Committee on the Rights of the Child
Eighty-third session

Summary record of the 2435th meeting
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Wednesday, 22 January 2020, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Pedernera Reyna

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

Consideration of reports of States parties (continued)

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Costa Rica (continued) (CRC/C/CRI/5-6; CRC/C/CRI/Q/5-6 and CRC/C/CRI/RQ/5-6)

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

2. The Chair invited the delegation of Costa Rica to continue replying to the questions raised by Committee members at the previous meeting.

3. Ms. Arce Meneses (Costa Rica) said that her country was implementing a national policy on the treatment and prevention of violence against women for the period 2017–2032, and priority was being given to the situation of young and teenage girls. Community-level action was taken to tackle the structural causes of violence and to eradicate male chauvinism. The National Institute for Women had launched a programme in 2019 which sought to promote respectful and non-violent masculinity. Under that programme, training courses had been organized to date for 47 male staff members of public institutions. Teenage girls were also being trained to serve as community leaders and to prevent all forms of ill-treatment in their communities. The Institute was working with community associations to raise awareness and bring about a change in attitudes, which were often indifferent to or tolerant of violence against women.

4. With a view to promoting the participation of young people in governance, the U-Report programme had been launched in conjunction with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). U-Report was a messaging tool that empowered young people to engage with and speak out on issues that mattered to them. The first U-Report exercise involving the Child and Adolescent Participatory Councils had been launched in December 2019. The results were currently being analysed.

5. The National Child Welfare Agency had established toll-free telephone hotlines. All children and adolescents could call 1147 and teenage mothers could call 800 226 26 26 to contact psychologists, social workers and legal experts.

6. Ms. Lobo Ugalde (Costa Rica) said that the Ministry of Education had developed a protocol for tackling cases of bullying, intimidation and harassment in schools. Training courses and workshops were organized for children and adolescents and for their parents and legal guardians. The parenting academies run by the National Child Welfare Agency worked with families to prevent violence against children and teach positive parenting skills. The Agency’s local offices worked in conjunction with other institutions to safeguard young people’s rights. Staff from the early intervention centres also visited schools to teach life skills and to prevent bullying. The Ministry of Public Security trained police officers to collaborate with children and adolescents on the prevention of violence in their communities. The Public Prosecution Service also visited schools, communities, rural areas and indigenous populations to provide legal advice and information on tools for identifying and managing cases and procedures for filing complaints. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided support to the Ministry of Education and had launched preventive projects in schools.

7. Campaigns were being conducted in partnership with the Costa Rica College of Journalists to ensure that journalists respected minors’ rights. The Children and Adolescents Code authorized the National Child Welfare Agency to order protective measures when images of minors in the media were presented in a manner that violated their rights, privacy or honour. The Advertising Control Office took action against advertising that undermined family dignity and honour, and the Committee on the Control and Rating of Public Entertainment was tasked with monitoring offensive material concerning minors in films, radio, television and other media.

8. There had been two parliamentary inquiries into the National Child Welfare Agency: one by the Committee for Children and Adolescents and the other by the Committee on Public Revenue and Expenditure. The latter had not issued any recommendations and the former had recommended the strengthening of preventive programmes. The Comptroller
General of the Republic had also issued a recommendation concerning preventive projects. Internal audits of the National Child Welfare Agency had recommended closer coordination of its projects to enhance their impact. In addition, the Agency had adopted a new technical oversight proposal pursuant to which all staff must undergo training to ensure that they were fully aware of minors’ rights enshrined in the Convention, the Children and Adolescents Code and all relevant legislation.

9. With regard to the submission of complaints, the Agency’s 52 local offices were open from 7.30 a.m. until 4 p.m. There was currently only one emergency office – in Central Valley – that could be contacted on a 24-hour basis every day of the week. Emergencies could otherwise be reported to the police through the 911 hotline. However, in December 2019 the budgetary authority of the Ministry of Finance had authorized the creation of additional emergency units throughout the country that would operate outside normal working hours.

