Committee on the Rights of the Child
Eighty-third session

Summary record of the 2433rd meeting
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Tuesday, 21 January 2020, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Pedernera Reyna

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (continued)

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Belarus (continued) (CRC/C/BLR/5-6; CRC/C/BLR/Q/5-6 and CRC/C/BLR/RQ/5-6)

1. At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Belarus took places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. Tamilchyk (Belarus) said that the relevant State bodies made every effort to ensure that children were not separated from their parents, which was only done in extreme cases. In situations where children were believed to be at risk, the family was closely supervised and supported by the local authorities. The Government worked in close cooperation with non-governmental and international organizations in that area. Local commissions for minors had the power to remove children from their parents for up to six months in cases where the parents’ behaviour was deemed immoral and therefore harmful to the child, where the parents were addicted to alcohol or drugs, or more generally where the child’s living conditions posed a real danger to his or her life or health. In such cases, to ensure that children could be returned as soon as possible, parents were given assistance in overcoming their alcohol dependency, finding employment, improving their parenting skills and providing safe conditions in which to raise the child. Under the Marriage and Family Code, parental rights could be withdrawn only by a court and only as a last resort. If, after the six-month period, the reasons for removing the child persisted, then parental rights could be terminated permanently. Such rights could not be permanently withdrawn in cases where the parent suffered temporary health issues.

3. Mr. Barysiuk (Belarus) said that, in the region of Brest, the tutelage and guardianship authorities and representatives of the National Commission on the Rights of the Child were responsible for the protection of children’s rights. Their work was coordinated by an interdepartmental council. When information was received about a threat to the life or health of a child in a family, the tutelage and guardianship authorities, which comprised health-care and education professionals, visited the family and carried out an assessment to determine whether the family situation posed a danger to the child. Initially, the child remained with the family, and various professionals, including psychologists, worked with the parents and provided them with assistance. If the situation in the family had not changed after six months, the child would be removed and temporarily placed in a foster family or State institution, during which time the work with the family would continue. If there was still no improvement, the guardianship authorities could petition the court to terminate parental rights. The courts could subsequently reinstate parents’ rights if the situation within the family was found to have improved sufficiently. The authorities’ main priority was to assist families so that children could remain with their parents whenever possible. In the Brest region, the children of persons stripped of their parental rights over the previous year had all been placed in family-based care rather than State institutions.

4. Ms. Todorova (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that the Committee did not object to removal of children from their families where such an action was in the best interests of the child; her question concerned the procedure for removing children from their families and the authorities mandated to do so. It was unclear which bodies had the legal authority to conduct social assessments of families and whether they had staff with the necessary professional knowledge and skills. In her view, a six-month period limited the discretion of the relevant authorities to determine whether the family situation had improved sufficiently or whether more time was needed. What happened in cases where the family situation improved one or two years after the removal of parental rights? Would the child be returned and parental rights reinstated? In her understanding, article 32 of the Constitution stated that a court decision was required to remove a child from his or her parents and it did not mention the withdrawal of parental rights. She would appreciate clarification in that regard. In addition, she wished to know which authorities were represented on the interdepartmental coordination council.

5. Mr. Karpenko (Belarus) said that social assessments were carried out by the tutelage and guardianship authorities, who were qualified professionals. Members of the coordination councils included representatives of regional non-governmental organizations.
(NGOs), tutelage and guardianship authorities, medical specialists and local authorities, who considered all aspects of the child’s situation. The courts alone had the authority to remove parental rights and could also reinstate them. Children were removed from their families only in exceptional cases, where there was a real threat to the life or health of the child. Psychologists and social workers were always involved in decisions to place children in care.

6. Ms. Koptseva (Belarus) said that Maksim Tank State Pedagogical University of Belarus provided ongoing training to psychologists and social workers to give them the skills to conduct proper assessments of children’s situations. The University also trained specialists in inclusive education, which was a priority of the country’s education system. In 2016, the University had opened its Inclusive Education Institute in order to provide training not only to students and teachers, but also to parents, on inclusive education. The University had also strengthened psychological training for future teachers to better equip them to understand and protect children.

