Committee on the Rights of the Child
Eighty-third session
Summary record of the 2432nd meeting
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Monday, 20 January 2020, at 3 p.m.
Chair: Mr. Pedernera Reyna

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Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Belarus
The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties

Combined fifth and sixth periodic reports of Belarus (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. Karpenko (Belarus), introducing his country’s fifth and sixth periodic reports (CRC/C/BLR/5-6), said that the report had been adopted by the National Commission on the Rights of the Child and submitted to the Committee in 2018. Since then, however, Belarus had continued taking steps to give effect to the provisions of the Convention, including ongoing reviews of the country’s legal framework to ensure that it was compatible with the Convention.

3. In January 2019, the Government had adopted a resolution establishing criteria for the identification of at-risk children, which had led to changes in the approaches taken to preventive work with dysfunctional families, the aim being to enable children to continue living with their families. A presidential decree had been adopted with a view to boosting birth rates and ensuring long-term support for families with numerous children. In December 2019, a number of legislative amendments had been adopted with a view to encouraging out-of-court dispute resolution in family and other social matters, enhancing legal regulations relating to family relations and incorporating the provisions of international legal instruments, including the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, into domestic law. A bill on amendments to the Education Code had been drafted with the aim of making inclusiveness a core principle of State education policy.

4. The National Commission on the Rights of the Child, headed by a deputy prime minister, coordinated efforts to promote and protect children’s rights. It had considered a wide range of child-protection issues in 2019, and its members conducted periodic visits to relevant organizations and institutions to learn about the best practices for creating a favourable environment for children. Local branches of the Office of the Procurator General briefed the Commission on the results of their efforts to monitor the implementation of the Convention and the enforcement of relevant domestic laws. In April 2020, the Commission planned to discuss activities designed to prevent violence against children.

5. Hundreds of applications for the protection of children’s rights had been submitted to the Commission in 2019, including by children, and local offices of the Commission held monthly meetings with children, their parents or guardians, and other citizens on issues relating to the rights and protection of children. In October, Commission members had joined forces with public officials to respond to a situation caused by an unemployed father who had refused to allow his three children to attend school unless he was reinstated in his job.

6. The Government of Belarus made efforts to promote legal literacy among children and their parents, including with regard to the Convention. A special website provided legal information for children. Citizenship, legal and human rights education was provided in secondary schools, and a wide range of courses that touched on the rights of the child was offered in the country’s institutions of higher learning. The broadcast and print media also contributed to efforts to promote children’s rights.

7. The Government had taken steps to ensure that children and young people were involved in decision-making. Youth parliaments met throughout the country, for example, and work was under way to establish a Youth Chamber in the National Assembly. Belarusian delegations sometimes included representatives of youth parliaments, as had been the case with a delegation participating in a panel discussion in February 2019 at the United Nations Office at Geneva. In 2019 members of a student council had been consulted on a bill containing proposed amendments to the Education Code. As part of an initiative introduced by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 24 of the country’s cities had
been recognized as child-friendly. A number of other initiatives had been undertaken with a view to ensuring that the country’s children, including those with disabilities, participated in efforts to promote and protect their rights. In 2020, educational institutions throughout the country would launch a project to enhance parenting skills.

8. As a result of the measures taken to improve protection for children in vulnerable families, the percentage of children in Belarus who were orphans or lacked parental care had fallen to less than 1 per cent in 2018. The number of children whose parents had been deprived of their parental rights had also fallen. As part of the new approach to preventive work, inter-agency activities had been carried out with a view to eliminating the causes of the vulnerabilities faced by disadvantaged families.

9. By law, the top priority for children in Belarus who were put up for adoption was to ensure that they were adopted domestically. Nationals of Belarus had adopted 409 children in 2019, whereas 78 children had been adopted by nationals of other countries. Just under 46 per cent of the nearly 4,700 children adopted over the period 2011–2019 had been adopted from orphanages or care homes. Fourteen family-type children’s homes had been opened in 2019, continuing a trend that had begun nine years earlier. The number of children living in larger residential institutions had fallen by 80 per cent since 2011.

10. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children had visited Belarus in 2018. While there, she had met with schoolchildren and representatives of children’s and youth councils, and she had been apprised of the measures that educational institutions were taking to prevent violence against children. Teachers systematically reported any signs of such violence to the police and to the parents or guardians of the children concerned. Mediation projects designed to help resolve disputes, including between peers, had been launched in 58 schools in 2019.

11. Other recent steps to prevent violence against children had included the provision of support by the Ministry of Education for the implementation of a safe schools programme modelled on a similar initiative undertaken in Croatia. A multidisciplinary team had been set up to respond swiftly to reports of violations of children’s rights. The team members could visit educational institutions, conduct investigations and, if necessary, ensure that the administrators at schools where such violations occurred were prosecuted.

12. The Government undertook to implement the provisions of the Convention regarding the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Every year, for example, summer recreational activities and health campaigns were organized. Some 400,000 children and adolescents had taken part in such activities in 2019. A psychological support centre, whose mandate was to provide comprehensive psychological, social and educational support, had opened in 2019. The centre maintained a website with a chat feature that allowed children, parents and teachers to request help anonymously. Regional networks of crisis psychologists had also been set up.

13. The Ministry of Education had recently adopted a decision on the establishment of a comprehensive system for providing psychological and social support and educational assistance to minors and their parents or guardians, with multidisciplinary centres throughout the country. In 2020, the Ministry intended to study international best practices for the provision of psychological support to children and teenagers before launching a number of pilot projects aimed at improving support services. The ministerial authorities would welcome expert recommendations in that regard.

14. Ms. Aldoseri (Country Task Force) said that she wished to know whether the State party was undertaking a comprehensive review of its legislation to ensure that the domestic legal framework as a whole, not merely the laws relating to forced migration, was in conformity with the Convention. She also wished to know whether the 2016–2020 National Human Rights Action Plan and 2017–2021 National Action Plan to Improve the Situation of Children and Safeguard Their Rights encompassed all the areas covered by the Convention and the Optional Protocols; whether funding for the implementation of those plans had been obtained; whether the development of the plans had involved setting measurable objectives; and whether means of assessing the plans’ outcomes had been identified.
15. She was pleased to note that the National Commission on the Rights of the Child came under the office of a deputy prime minister, which could contribute to its authority and prominence. She wondered, however, why the Commission secretariat was part of the Ministry of Education. She also wondered why the Ministry of Education rather than the Commission was responsible for coordinating efforts to implement the Convention. In addition, she wished to know why consideration was being given to merging the National Commission and the country’s commissions for minors. She believed that such a merger would be unwise.

16. She would welcome information on whether needs-assessment surveys were conducted in order to allocate targeted budgets for child protection, whether a tracking system had been put in place to assess the effectiveness of expenditures and identify gaps, how the data collected by different agencies were consolidated and analysed and, as previously recommended by the Committee (CRC/C/BLR/CO/3-4, para. 19), whether modern systems to enhance the collection of disaggregated data had been set up. She would also welcome a comment on whether the State party had decided to set up a national human rights institution. It would be interesting to learn what agency, in the absence of such an institution, received complaints from and on behalf of children. Information on any plans to establish an ombudsman’s office for children’s rights would also be welcome, as would information on any systematic efforts to raise awareness of the Convention.

17. She would be interested in learning whether the legislative amendments introduced in November 2013 had facilitated the establishment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and decriminalized the activities of persons working with unregistered organizations. In the same connection, she wondered whether there was a systematic procedure for ensuring the involvement of NGOs working on children’s rights in relevant activities. Lastly, she would like to know what mechanisms were in place to ensure that children could exercise their right to express their views, particularly in school, without fear of retribution. Were there any laws protecting that right?

18. Ms. Sidikou (Country Task Force), noting the stigmatization and discrimination faced by children with severe and complex disabilities, asked whether a chapter on discrimination would be included in the draft law on persons with disabilities and their social integration. In the light of reports that children with HIV/AIDS were not permitted to enrol in some educational institutions and had limited access to health care, she wondered whether the Government planned to amend the relevant regulations to put an end to that discrimination.

