teacher training colleges.
51. Some 5,500 Chinese immigrants and their families lived in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Chinese children enjoyed all the social benefits provided by the State, including free medical care and education, on an equal footing with Korean children. The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries was responsible for identifying the needs of Chinese people living in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and for making appropriate recommendations to the Government. Ten Chinese schools had been established throughout the country. The Ministry of Education was responsible for preparing the curricula for those schools.
52. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that article 68 of the Constitution guaranteed freedom of religion. There were over 10,000 Christians in the country and more than 500 Christian places of worship. There were 60 Buddhist temples and approximately 300 Buddhist priests. People were allowed to choose a religion and receive religious education. A number of religious organizations, such as the Korean Christian Federation and the Korean Buddhist Federation, had their own educational facilities. If they so

wished, children who had completed secondary education could take a course in religious education at the university level. However, the Korean people were wary of religion. They still remembered those who, under the cloak of religion, had infiltrated the country during the United States invasion and had engaged in espionage and other subversive activities.

53. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether churches had to register with the Government or comply with any other regulations.

54. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the Government was considering the adoption of legislation to regulate religious activities.

The meeting was suspended at 5.10 p.m. and resumed at 5.20 p.m.

55. The CHAIRPERSON asked the delegation to reply to the questions that had been raised about the aims of education and the minimum age of conscription. He requested additional information on reform schools and the scope and purpose of military-type summer camps. He asked whether there were any prospects for the further development of bilateral relations with the Republic of Korea.

56. Questions had been raised concerning the treatment of child returnees. In that connection, he asked the delegation to comment on allegations of ill-treatment and abuse and on the State party's policy regarding the free movement of persons.

57. He wished to know whether the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had a specialized juvenile justice system and juvenile courts, how the law treated juvenile offenders and whether children aged 17 and over were treated as adults.

58. He asked for clarification of the meaning of "public education measures" applied to juvenile offenders and on the exact function of the youth league in that connection.

59. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that children enlisted in the armed forces on a voluntary basis. Preliminary training was given to ensure children's physical and psychological preparedness for their duties as soldiers before they were formally inducted. Military training was offered in specialized schools. The Government's policy of self-reliance in politics, self-sufficiency in economy and self-defence in national defence required all citizens' involvement in military affairs.

60. Relations between the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea were continuing to develop positively; the two countries were not at war. The Korean people would overcome the division caused by foreign forces and would find ways to achieve reunification. He appealed to the United Nations to support those efforts. The upcoming tenth reunion of families that had been separated by the Korean War was indicative of such positive developments. The reunions were held in full compliance with the Convention.

61. No border agreements existed with neighbouring countries. Any person found to be in violation of legal provisions governing border crossings was punishable by law. However, it was untrue that returnees were placed in special institutions.

62. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea had no specialized courts for juvenile offenders. Juvenile delinquency was rare and most offences committed by minors were not severe enough to require legal proceedings. Public education did not take reprisals against offenders but instead encouraged them to repent. Since children generally repented their crimes, public education had proved a useful tool in the rehabilitation of juvenile offenders.
63. Ms. ALUOCH asked which authority was competent to assess the severity of violence and abuse perpetrated against children.
64. Ms. ORTIZ wondered how the principle of educating children in conflict with the law was applied to child returnees who were institutionalized and allegedly subjected to ill-treatment and torture.
65. Ms. CHUTIKUL said that children whose circumstances compelled them to cross the border should not be regarded as offenders but as victims. She appealed to the State party to consider ways of providing assistance to such children instead of punishing them. The State party should consider cooperating with the Government of China in preventing illegal border crossings. Possible measures to safeguard the rights of children who crossed the border included repatriation, and recovery and reintegration programmes in border areas.
66. Mr. PAK Tok Hun (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that Korean citizens who had crossed the border into China in search of economic assistance from relatives in times of hardship were not punished when they returned. However, fugitives from the law and persons involved in illegal activities were subject to punishment.
67. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that the statistics on children included 17-year-olds.
68. Public education sought to rehabilitate juvenile offenders by correcting their behaviour. Youth leagues, schools and parents took part in public education. The aim of youth league education was to instil a spirit of responsibility for the prosperity of the country and the well-being of society.
69. Chinese citizens residing in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had the right to apply for Korean citizenship. The Supreme People's Assembly decided on nationality-related questions. The Nationality Law applied both the principle of kinship and the principle of birthplace; no child born in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was stateless.
70. The CHAIRPERSON thanked the delegation for its frank replies to the Committee's questions. The State party should step up efforts to implement the National Programme of Action. Consideration should be given to the establishment of a truly independent monitoring mechanism consistent with the requirements set forth in the Convention.
71. The State party should undertake additional studies on abuse and violence within the family, corporal punishment, child labour, sexual exploitation, and trafficking in children. Freedom of religion and the right to information also warranted special attention.

72. He was concerned that the State's extensive role in child-rearing might be detrimental to parents' active involvement in the lives of their children. It might be preferable to allow parents to take charge of their children rather than placing them in institutional care, since institutionalization limited parent-children bonding and adversely affected children's emotional, psychosocial and cognitive development.

73. Further clarification was needed on the situation of child returnees from China. The State party should conduct an in-depth study of juvenile justice with a view to evaluating existing mechanisms and identifying potential weaknesses.

74. Mr. SO Se Pyong (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that his Government was committed to facilitating cooperation between the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the National Coordination Committee for the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. His Government would welcome the Committee's support in organizing a visit of members of the Coordination Committee to other countries in order to observe what those countries were doing to implement children's rights.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.