7. Ms. Bohdan (Belarus) said that incarcerated youths enjoyed the same access to health care and the same labour protections as non-incarcerated youths. The 141 juvenile inmates in the young offenders’ institution were provided with medical care by doctors, who carried out medical check-ups twice a year. Emergency assistance was available 24 hours a day. In 2019, the inmates had attended a combined total of over 600 consultations with a range of medical experts. All inmates were given advice on the forms of labour that were suitable for minors and on their future career options.

8. A survey had been conducted in 2019 by the National Statistical Committee in order to gather data on breastfeeding. That same year, an event called “Mama Pro” had been held in Minsk to raise awareness of parenting issues among prospective mothers and fathers. Similar events would be held across 11 other districts in February 2020. Inspections of maternity wards and children’s hospitals would be carried out jointly with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and measures would be taken to promote breastfeeding and to restrict advertising of breast-milk substitutes.

9. Children living with HIV were assured full access to State-funded medical treatment, in line with World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations. Patients with HIV received treatment with the cutting-edge antiretroviral drug dolutegravir. Measures had been taken in schools to prevent HIV infection, including awareness-raising campaigns conducted with the support of civil society organizations. The number of women living with HIV had fallen by one third between 2015 and 2019. Since 2016, Belarus had followed WHO recommendations on preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis, and had received commendations from the Organization for its accomplishments in that regard. Children living with HIV were not prevented from studying or playing sports, and only persons in clinical stage 3 or 4 of HIV infection were prohibited from adopting children.

10. Mr. Tamilehchyk (Belarus) said that the National Statistical Committee devised statistical policies and was responsible for the regulation and coordination of the activities of other government bodies in that field. The statistics compiled by the Committee were disseminated and published in journals, the media and on its official website. One statistical bulletin was dedicated entirely to children and adolescents and comprised data disaggregated by a range of variables, such as age and gender. In March 2019, a web portal for data on children had been launched. In September that same year, meetings had been held with experts from UNICEF on working with statistical data for the protection of children, and the Committee’s efforts had been highly praised.

11. Under the Education and Youth Policy, any youth organization could apply for organizational and financial support from the State. The application procedure was competitive, and funding was awarded by an interministerial commission. The organizations that most frequently applied for funding included UNICEF-affiliated youth organizations, associations supporting children with disabilities, and volunteer and scouting organizations.

12. In 2019, 47 million roubles (Rbl) had been allocated to children’s health care – more than in the previous year. Around Rbl 55 million had been spent on facilitating access to health and sports camps for all children, and a further Rbl 500,000 had been spent on maintaining the 6,000 camps in operation. As a result, the number of children attending
camps had increased by some 11,000 since 2018. The camps allowed children to acquire essential skills and boost their self-confidence. Children without parental care and children with disabilities received special treatment at the camps.

13. **Mr. Ambrazevich** (Belarus) said that Belarus currently had no national human rights institution that complied with the Paris Principles. Although extensive research had been conducted, no firm conclusions had been drawn concerning the usefulness of such institutions in other countries. Citizens’ human rights were protected by a range of specialized public institutions attached to relevant ministries. Those institutions, which were listed in paragraph 46 of the report (CRC/C/BLR/5-6), included civil society representatives.

14. With regard to citizens’ complaints, State bodies were required by law to investigate and respond to written communications, including those submitted in electronic form. The law specified a time limit for such action, and any failure to meet the time limit entailed consequences for the agency in question and the responsible officers. Citizens could also institute administrative or judicial proceedings if they considered that their legitimate interests had been violated. The issue of statelessness was dealt with by the Citizenship and Immigration Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and action was being taken to enhance the existing system. Detailed statistics could be provided in due course on the right of access to the Internet. He had never heard of any cases in which access had been restricted. Over 90 per cent of the population had mobile phone subscriptions.