19. The best interests of the child principle had not been incorporated into domestic legislation and was therefore not applied in a systematic manner; that was a cause for particular concern in situations involving institutionalized children, asylum-seeking children and children in conflict with the law. She would appreciate further information on the coordinating council that was responsible for analysing the situations of children considered for placement in institutions under Council of Ministers Resolution No. 22 of 15 January 2019, and on the measures taken to ensure that the council operated on the basis of the best interests of the child. She also wished to know whether the Government planned to amend the legislation allowing for the detention of asylum-seeking children so as to put an end to that discrimination.

20. She welcomed the State party’s efforts to improve support for parents. However, as mothers remained more involved than fathers in early learning activities, she wondered whether there were plans to increase paternal participation and promote shared parental responsibility. Given that only one out of three mothers practised exclusive breastfeeding for the period recommended by the World Health Organization, she would like to know what measures were being taken to support breastfeeding and restrict the marketing of breastmilk substitutes, whether there was a programme to educate pregnant women and new parents on the issue, and whether there was a capacity-building programme for health workers to enable them to advise parents on breastfeeding.

21. On the issue of child participation, she wondered whether the Government could increase funding for small youth organizations and institute a democratic process for selecting members of youth parliaments so that all groups of children, including children in
situations of vulnerability, children with disabilities and underprivileged children, would have the opportunity to participate.

22. **Ms. Todorova** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) said that she would appreciate information on any steps taken to improve birth registration for Roma children and any government plans to improve the collection of data on stateless persons and undocumented parents, whose Belarus-born children risked becoming stateless. She would like to learn more about the right to privacy of children in Belarus, including children who were involved in cases of violence reported in the media or were in government care. She also wished to know how children’s personal data were protected and how children’s right to access information, particularly on the Internet, was guaranteed. She wondered whether children could access the Internet easily and how their rights were protected online.

23. **Ms. Winter** (Country Task Force) said that, regrettably, the State party appeared to have made little progress in addressing violence against children and guaranteeing children’s right not to be subjected to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including corporal punishment. The relevant legislation existed, but its implementation was problematic, and although a helpline for children had been set up, it seemed unlikely that all children in the country knew about it. She was pleased that a draft family law before parliament would forbid corporal punishment in all settings and would be interested in hearing what steps the Government planned to take to explicitly prohibit corporal punishment and to provide training on non-violent education for parents, teachers and the staff of institutions.

24. A report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus (A/HRC/41/52) had noted that there was a desire to create “unbearable conditions” for prisoners detained for drug-related offences. She wondered how the bests interests of the child were taken into consideration when children were sentenced under article 328, the relevant article of the Criminal Code.

25. There had been many allegations of inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment in all forms of “closed type” institutions. Children in prison were reportedly allowed only infrequent family visits, with only one family member allowed to visit at a time, and had no real chance to receive a secondary education, although education was compulsory for all children. Moreover, children in prisons and other detention settings were required to do work under conditions that, according to reports made available to the Committee, were sometimes akin to slavery, with long hours of physically demanding work that was unsuitable for children and harmful to their health. The children also often had limited or no access to medical care, and the reports suggested that such access, like access to education and family visits, was granted at the discretion of prison staff. Lastly, she would be interested in hearing the delegation’s thoughts on why convictions of girls and the rate of recidivism among children had increased, whether the Government planned to change the conditions of detention for children charged with drug-related offenses and why the age of responsibility had been lowered for those offences.

26. **Mr. Gudbrandsson** said that he was concerned about the lack of information in the State party report on child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse, and on any system for responding to such abuse. He wished to know whether any structures were in place under the “Child-friendly cities” initiative to ensure a multisectoral response to child sexual abuse and provide services for the victims. He wondered whether the “houses of understanding” run by NGOs, which provided child-friendly forensic interviewing facilities, were still in operation, whether they received support from the Government and whether the involvement of different sectors was ensured.

*The meeting was suspended at 4.05 p.m. and resumed at 4.25 p.m.*

27. **Mr. Lashyn** (Belarus) said that the State party had a centralized, independent prosecution service that monitored implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and protected the rights and legitimate interests of minors. A network of specialized children’s rights prosecutors operated in each region and city in the country. Prosecutors had broad powers to inspect any public institution, including “closed type” institutions, and require that any children’s rights violations detected be eliminated. Perpetrators faced disciplinary, financial, administrative and criminal penalties.
28. Prosecutors could file lawsuits in the interests of children, and children could apply to prosecutors for the protection of their rights. Citizens, organizations and officials were obligated to report violations of children’s rights to a prosecutor. In 2019, prosecutors had investigated approximately 500 complaints regarding such violations, approximately 300 lawsuits had been filed on behalf of minors and more than 2,000 inspections had been conducted. As a result, thousands of violations had been remedied and more than 5,000 people had been brought to justice.