10. The National Child Welfare Agency had created a special unit in June 2019 to collaborate with other State bodies on cases involving children in alternative care and to work towards deinstitutionalization. A trust fund of US$ 25 million would enable the Agency to improve the conditions in existing facilities.

11. Ms. Hernández Sánchez (Costa Rica) said that the institutionalization of minors should be a measure of last resort, particularly for children under 8 years of age. The National Child Welfare Agency, the courts and other institutions therefore treated cases involving the removal of a child from his or her family as emergencies. Articles 133 and 139 of the Children and Adolescents Code specified the requisite procedures. Bill No. 20067 regulated foster care, highlighting the principle of the best interests of children who were temporarily separated from their families and the need for an alternative to institutionalization. The Agency’s compliance management unit was responsible for implementing administrative decisions aimed at promptly resolving the legal status of such children. An agreement had been concluded with the State agency that was responsible for determining whether a legal representative could be found to act on behalf of absent parents in legal proceedings. Steps had also been taken by the National Child Welfare Agency to ensure speedy access to family registration records and birth certificates in order to ascertain parentage and avoid paternity fraud. Genetic tests were conducted on behalf of persons who wished to have their parenthood recognized.

12. The Agency was about to conclude an agreement with the judiciary pursuant to which training courses would be provided for lawyers, social workers, psychologists, judges and guardians who dealt with abandoned or institutionalized minors. There were currently major delays in obtaining the psychological assessments of children that were required in legal proceedings, for example prior to adoption. External staff specially trained to serve as experts could conduct such assessments far more speedily in the future. The agreement would also permit the establishment of a warning system in legal proceedings to secure priority consideration of the cases concerned.

13. The National Council on Children and Adolescents was the coordinating body for the National Policy for Children and Adolescents. As noted in the report, it was vested with high-level authority and the judiciary now enjoyed permanent representation on the Council. The National Child Welfare Agency was responsible for providing technical guidance, which was one of the five objectives of the Institutional Strategic Plan for 2018–2019. The Agency had published guidelines for producing uniform standards, methods, terminology and procedures and for promoting research and development aimed at safeguarding the rights of children and adolescents.

14. Ms. Murillo Solís (Costa Rica) said that the National Telecommunications Development Plan 2015–2021 was designed to promote a society that was interconnected through information and communications technology in a safe, responsible and productive manner. The Plan provided for digital inclusion, which prioritized action to provide vulnerable groups, including children and adolescents, with safe and secure access to information and communications technology in line with the General Telecommunications Act.

15. The Connected Public Spaces Programme provided free access to Internet services in more than 400 parks and public areas, 28 railway stations, 61 public libraries and 7 civic
centres for peace. Access to pornographic or violent material and intrusive or aggressive use of the services was blocked. In addition, two projects implemented by the Costa Rican Electricity Institute provided telephone and Internet services to 14 indigenous territories.

16. “Costa Rica says NO to online child sexual exploitation and abuse” was an initiative based on three strategies: strengthening of the Connected Homes Programme; support for the 911 emergency system in collaboration with UNICEF; and development of a national model for the prevention of and response to online sexual exploitation and abuse of children and adolescents. In August 2018 a total of 260 officials had been trained under the E-Mentor Network programme to work with families in preventing and responding to such abuse and exploitation. The National Strategy for the Prevention of and Response to Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children and Adolescents had been launched in June 2019 by the Paniamor Foundation with the support of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Telecommunications.

17. Ms. Duncan Villalobos (Costa Rica) said that the practice of female genital mutilation did not exist in her country. Children born outside marriage could be duly registered in the presence of both parents. If the father was absent the mother could, under the Responsible Paternity Act, proceed to register the child under her own name and that of the alleged father. Mother and child then underwent DNA testing. If the father still failed to present himself, paternity was assumed and the birth recorded in the Civil Registry under the names of both mother and father. If no father was named, then the birth would nonetheless be recorded in the Civil Registry under the name of the mother.