15. **Ms. Karzhovalia (Belarus)** said that the principle of inclusiveness had been introduced into the draft Education Code and was already operational in the education system. The State Education and Youth Policy 2016–2010 provided for the development of inclusive education for persons with physical or psychological disabilities. A network of preschool, primary and secondary institutions for integrated education had been established. More than 70 per cent of children with special needs were enrolled in such institutions. There were more than 5,000 special integrated classes. Parents could decide, in consultation with a medical, psychological and pedagogical specialists, whether to enrol children with disabilities in specialized establishments or in regular schools, which would provide them with the requisite facilities. For instance, 86 per cent of children with disabilities were transported to school in special vehicles, and assistance was provided in integrated classes for children with visual, auditory or speech impairments. A joint project on inclusive education for children with disabilities was being implemented during the period from 2018 to 2020 in cooperation with UNICEF. There was also a pilot project aimed at creating an inclusive culture in educational establishments and enhancing teachers’ ability to cater for the needs of children with disabilities.

16. It was not yet clear when all specialized residential schools would be closed down. However, the number had been reduced from 95 in 2000 to 49 in 2019. The remaining schools would eventually be converted into centres tasked with helping parents to prepare their children for enrolment in regular schools and training teachers in regular schools to provide the requisite assistance for children with special needs.

17. A ministerial order issued on 29 June 2018 prohibited children enrolled in educational establishments from engaging in agricultural work. The employment of children aged over 14 years in agricultural work required the conclusion of an agreement pursuant to the Labour Code.

18. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked whether a time limit had been set for the elimination of special or segregated schools for children with disabilities. He was not sure he had correctly understood what the delegation had said regarding inclusive education for persons with psychological disorders and would appreciate clarification. It would be useful to know how the State party defined the concept of inclusive education. Additional information on measures taken to provide reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities would also be welcome. Noting that special vehicles were provided to transport children with disabilities to school, he asked whether all public transport was accessible for persons with disabilities.

19. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that she would welcome information, including statistics, if possible, on children with autism and the support provided for them in the State party. Were there enough teachers with the requisite expertise? In relation to violence again children, she wished to know what measures were taken to assist boys who had been
subjected to sexual abuse. Lastly, she would be interested in hearing whether the State party had developed strategies to combat corruption.

20. **Ms. Karzhova** (Belarus) said that the action plan to develop inclusive education covered the period from 2016 to 2020, and further action would be taken in 2021 and 2022. The action plan had not provided for closure of all specialized schools. However, over 70 per cent of children with psychological disorders and physical disabilities were currently enrolled in mainstream educational establishments. As already noted, the specialized schools were being converted into centres that would promote the transition to integrated classes. School buses were provided for all pupils in rural areas. Children with disabilities benefited from specially equipped transport.

21. **Ms. Bohdan** (Belarus) said that births were registered with civil registry offices. All relevant data were recorded in the information system of the Ministry of Health. Births could be registered while the mother was still in the maternity ward or afterwards, within the first three months after birth. The Government was confident that virtually all births were registered within the period established by law. The issuance of a birth certificate was mandatory and entitled the child and family to receive various social benefits. The Ministry of Health was currently developing an electronic health information system with support from the World Bank, which would ensure that children were registered in the system automatically when their births were registered.

22. State allowances and social benefits depended on children’s degree of disability. For instance, a child with cerebral palsy who was unable to attend school would require a greater degree of assistance. An early intervention system had been established in 2017 with the support of UNICEF. Instructions had been adopted in 2018 and 2019 on early intervention and interdepartmental action to support children with disabilities. Palliative and relief care was also provided for children with serious disabilities who were looked after by their families. As a result, the number of children with disabilities in institutions had been reduced by half over the previous six years.

23. The Ministry of Health had never ordered the removal of children from their families because of illness. Such action was taken only if a child’s life and health were at risk. Every effort was subsequently made to return the children to their families, and parents were assisted in shouldering their responsibilities.