29. Claims that children’s rights had been violated were investigated thoroughly, with on-site visits and interviews with the children concerned. Measures were then taken to remedy violations. Such complaints had, for example, led to criminal proceedings being brought against a citizen accused of kidnapping an orphan and a border official accused of allowing a child to cross the border illegally.

30. The monitoring activities of the prosecution service had revealed numerous violations of the rights of orphans and children with disabilities, which had led to the approval and implementation of an interdepartmental action plan to improve conditions for children with disabilities and their families. A draft law on volunteering would be submitted to parliament in 2021 with the aim of increasing the involvement of civil society and volunteers in protecting the rights of orphans and children with disabilities. Monitoring by prosecution authorities had also shown the need for improvements to national legislation aimed at preventing families from becoming disadvantaged, which had given rise to the adoption of a government decree on prevention of family disadvantage and orphanhood. In 2019, following the implementation of the decree, the number of disadvantaged families had declined by 30 per cent.

31. In 2019, children had been invited to express their views at an international conference held in Minsk on the prevention of drug and alcohol consumption by minors. Following the conference, which had also been attended by representatives of civil society and a variety of government entities, proposals had been made to improve work on the prevention of children’s use of psychoactive substances.

32. Ms. Chaushnik (Belarus) said that a review of domestic legislation conducted in 2018 had shown that certain laws needed to be brought into line with the provisions of the Convention relating to the best interests of the child. In December 2019, a number of articles of the Marriage and Family Code had been amended to require either that the opinion of the child should be considered or that the consent of the child should be obtained when decisions were taken regarding that child. The Government planned to incorporate the best interests of the child principle into the Act on the Granting of Refugee Status, Subsidiary Protection, Asylum and Temporary Protection to Foreign Nationals and Stateless Persons in Belarus (Forced Migration Act).

33. The draft law on the rights of persons with disabilities and their social integration, currently before parliament, clearly provided that children with disabilities should enjoy the same rights and freedoms as other children and that the best interests of the child must be ensured in all actions taken with respect to children with disabilities. The draft law included a definition of disability-based discrimination, set out the different forms of discrimination that existed and provided for criminal prosecution of cases of discrimination.

34. Mr. Tamilchyk (Belarus) said that the National Action Plan to Improve the Situation of Children and Safeguard Their Rights for 2017–2021 was the fourth such plan to be implemented. Its purpose was to facilitate the fulfilment of the country’s international obligations in the area of children’s rights by creating the necessary legal and institutional conditions and improving implementation mechanisms. The Plan’s objectives included upholding children’s rights to a high-quality education, social protection and inclusion, and health care; enabling them to live in a family setting and to take part in decisions affecting their interests; and protecting them from violence and exploitation. The Plan also sought to facilitate international cooperation to promote children’s rights. Implementation of the Plan was coordinated by the National Commission on the Rights of the Child. The Plan set out expected results, which ensured effective monitoring and evaluation of its implementation. Actions under the Plan were carried out by local and national government agencies, with
input from voluntary associations and scientific and religious organizations and with financial and technical support from international organizations.

35. Operational leadership of the National Commission on the Rights of the Child was ensured by its Chair; the Ministry of Education provided organizational and technical support. In January 2019, the Council of Ministers had decided not to merge the Commission with the commissions for minors, since those bodies complemented rather than duplicated each other’s work.

36. In accordance with the Rights of the Child Act, the State was required to protect children from all forms of violence and exploitation, including abuse within the family. Preventive work was carried out within the education system, both with students and their parents or guardians. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Internal Affairs had jointly developed a package of measures to maintain discipline in educational establishments and a procedure under which teaching staff informed parents, students and the relevant authorities when signs of violence against a child were identified. Professional development programmes for teachers, psychologists and other specialists working with children covered topics such as fostering a public culture of non-violence, rehabilitation of child victims of violence and prevention of violence against children. Whenever a case of violence was identified by an educational establishment, the administration would request the intervention of a rapid response group from the Ministry of Education, which investigated the situation and made recommendations.