18. Mr. Rodríguez Reyes said that, although he was aware that child marriage was prohibited by law, he wished to know whether the authorities were aware of any cases of relationships between adults and minors that constituted de facto marriages and what steps were taken in the event that children were born from such relationships, particularly in view of the fact that the fathers of such children might not wish to register them for fear of criminal liability. He wished to know what “technical oversight” amounted to and whether it was exercised by bodies other than the National Child Welfare Agency.

19. Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi (Country Rapporteur) said that she wished to know if the national plan to combat violence included follow-up indicators and impact assessments whereby its effectiveness could be measured. Harassment and bullying could have very serious consequences and she wished to know if teaching staff received training in how to identify children who might be victims of such practices. Perhaps consideration could be given to introducing a system inside schools through which children could file confidential complaints about bullying and ill-treatment at the hands of their peers.

20. She wished to know if children who called the 911 hotline were rapidly referred to the appropriate agency. Could the delegation provide information about the quality of the services available to children and what, if any, improvements needed to be made? She wished to know if the National Child Welfare Agency followed up on the implementation of public policies and of recommendations emanating from the Committee and other treaty bodies.

21. Ms. Aho Assouma said that she wished to know how children were made aware of the hotlines available to them and how they knew which one they needed to call, depending upon the situation they were facing. The Committee would be interested to know how many children had availed themselves of hotline services in 2019 and how they had been dealt with.

22. Mr. Gudbrandsson said that he would like to hear more details about the mechanism whereby sex offenders under the age of 18 were typically not prosecuted but referred for therapy. He would also like to know whether precautions were taken to ensure that child victims and witnesses were not retraumatized by repetitive interviewing or multi-agency interventions.

23. Ms. Duncan Villalobos (Costa Rica) said that the State was not contemplating any measures to make abortion freely available, as such a move would be impossible under the existing Constitution and laws. An inter-agency committee was responsible for the implementation and follow-up of the country’s human rights obligations. The committee, which brought together 23 public institutions, studied those obligations and coordinated
actions aimed at putting them into effect. The previous year, it had contributed to revising national policies intended to tackle racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia.

24. Ms. Hernández Sánchez (Costa Rica) said that a mechanism was in place to monitor the situation of children who had been placed in institutions, with a particular focus on those under the age of 6. The mechanism was run from regional offices of the National Child Welfare Agency and each child was systematically monitored with monthly reports on his or her psychosocial development and legal status.

25. Time limits had been established to streamline and facilitate adoption proceedings, including in cases where the courts had not yet issued a legal declaration of abandonment. Furthermore, a new tool had been created and placed at the disposal of government agencies and NGOs involved in providing residential care for children. Those bodies could use the tool to enlist the assistance of the National Child Welfare Agency to expedite proceedings in relation to a particular child.

26. Bill No. 19919, which aimed to facilitate adoption processes, included provision to regulate the direct placement of children in adoption, which would only be allowed to take place via the good offices of the National Child Welfare Agency, using a mechanism similar to that which already existed for orphans and foundlings. The bill also envisaged amendments to existing laws, including the Family Code and the Children and Adolescents Code, so that the National Child Welfare Agency could place children with potential adoptive families then inform the courts rather than having to wait for prior judicial authorization, which was the current state of affairs. That too would streamline the adoption process and help to guarantee children’s right to a family.

27. The bill also contemplated other situations. For example, once children who had been separated from their families under temporary protection measures had spent six months in care facilities, the regional offices of the National Child Welfare Agency were required to evaluate their “adoptability” depending on whether or not there was any possibility of them returning to their own homes.

28. The National Committee against Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CONACOES), the National Coalition to Combat the Smuggling of Migrants and Human Trafficking (CONATT) and the special prosecutor for sexual offences worked with the National Child Welfare Agency to combat sexual exploitation. In that connection, the Agency had recently created a technical committee of its own. In 2019, efforts had focused on awareness-raising and training among schoolchildren, parents and the wider community, including in more remote regions of the country, while contacts had also been made at the international level, notably with Panama and Guatemala.