24. Thanks to the vigorous steps taken by the State to reduce access to and demand for drugs, the problem of drug addiction among children had been virtually eliminated in the country. A small number of children were benefiting from long-term rehabilitation programmes. Research on suicidal behaviour among adolescents had been conducted in cooperation with UNICEF in 2019. The main reasons for suicidal thoughts had been found to include loneliness and lack of understanding, conflict with parents and unrequited love. In response to the study findings and recommendations, a series of measures had been adopted to offer advice to parents and to assist teenagers in acquiring life skills, and an interdepartmental programme had been established and a governmental plan of action for 2021–2025 formulated.

25. The 2,737 children who lived in Bragin district, in the contaminated area affected by the Chernobyl disaster, were provided with comprehensive health care. Specialized medical units focused on thyroid cancer, which remained a concern in the region. The children’s health situation was analysed each year; some 14 per cent had been found to suffer from chronic illnesses, while 2 per cent had disabilities, about the same percentages as in the general population. Steps were being taken to ensure healthy food and promote a healthy way of life for the children. All children living in contaminated areas could attend camps within the country or abroad.

26. **Ms. Tsimanovich** (Belarus) said that the termination of parental rights was an extreme measure that could only be ordered by the courts pursuant to article 18 of the Marriage and Family Code. Parents could not be deprived of their rights if their failure to fulfil certain obligations was due to illness, alcoholism, drug addiction, or economic difficulties or other circumstances beyond their control. The number of court decisions to terminate parental rights had declined steadily, dropping from over 3,000 in 2012 to 2,060 in 2018 and 1,757 in 2019. Parental rights had been restored to 135 parents in 2019. Either parent could file an appeal for the restoration of rights. The court would seek the advice of
guardianship authorities before ruling on the matter. Children aged 14 years or over were invited to express their views on the decision.

27. Article 193 of the Criminal Code, concerning the illegal organization of activities of a public association, religious organization or foundation or participation in such activities had been repealed in 2019, but administrative penalties for such activities had been increased. No minor had ever been charged with an offence under article 193.

28. By law, professional legal aid must be provided to migrants and stateless persons on an equal footing with Belarus citizens. Children’s guardians could also benefit from legal assistance. Only three unaccompanied minor migrants had entered the country in 2018 and 2019, of whom two had been Afghans and one had been a Palestinian. The only previous cases had occurred in 2011.

29. **Mr. Kazakevich** (Belarus) said that article 328 of the Criminal Code dealt with drug-related offences and prescribed a maximum custodial sentence of two years for possession of drugs without intent to sell them. There had been a marked decline in the number of minors charged with such offences since 2014. In 2019 only 23 minors had been charged and only three custodial sentences had been handed down. The Government sought to promote rehabilitative measures for minors as an alternative to prosecution. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, as an executive body, was responsible for crime prevention, and its drug control unit was tasked with the elimination of drug trafficking. The judiciary was responsible for handling criminal cases and handing down judgments. All stages of drug-related proceedings were monitored by the prosecuting authorities.

30. **Ms. Todorova** said that she would be interested to learn about any steps taken to prevent vendors of alcohol and tobacco products from selling their wares to adolescents. Such measures would be more effective than punishing the minors themselves. The Committee would also like to hear about sexual and reproductive health education in schools, including measures to prevent transmission of HIV. She believed that the authorities should reconsider the definition of disability under domestic law, as it did not appear to be consistent with that enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

31. The Criminal Code needed to be reviewed with a view to bringing it into line with the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. She hoped the delegation could provide details about any prosecutions brought against persons who had committed offences in violation of the Protocol. She wished to know if the courts could prosecute a Belarusian citizen in Belarus for Protocol-related offences committed outside the country. In that regard, she was concerned that the State party’s application of the principle of dual criminality seemed to undermine the effectiveness of the Optional Protocol. She would be interested to learn more about the referral system for child victims. In particular, she wondered whether State entities other than the Ministry of Internal Affairs were involved in assisting victims. Lastly, she wished to know what, if any, rehabilitation services were available for victims and whether there was provision for victims to receive redress.