37. Various rehabilitation measures could be applied in respect of children in conflict with the law, the most severe of which was referral to a special educational or treatment facility where, in a closed setting, children underwent a programme of general secondary education and training in basic occupational skills. They also received specialist social support and psychological assistance. Only about 240 children per year were referred; as at 20 January 2020, 180 minors, 15 per cent of whom were girls, had been resident in such institutions. Children residing in such a facility could send and receive letters and meet with their parents without any restrictions. They could also be allowed home visits or granted early release. The safety of children and the prevention of violence in the institutions was ensured. Three out of four of the children and adolescents released from such establishments were successfully integrated into society and did not reoffend, which indicated that the approach taken was effective.

38. The law allowed any citizen to establish a voluntary association and to receive government grants, including under the National Youth Programme. Young persons themselves decided which associations to join; there was no bias in favour of pro-Government organizations.

39. **Mr. Kazakevich** (Belarus) said that the number of drug-related offences had significantly increased between 2012 and 2014, while the age of the typical drug user had decreased. The same period had seen a surge in drug overdoses, including among children. By 2019, legislative and practical measures, including the lowering of the age of criminal responsibility to 14 years of age for drug trafficking offences, had enabled a fivefold reduction in the number of such offences involving minors, along with a twentyfold reduction in drug overdoses among children; no child had died of an overdose since 2015. In 2019, the National Assembly had amended article 328 of the Criminal Code to reduce the minimum sentence for the sale of drugs by two years, thus enabling courts to adopt a more discretionary approach to sentencing. The main focus of the country’s anti-drug policy was prevention rather than punishment. Since 2014, the Government had implemented a series of two-year national plans mandating a comprehensive approach, with an emphasis on prevention. Annual reports on implementation of the plans were presented to the Government and Head of State. He believed that government efforts to combat the drug threat had been effective and could not be characterized as excessively harsh.

40. **Ms. Batyrtyskaya** (Belarus) said that children received custodial sentences only in cases involving very serious offences. Twenty years earlier, there had been three young offenders’ institutions, with a total of 1,500 inmates, whereas currently there was a single institution with only 141 inmates, only 2 of whom were under the age of 16. The reduction in the number of incarcerated minors had been achieved thanks to amendments to the
Criminal Code, which had empowered courts to impose individualized penalties, including a broad range of non-custodial measures. Under an amnesty act passed in 2019, 80 young offenders, including youth convicted of drug trafficking offences, had benefited from a two-year reduction in their sentences.

41. Following the amendment of article 328 of the Criminal Code, the sentences of all persons convicted under the relevant provisions had been reviewed, as a result of which 53 young offenders had had their sentences reduced by two years and 7 had been exempted from serving the remainder of their sentences. The average sentence for minors convicted under the article was currently between 4 and 6 years. Residents of the young offenders’ institution who had reached 18 years of age were able to transfer to an open prison or switch to a semi-custodial sentence.

42. Following a 2016 amendment to the Penalties Enforcement Code, persons detained in a young offenders’ institution were entitled to 12 family visits per year and could be granted additional visits for good behaviour. Since 2019, the internal regulations of penal facilities had been amended to allow video calls for detainees; that change had first been implemented in the young offenders’ institution.

43. All detainees who had not completed their secondary education were enrolled at the school located on the grounds of the young offenders’ institution, which had had 41 students as at 1 January 2020. Those with a general secondary education could continue their studies at a vocational and technical college. In January 2020, 55 inmates had been enrolled in various vocational courses. Since 2016, it had been possible for inmates to pursue a higher education qualification through distance learning, at their own expense. Two inmates were currently availing themselves of that opportunity. All minors held in remand centres could continue their secondary education. Teachers from their previous schools visited the remand centres and sent exercises by email. If minors completed their education during their detention, they could sit the final exams and receive the usual certificates.