29. Ms. Hernández Chaves (Costa Rica) said that any institution that became aware of instances of physical or psychological violence against minors was required to report the matter to the Ministry of Health. In addition, Child Abuse Research Committees were present in all health centres and kept records of cases of physical or psychological violence against children.

30. Health-care providers were obliged to abide by the norms governing legal abortion. The norms envisaged the right of professionals to refuse to carry out an abortion on grounds of conscientious objection but also made it clear that the exercise of that right should not violate the right of women to undergo the procedure. In addition, the norms contained a section on informed consent and included provision for a register in which details about abortion requests and the procedures actually carried out were recorded. As no age limit was stipulated, women or girls of any age were able to access legal abortion. Following the promulgation of the norms, the institution responsible for public health services – the Costa Rican Social Security Fund – had been given six months to draft protocols for their implementation.

31. All health-care plans were adapted on the basis of the age of the persons concerned, including children. In the domain of mental health, group activities took place which aimed to promote citizenship skills, conflict resolution and non-violence through artistic and creative activities as well as via the use of technology, leisure and sport. Disability remained a challenge for Costa Rica and many improvements still needed to be made; for example, an
evaluation of the situation of adolescent girls, due to have been conducted by the National Council of Persons with Disabilities, was still pending. Nonetheless, the Costa Rican Social Security Fund remained wedded to the concept of disability rights and had included persons with disabilities, including children, in an operational protocol it had issued in 2018.

32. Ms. Murillo Solís (Costa Rica) said that the National Agenda for Children and Adolescents contained provisions intended to protect children and adolescents with disabilities from ill-treatment and abandonment, and to prevent their institutionalization. The National Child Welfare Agency and other national bodies had worked with UNICEF to improve the 911 emergency hotline with a view to making it more easily accessible to children with disabilities in risk situations, including those with hearing impairments. The 911 hotline could be called from anywhere in the country by persons whose lives, freedom, physical integrity or personal safety were at risk. Depending upon the situation, callers would be transferred directly to the body best able to meet their requirements; for example, the fire brigade, the Costa Rican Red Cross, the Ministry of Public Security, the National Child Welfare Agency or the National Institute for Women.

33. The State took measures to help the families of children with disabilities in order to prevent abuse, neglect and abandonment. In the second half of 2016, 17 children with disabilities had received technical assistance from the National Child Welfare Agency, while 70 had benefited from support services. In the first half of 2017, 13 children had received technical assistance and 62 had made use of support services. In the second half of 2017, nearly 300 children with disabilities had been included in programmes run by the country’s parenting academies.

34. In 2018, 977 children with disabilities had attended childcare centres run by the National Childcare and Development Network while their parents were at work. In the same year, the National Directorate of Education and Nutrition Centres and Child Nutrition and Integrated Services Centres had distributed free milk and food to children who showed signs of malnutrition, reporting that children with disabilities accounted for 1.4 per cent of the total beneficiaries. Meanwhile, the Inter-Agency Institute for Social Assistance had increased by 15 per cent the allowance provided to the families of children with disabilities, a measure that had benefited some 1,160 children. All children, including children with disabilities, could submit complaints concerning violations of their rights via the National Child Welfare Agency’s website.

35. Ms. Duncan Villalobos (Costa Rica) said that the National Emergency Commission had, in 2018, launched regulations and a campaign to ensure that persons with disabilities received accessible information with respect to emergency plans and were included in early warning systems. The new regulations had led to institutional policies, protocols and procedures being modified in order to be more inclusive of persons with disabilities. The staff of the relevant institutions had received training on disability-inclusive emergency management. Educational materials had been specially produced for persons with visual impairments, and five videos featuring testimonials from children with disabilities who had been affected by natural disasters had been produced and shared on social media.

36. In 10 communities that were highly vulnerable to natural disasters, a theatre production explaining the procedure for protecting and caring for persons with disabilities in emergencies had been produced, with an estimated audience of 550 children and adolescents with and without disabilities. Plans were in place to train the staff of organizations that worked with persons with disabilities in the psychosocial support to be provided to children in the aftermath of emergencies.