32. **Ms. Winter** (Country Task Force) said that she was concerned by the fact that persons aged 17 could be admitted into military education establishments and wondered whether the Government was considering raising that age to 18, in line with the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. The fact that the Criminal Code contained no precise definition of “direct participation in hostilities” meant that it was difficult to act in cases where such involvement was suspected. Was a specific complaints mechanism available to 17-year-old recruits? She would be interested to learn about any plans to include peace education in school curricula and teacher training. She shared Ms. Todorova’s concern about the requirement for dual criminality in extraterritorial offences and wondered if there were any plans to abrogate that provision. In addition, she would be interested to learn how children seeking asylum were evaluated to determine whether they had been involved in hostilities abroad.

33. **Ms. Aldoseri** (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know if any action had been taken on the recommendation the Committee had made in its 2011 concluding observations (CRC/C/BLR/CO/3-4) regarding speedy enactment of the law on legal responsibility for corporations and the adoption of a corporate responsibility index. How
did the State monitor the activities of private companies to ensure that they respected the rights of children, including the right to live in a healthy environment?

The meeting was suspended at 11.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.50 a.m.

34. Mr. Kazakevich (Belarus) said that, as 98 per cent of drug transactions took place online, the State had acted to identify and block access to suspect sites, including on the darknet. In cooperation with various NGOs, the authorities had taken steps to make children and their parents aware of online dangers, especially those related to drugs and sexual violence, in particular sexual grooming. Specialists were on hand to provide assistance to children in need and could be contacted round the clock via a special call centre or through social media.

35. The Committee’s recommendations regarding the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography were taken very seriously. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was responsible for coordinating activities for the implementation of the Protocol and for referring the individuals concerned to the State agency or NGO best able to fulfil their needs. Details about the Ministry’s role in that regard were available on its website. All the offences envisaged under the Optional Protocol were covered under the Criminal Code, although not all in the same article or chapter.

36. Under domestic law, the principle of dual criminality meant that a citizen or permanent resident of Belarus was criminally liable for acts committed outside the country only when those acts were criminalized in the country where they had taken place and no charges had been levelled against the person in that country. All matters relating to the protection of trafficking victims, including minors who had been coerced into prostitution or pornography, were covered under the Prevention of Human Trafficking Act, while the identification and referral of victims and the provision of medical care, social assistance and rehabilitation were regulated by a recent government decree. All services, including temporary shelters for children of different age groups, were provided free of charge. Child trafficking victims were sent to children’s homes or to special pedagogical centres for rehabilitation. Those measures had been effective as the number of children suffering sexual abuse had fallen from 71 in 2016 to 30 in 2019. In addition, a two-year plan to protect children from sexual violence through action by both the State and civil society had been developed and submitted for government approval.

37. The involvement of children in armed conflict was criminalized under domestic law, but criminal liability applied only to citizens or permanent residents of Belarus. Persons could be held criminally liable from the age of 16. However, there were no recorded cases of children being involved in such offences.

38. Ms. Todorova said that it was important to note that the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was not specifically about trafficking but also other offences.

39. Ms. Winter said that the purpose of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict was to protect children, not to punish them. She hoped the delegation could clarify whether the State party had any mechanisms in place to identify children who might have been exploited in armed conflicts abroad – such as the two unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan mentioned earlier – so that they could then be given appropriate assistance.

40. Mr. Kazakevich (Belarus) said that children seeking asylum received assistance, including free legal aid, on an equal footing with all other children in Belarus. Psychologists carried out examinations to try and determine what traumas the children might have suffered before arriving in the country. The case of the two persons from Afghanistan had caused some perplexity, as their physical appearance had seemed to suggest that they were older than their stated age; nonetheless, they had received comprehensive assistance.

41. Ms. Baturytskaya (Belarus) said that the prosecution services were responsible for monitoring prison conditions and had unhindered access to places of juvenile detention where they could make unannounced visits at any time to check on the lawfulness of detention and the provision of medical care and educational activities. Moreover, inmates had a confidential complaints system at their disposal and could meet with lawyers in private. Alongside the prosecution services, places of detention were also subject to
oversight by public bodies including the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, which also had the right to meet with minors deprived of their liberty. Any changes to a minor’s conditions of detention had to be agreed with the Commission. Visits had also been conducted by the UNICEF country office.