44. Mr. Melnik (Belarus) said that all international obligations of Belarus regarding the protection of children from abuse had been enshrined in national legislation, including a specific provision on violence against children by family members. Preventing domestic violence and ensuring prompt assistance to victims were priorities. The Government had long-standing partnerships with various NGOs to achieve that goal. An example was its collaboration on annual preventive campaigns with the theme “a home without violence”. The United Nations Population Fund was providing technical assistance for capacity-building in the area of gender-based violence prevention.

45. In 2019, 127 offences involving the sexual abuse of children by close relatives had been identified. That was an increase from previous years, as measures including awareness-raising and the early flagging of problems within families had led to increased detection of such incidents. Any form of violence against children was considered utterly unacceptable in Belarusian society, and the issue was taken very seriously. All relevant stakeholders worked to ensure that such crimes were brought to light.

46. As at 1 January 2020, there had been 70 children with refugee status in the country. Under the Forced Migration Act, child migrants had most of the same rights as citizens of Belarus, including the same entitlements to free education and health care. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children were dealt with by the citizenship and immigration units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which were responsible for establishing the identity of such children, drawing up abandoned child reports and promptly informing the guardianship authorities. As soon as the abandoned child report was issued, the unaccompanied minor had the status of a foreign national seeking international protection. The guardianship authorities placed asylum-seeking children in residential homes or, for children over the age of 16 years, could approve their placement in temporary accommodation for refugees. In exceptional cases, children might be held in holding and processing centres while their identity was being established. Very few children were held in such centres and those who were generally were persons whose appearance indicated that they were adults. At the request of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, psychologists were involved in the asylum process, along with immigration and guardianship authorities.
Although the legislation provided for deportation, not a single minor had been deported from Belarus.

47. **Mr. Lashyn** (Belarus) said that all forms of physical and mental violence, including corporal punishment of children, were prohibited under domestic legislation and punishable by administrative, disciplinary, civil and criminal sanctions. Perpetrators could be held administratively liable under articles 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3 of the Code of Administrative Offences and criminally liable under articles 147, 149, 153 and 154 of the Criminal Code, among other provisions. Teachers and other education staff found guilty of resorting to non-pedagogical methods could face disciplinary action, including dismissal, in accordance with article 198 of the Labour Code. Since 2015, more than 500 individuals had been prosecuted for abusing a family member aged under 18 years. Persons convicted were required to undergo rehabilitation, and, in cases where a child’s life or health were deemed to be in danger, he or she could be placed under State care through a court decision. Compensation could be awarded to victims of violence under article 152 of the Civil Code.

48. **Ms. Labkovich** (Belarus) said that the issue of equal participation of mothers and fathers in the upbringing of children was addressed in the Government’s gender policies and was the subject of an ongoing national study. A survey carried out in 2016 by the National Statistical Committee had revealed that women devoted an average of 2.5 times more hours per day to household responsibilities, including child care, than men. While parents were entitled to up to three years of paid leave and could divide that period between themselves as they saw fit, it was the mother who took leave in 99 per cent of cases. In 2019, as part of efforts to redress that imbalance, the Labour Code had been amended to provide for two weeks of paternity leave that could not be denied by employers. Steps were also being taken to eliminate gender stereotypes and raise awareness of the importance of sharing domestic tasks. Support was being provided in that regard by non-governmental and international organizations, notably the United Nations Population Fund. The Government was working with employers to ensure that workplaces were family-friendly, and had decided to dedicate an entire chapter of the National Plan of Action on Gender Equality for the period 2021–2025 to the issue of equal participation of parents in the upbringing of children.

49. **Ms. Todorova** said that she wished to know which authorities were responsible at the local level for making decisions regarding the placement of children in care, and why that responsibility had been taken away from courts, given that article 32 of the Constitution provided that children could be removed from their families only by court order. She would also like to know to which authority commissions for minors were answerable, what the mandate of those commissions was, whether that mandate included dealing with child offenders, and, if so, why such commissions were reportedly involved in conducting family assessments. In addition, she would be interested to hear about the composition and work of local coordination councils and about the professional training and qualifications of the staff of children’s authorities, particularly members of the commissions for minors. Details on the status and development of social work as a profession and as an academic discipline in Belarus would also be welcome.