37. Ms. Khazova said that it would be useful to know how the State party dealt with children with behavioural problems, especially in schools. The Committee was aware of a tendency in many States to overmedicate such children, which could be extremely damaging to their health.

38. Mr. Rodríguez Reyes said that he would like to hear more about the State party’s mental health policy for children, including whether priority was given to institutionalization or treatment in the home.
39. He wondered whether the Government had assigned a budget for the implementation of inclusive education in Costa Rica. Specifically, the delegation might comment on how the State party planned to phase out special schools and policies that separated children with disabilities from other children. On a related note, the Committee would be interested to hear whether plans were in place to train teachers and teaching assistants in how to impart knowledge to children with disabilities, including psychosocial disabilities.

40. With respect to statistics, it would be useful to know whether the data collected on children with disabilities was disaggregated by disability and region. He would welcome information on the State party’s policy with regard to the sterilization of girls with disabilities, including whether their consent was sought. Lastly, he would like to hear about any campaigns that were in place to eliminate prejudice against children with disabilities, and whether programmes to promote inclusion encompassed not only schools but also leisure pursuits such as sport and music.

The meeting was suspended at 11.35 a.m. and resumed at 11.50 a.m.

41. Ms. Lobo Ugalde (Costa Rica) said that the National Child Welfare Agency and the National Council of Persons with Disabilities worked in a collaborative manner to provide inclusive services and financial support to the families of children with disabilities with a view to preventing institutionalization. The Council assisted families that were living in poverty by providing housing subsidies, care assistants, financial allocations and other support, depending on the nature of the disability concerned. The National Child Welfare Agency and the Council coordinated closely with respect to institutionalized minors, who came under the protection of the Council once they turned 18.

42. With respect to women deprived of their liberty, two prisons had mother-and-child units. At the Vilma Curling Rivera prison for women, 28 children were currently being held with their mothers, and 2 women were pregnant. At the Zurquí juvenile detention centre, one 18-year-old woman who had entered the prison as a minor was detained with her 2-year-old child, and one pregnant minor was in pretrial detention.

43. The regulations governing the national prison system dictated that children could be held with their mothers until the age of 3. Before the child’s third birthday, a team of social workers and psychologists carried out assessments and coordinated with the National Child Welfare Agency in order to rehouse him or her within the community, usually with a foster family. All efforts were made to avoid institutionalizing such children.

44. The Government had built partnerships with NGOs that could provide homes for children in the absence of a suitable foster home. Mothers in the prison system received support and training in responsible parenting, healthy lifestyles and child nutrition, while their children were given access to crèches, learning materials and medical treatment. Milk, nappies, clothes and personal hygiene items for the use of mothers and children were also provided.

45. Ms. Arce Meneses (Costa Rica) said that the National Child Welfare Agency had invested in nearly 200 playgrounds for children in rural, coastal and border communities and vulnerable urban areas. In order to boost participation in sports, the Agency was working on an agreement to establish 111 sports training colleges in conjunction with the Costa Rican Sports Institute and various sporting federations. More than 4,000 children would have the opportunity to be trained in a range of sports, including sports such as rugby, skating and table tennis, which were not traditionally practised in those areas.

46. Costa Rica also boasted sports schools for children and adolescents with disabilities. In Talamanca, the region with the largest indigenous population, an innovative initiative had led to the development of a school for indigenous games thanks to considerable government investment. In each of the country’s early intervention centres, a physical education teacher drew up an individual and collective work plan for each child, with a focus on learning through play.

47. Mr. Burgos Mata (Costa Rica) said that the law on the juvenile criminal justice system dated back some 24 years. The jurisprudence of Costa Rican courts in that area of law formed the basis for training courses in other Latin American countries.
48. Postgraduate law degrees at the University of Costa Rica included modules on juvenile criminal justice. In addition, courses, conferences and other initiatives relating to juvenile criminal justice were promoted both within the judiciary and at the University. Juvenile justice was such an integral part of the criminal justice system that one of the five criminal judges currently serving on the 22-judge Supreme Court was an expert in that discipline.