42. Juveniles in detention had the right to consult a legal database and to receive legal assistance free of charge, and lawyers had unrestricted access to their detained clients. In the course of 2019, 7 inmates had requested such assistance and 11 meetings with lawyers had taken place inside prisons. Lastly, she wished to make it clear that everyone in detention was required to wear the same prison clothing, with no distinguishing marks to indicate inmates' past record or the offences with which they had been charged.

43. Ms. Karzhova (Belarus) said that reproductive health, family planning, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, healthy lifestyle choices and the medical and social consequences of drug and alcohol use were all covered in school curricula aimed at tenth and eleventh grade pupils in mainstream education and in extracurricular activities. Between the second and ninth grades, pupils received skills training that they would need to integrate into society and lead successful lives. Girls were taught subjects such as cookery, sewing and knitting, while boys received technical training. As of 2018, vocational training in more than 100 specific occupations had been made available to tenth and eleventh grade pupils. There was nothing to prevent boys from attending classes intended for girls or vice versa.

44. Military education establishments were part of the upper secondary education system. They offered intellectual, cultural, physical and moral education that was intended to prepare young people for their future professional lives, possibly in the armed forces. No changes regarding the age requirements for such schools were currently planned.

45. Ms. Todorova said that the State party’s policy towards skills training appeared to undermine its policy to combat gender stereotypes. It was not appropriate to tell children that certain activities were suitable for girls and others for boys; moreover, such a division could lead to men feeling a reduced sense of parental responsibility and being less inclined to participate in child-rearing and domestic tasks. She encouraged the State party to modify its policy so that all pupils were treated as equals and permitted to choose which subjects they studied.

46. Mr. Karpenko (Belarus) said that boys and girls could follow the vocational and skills training courses of their choice. The design of such courses was entrusted to pedagogical experts.

47. Ms. Vasilevskaya (Belarus) said that the Government was working with businesses in Belarus to promote corporate social responsibility, including with respect to the rights of children, and was also working with NGOs on projects that incorporated children’s rights. All businesses operating in Belarus must comply with strict corporate and social responsibility standards and were monitored by the State. Many of the national and international enterprises operating in the country had signed the United Nations Global Compact. Belarus paid great attention to the issue of human rights in business activities and had conducted a survey, together with NGOs, such as the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, on how such rights should be applied in practice. The results of the survey were set to be discussed with business representatives in order to define next steps.

48. Ms. Aldoseri asked whether specific laws on corporate social responsibility had been enacted.

49. Ms. Vasilevskaya (Belarus) said that there was no urgent need to adopt a specific law because national legislation already provided for measures that safeguarded the rights of the child in relation to businesses. However, discussions on the best ways to enhance such protections were ongoing.

50. Mr. Tamilchyk (Belarus) said that the Marriage and Family Code provided for oversight of the activities of guardians of minors. Representatives of the competent authorities inspected the child’s living conditions at least twice a year and spoke to all children in care without their guardians or foster parents being present. Pedagogical specialists carried out educational tests on all children in care and medical professionals annually examined their physical and mental condition and discussed the results with their carers. When necessary, specialists from the tutelage and guardianship authorities referred
any problems or cases of abuse to the National Commission on the Rights of the Child, district prosecutors or other competent authorities. Children in Belarus had access to the Internet and could email any State body to report problems or mistreatment. All complaints were thoroughly examined and the necessary investigations carried out.

51. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that the Committee understood that many cases involving the sexual abuse of boys remained pending. She would like to know what criminal action had been taken in those cases. It would also be useful to know what sentences had been handed down to minors found guilty of drug possession and how the State assisted and collaborated with NGOs in relation to drug use among minors.