50. Pursuant to the Marriage and Family Code, the deprivation of parental rights was a measure of last resort. Nevertheless, the Committee had received information indicating that parents could be stripped of their rights for a number of reasons, including ill health, unemployment or economic hardship. She wondered whether that was true, and to what extent the inability of parents to support their children financially was an obstacle to the reintegration of children into their families following a period in care. She would also appreciate further clarification of the concept of “socially dangerous situation”, which was sometimes used to justify removal.

51. The State party was to be commended for engaging in a process of deinstitutionalization of children. She wished to know whether that process had been integrated into national action plans, whether it was properly funded and which body was in charge of the process and of developing family-type alternatives. She would also appreciate information on the authority responsible for coordinating the mandates of child welfare and foster care authorities, and on the mechanisms in place to monitor the situation in institutions and enable children to report any violence or misconduct.
52. Regarding children with disabilities, she wondered whether there were plans to align terminology and concepts under domestic law with those set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Belarus had ratified in 2016. Noting that the State party had adopted policies on the provision of financial support to parents of children with disabilities, she asked what other assistance was available to such parents and what steps were being taken to combat the stigma associated with disability. Lastly, she invited the delegation to comment on reports that some doctors continued to recommend the placement of children with disabilities in institutions.

53. **Ms. Winter** said that she would welcome information on the measures in place to provide medical treatment to drug users. In particular, she wondered whether those measures were evidence-based and respectful of such persons, including those in prison. She also wished to know whether public health, harm reduction and gender-sensitive approaches had been incorporated into national drug strategies.

54. The Committee had been informed that police inspectors were often promoted on the basis of the number of arrests they had made. She wondered whether that was true. If so, she would like to know what was being done to protect the public from unscrupulous inspectors looking to boost their figures. She would also like to hear what progress had been made towards the establishment of a fully fledged juvenile justice system, with diversion measures, alternatives to detention and fundamental legal safeguards.

55. She invited the delegation to confirm whether the practice of using coloured badges on prison uniforms had ceased, to indicate whether the policy of imprisoning minors for lesser offences would be reviewed and to describe the measures taken to monitor conditions of detention, including the provision of health care. She would also be grateful for information on the status of efforts to address the issues raised by the Committee in paragraph 12 of the list of issues (CRC/C/BLR/Q/5-6) in relation to the detention of children.

56. **Ms. Aldoseri** said that she would like to receive information on the results of the annual surveys to identify students at risk of suicide, mentioned in paragraph 336 of the State party’s report. In particular, she wondered whether the surveys had helped to reduce suicides. She also wondered whether studies had been carried out to identify the root causes of adolescent suicide, whether a strategy had been developed to tackle those causes, what training was provided to teachers and other education staff to enable them to identify suicidal behaviour and whether psychologists and psychiatrists were employed in schools to offer counselling services. Details of the steps taken to understand and address the root causes of HIV infection in girls and young women would also be appreciated. In addition, she would like statistics on the number of children living in areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster and information on the rehabilitation programmes established to curb the consequences of the associated radiation pollution.

57. Turning to the issue of education, she asked whether there was a timeline for the process of deinstitutionalization and whether plans were in place to include all children, including those currently living in closed institutions, in mainstream education. She would be pleased to have an update on the status of amendments to the Education Code, including details of whether a bill to amend the Code had been submitted to the House of Representatives. She would also like to know how many school-age Roma children were out of school, what reasons lay behind the high dropout and non-enrolment rates among such children, whether children’s rights were a mandatory part of school curricula from an early age, whether teachers were given appropriate training on those rights, and what was being done to modernize school textbooks, including through the removal of gender stereotypes. Lastly, she would welcome information on any measures adopted to ensure that all children, especially those belonging to vulnerable groups, were able to enjoy the right to rest and leisure.

58. **Ms. Sidikou** said that she wished to know how the refugee status determination procedure in Belarus made it possible to correctly identify the international protection needs of unaccompanied migrant children and ensure that their best interests were taken into account at all times. She would also like to know whether there was an effective system for the collection of data on migrant children and whether such children had access
to free legal aid. In addition, she would appreciate information on the measures taken to eradicate all forms of child labour, whether a strategy had been adopted to combat child sexual exploitation, whether mechanisms were in place to provide care to victims of such exploitation, and what was being done to prevent traffic in, and the abduction or sale of, children.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.