49. The State ensured that no adult or juvenile defendants were forced to pay for their legal defence. On the very rare occasions when police abuse occurred, the Public Defence Service took immediate action. All cases were investigated and the accused brought to trial.

50. The Juvenile Criminal Justice Act applied to minors aged 12 to 18 years of age charged with offences, as well as to adults who had committed offences as minors, provided that the statute of limitations for the offence, if applicable, had not expired. In cases where an offence committed by a minor was not specifically covered by juvenile criminal law, the general rules of justice applied, but such cases were the exception, not the rule. Specific laws guaranteed juvenile defendants’ right to appeal.

51. Considerable work had been undertaken to promote community service and other alternatives to custodial sentences for juvenile offenders, with a high degree of success. In the province of Cartago, 85 per cent of those who had benefited from suspended sentences had not reoffended.

52. The poor living conditions found at Zurquí juvenile detention centre in 2012 had improved significantly as a result of remedial action taken by the Ministry of Justice. The isolated complaints of violence that had been received since then had been investigated by the relevant bodies. The approach taken by the Public Prosecution Service was to prosecute drug dealers and not consumers; no young person would be prosecuted solely for taking drugs.

53. Despite widespread opposition from judges, a recent decision by the Constitutional Chamber had ruled that security measures – which were imposed for acts that were classified as crimes but for which the perpetrator was not culpable, owing to a lack of cognitive capacity or criminal intent – could be imposed on minors. It was hoped that, with the new composition of the Supreme Court, which included a judge specialized in juvenile criminal law, the Court’s doctrine would be reviewed in the near future and that there would be a shift to a more restorative approach to juvenile justice. Under the Juvenile Criminal Penalties Act, all sentences, whether custodial or non-custodial, handed down against minors had to be followed up by a specialized court.

54. Ms. Duncan Villalobos (Costa Rica) said that Costa Rica had become a destination country for many asylum seekers and refugees from across the American continent, including Venezuela, the countries in the Northern Triangle of Central America, Colombia and Nicaragua. A comprehensive migration policy for the period 2013-2023 was in place and legislation had been enacted to promote the full integration of migrants into society. Costa Rica was party to the Inter-American Convention against all Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance and had signed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the global compact on refugees.

55. In 2019, for the first time in Costa Rican history, around 30 public institutions and 7 international organizations had begun joint work on a protocol for addressing issues surrounding migratory flows. In spite of its limited resources, Costa Rica had implemented public policies to host migrants and had developed best practice in the area. However, the country’s ability to manage migration trends had been seriously compromised since 2017, when immigration had surged. The political and social crisis in Nicaragua in April 2018 had resulted in an exponential increase in asylum applications: in 2017, the country had received an average of just over 500 asylum applications per month; in 2018, that number had risen by more than 700 per cent. Thereafter, the number of applications had continued to increase, reaching an average of 3,300 per month by the end of October 2019.

56. Her country had adopted positive measures to combat xenophobia – including public awareness-raising campaigns and training of staff dealing with asylum seekers – and to ensure the economic, social and cultural rights of migrants – including the rights to
employment, education and social security – from the moment they submitted their application for asylum or any other form of international protection. Applicants were granted a three-month work permit pending the resolution of their asylum application. Steps had been taken to ensure respect for the principle of non-refoulement so that foreign nationals in need of protection were not returned to their country of origin. In spite of the country’s weak financial situation, guidelines had been established for inter-agency coordination to help integrate migrants. While processing applications remained a challenge, the decentralization of the Refugee Unit, in coordination with UNHCR, had streamlined application procedures and cut waiting times.

57. The rights of child migrants to health care and education were respected, regardless of their migration status, as soon as they entered national territory. A protocol was in place for the identification, care and protection of refugee or stateless minors. The Government worked with UNICEF to ensure that the needs of all migrant children were met and their fundamental rights respected in accordance with the country’s international obligations. The Government worked in cooperation with the Association of Psychologists to assist in the restoration of the rights of migrant students and to help build their potential. Pilot projects were in place to regularize the situation of students in border areas and to develop the right to education for children with transitory migration status.