52. **Mr. Kazakevich** (Belarus) said that, while the data collected by the State regarding victims of sexual violence was not routinely disaggregated by gender, he could report that in 2019, some 10 boys and 20 girls had been victims of sexual abuse. All criminal cases opened were referred to the courts and not left pending. Strict penalties were imposed on those convicted of offences connected to sexual abuse or exploitation. As indicated earlier, sentences for drug possession offences had recently been reduced, and courts had been granted more discretion to hand down lighter sentences commensurate with the age and situation of the offender. The State had concluded social contracts with various NGOs, many of which were also partners in international projects funded by entities such as the International Organization for Migration and UNICEF.

53. **Mr. Karpenko** (Belarus) said that the sale of alcohol to minors was prohibited by law, and establishments that violated that prohibition could have their licenses revoked. Under national legislation, stores selling alcohol could not be located within 500 metres of educational establishments. Smoking was prohibited in many public places, including educational establishments, sports centres, cultural sites, health care facilities, and even some public squares. The State carried out preventive work to raise awareness among young people about the risks associated with alcohol and tobacco use.

54. **Mr. Mezmur** said that it would be useful to know what efforts the State party had made to implement the recommendations made by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children following her recent visit to Belarus. In particular, he would be interested to hear whether the State party had followed up on the proposal to establish a well-coordinated, high-level commission to ensure a strategic vision and an effective implementation strategy for the safeguarding of children’s rights and the protection of children from violence.

55. **Ms. Aldoseri** said that, while she understood that around 80 per cent of children with disabilities in Belarus were enrolled in inclusive education, it seemed that a number of them had been transferred to alternative educational establishments because of problems such as the inability of their teachers to cope with their type of disability. She would appreciate statistics on the number of children who had been transferred. Moreover, she wished to know whether Belarus had a monitoring system in place to facilitate the return of transferred pupils to inclusive education.

56. **Ms. Karzhova** (Belarus) said that it was not the case that children with disabilities had been transferred to special schools. Rather, their parents had been invited to choose where they should be educated based on their particular requirements, as determined through medical and learning-based assessments. Their choice was, of course, informed by the facilities on offer at the local mainstream school. Of the 9,420 school-age children with disabilities in Belarus, some 80 per cent indeed attended inclusive educational establishments.

57. **Mr. Tamilchyk** (Belarus) said that the National Commission on the Rights of the Child was the coordinating body responsible for preventing violence against children. The Commission was composed of representatives of various Government bodies and carried out its mandate in accordance with the regulations established by law.

58. **Ms. Winter** said that the State party was to be commended for the progress it had made in implementing the principle of the best interests of the child since its last review by the Committee. Change did not happen overnight, particularly when it involved transforming the attitudes of parents and carers. The Committee would highlight a number of its recommendations for urgent follow-up, and trusted that all the planned actions and
activities reported by the delegation would be brought to fruition before the State party’s next periodic review.

59. **Mr. Ambrazevich** (Belarus) said that the Government of Belarus welcomed the Committee’s positive assessment of the progress it had made and would continue to seek opportunities to improve its national systems for the protection of children’s rights. The delegation understood that further progress would require time, the allocation of adequate financial resources and a balanced approach that involved awareness-raising among parents, teachers and social workers. Recent developments in Belarus offered the hope that significant headway could be made in the near future.

60. The country had experienced dynamic growth and development in recent years, and its Human Development Index ranking had increased by 24.5 per cent between 1995 and 2018. The Government was now actively pursuing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. However, while economic growth was necessary to enhance living standards and the observance of human rights, it could not be achieved without peace and stability. For that reason, the Government promoted peace, security and humanitarian principles domestically, including through school curricula, and abroad, through its foreign policy. The Government looked forward to receiving practical recommendations from the Committee that would allow it to continue developing its holistic approach to guaranteeing and implementing the rights of the child.

61. **The Chair** said that the State party could count on the Committee’s continued collaboration as it endeavoured to improve its implementation of the Convention. He invited the delegation to disseminate the Committee’s recommendations to the children of Belarus in a form and language that they could easily understand.

*The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.*