58. To ensure that schools were safe and free from violence, the Student Rights Office had established complaints mechanisms and protocols for the prevention of bullying, physical and psychological violence, and the consumption of drugs. The Office comprised interdisciplinary professionals specialized in education administration, psychology and sociology. Measures were taken at the national level to prevent and raise awareness of bullying in order to foster a culture of knowledge and to enforce children’s rights legislation. Where appropriate, the education authorities referred cases to the juvenile courts and prosecutor’s offices.

59. A protocol for schools to deal with domestic and gender-based violence had been updated, and teachers received training to implement it in schools in priority areas. As part of the Ministry of Education’s early childhood policy, a project to promote a culture of peace and equality from an early age was being implemented. The “Schools for Change” programme, which was part of the Ministry’s gender policy, had been developed in conjunction with the National Institute for Women and was being run in 140 schools. The Ministry’s gender-sensitive masculinity programme sought to raise awareness of, and foster a commitment towards, gender equality among male students and teachers. A national strategy to promote healthy relationships sought to raise awareness at the national level, and regional education authorities and schools were encouraged to develop similar strategies.

60. The Ministry of Public Security, in coordination with the Ministry of Education, provided training to its staff on dealing with domestic violence cases. Any calls regarding domestic violence received by 911 emergency operators were handled as a matter of priority. A specialized team of trained police officers responded to domestic violence incidents, provided follow-up care to victims and enforced special protective measures. The team regularly visited the homes of victims and conducted risk analyses.

61. Specialized police officers visited schools across the country to help teach young children about how to avoid becoming victims of crime. Within communities, training was provided on public security, including how to make complaints regarding domestic violence, with an emphasis on cases affecting children and adolescents. The “GREAT” programme was designed to discourage children from becoming involved in drug trafficking and from joining gangs.

62. At the national level, the school dropout rate had fallen to around 3 per cent, the lowest level in recent years. At the lower and upper secondary school levels, dropout rates were also at their lowest in recent years, at 7.2 per cent. Between 2014 and 2018, preschool attendance had risen from 63 per cent to 84 per cent. To boost school attendance among children and adolescents, grants were offered and school canteens had been improved.

63. The creation of a digital filing system and major investment in health-care infrastructure as part of a new national plan had facilitated access to medical care and
significantly reduced waiting lists. In recent years, waiting times had been cut for hundreds of thousands of patients in need of medical treatment, surgery and specialist consultations.

64. At the end of 2019, Costa Rica had hosted PRE COP 25, a preparatory meeting for the conference of parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Youth groups, civil society and UNICEF had requested support from the Ministry of Culture and Youth to coordinate various events related to the participation of young people in action to combat climate change. As a result, a side event to the PRE COP 25 involving various youth groups from all over Latin America had been organized and dialogues had been held with the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Following the event, a youth declaration on climate change had been signed on behalf of Latin American youth. Furthermore, the Deputy Minister of Culture and Youth had taken part in various panel discussions highlighting the importance of listening to young people on the issue of climate change. A public policy for young persons for the period from 2020 to 2024 was being developed, which would include consultations on climate change with young persons aged between 12 and 35 from different communities. The policy would soon be made official by executive decree.

65. Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi said that Costa Rica had introduced praiseworthy plans and policies to uphold the rights of children, in spite of its unprecedented budget crisis. However, many challenges remained. In particular, the Government would do well to step up its efforts to protect children from violence, particularly its cultural and structural aspects.

66. Ms. Duncan Villalobos (Costa Rica) said that her country was committed to ensuring respect for the rights of children and it recognized the fundamental role of the Committee and other human rights treaty bodies in that regard.

67. The Chair (Country Rapporteur), thanking the delegation for what had been a fruitful dialogue, said that the Committee encouraged the State party to disseminate its concluding observations in such a way that they would be easily understood by the children of Costa Rica.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.