

principle of non-discrimination; the lack of conformity of the birth registration system with all the requirements of article 7 of the Convention; the fact that corporal punishment is still used by parents and that internal school regulations do not contain explicit provisions prohibiting the practice; and, the insufficient awareness of, and lack of information on, ill treatment and abuse, including sexual abuse, both within and outside the family; insufficient legal protection measures and appropriate resources, both financial and human, and the lack of adequately trained personnel to prevent and combat abuse.

Additional concerns identified by the Committee included: the fact that current legislation on adoption does not effectively protect children against illicit transfer and non-return; efforts to reduce the infant mortality rate and the under-five mortality rate, noting the prevalence of malnutrition and high rates of maternal mortality, as well as the limited access to health services on remote islands; the high and increasing rate of early pregnancies, the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among youth, the occurrence of teenage suicide, the insufficient access by teenagers to reproductive health education and counselling services, including outside schools, and the insufficient preventive measures on HIV/AIDS; the insufficient measures taken to ensure effective access of children with disabilities to health, education and social services, and to facilitate their full inclusion into society; and the small number of well-trained professionals working with, and for, children with disabilities.

The Committee expressed further concern over: the fact that a system of compulsory education is not yet fully in place; the high drop-out rates as well as at the unequal access to quality education; the absence of a public pre-school system; the existing low minimum age for access to work, set at 12 years; the lack of data on child labour and economic exploitation, including sexual exploitation of children; the insufficient measures to address issues of drug and alcohol abuse which are increasingly affecting children; the insufficient rehabilitation measures for ill-treated, sexually abused, and economically exploited children, as well as their limited access to the justice system; the lack of legal counselling for children in care centres, the fact that detention is not being used as a measure of last resort, and the poor state of detention centres; and, the low minimum age for criminal responsibility, set at 10 years, and the fact that children aged between 17 and 18 years are not considered under the juvenile justice system.

The Committee recommended that the government, *inter alia*:

- ♦ take all necessary measures to accelerate the process for the enactment of the Children's and Young Persons' Act, as well as other legislation related to children's rights; ensure that domestic legislation fully conforms with the provisions and the principles of the Convention; and take into account the principles and provisions of the Convention in the Constitutional Amendment Bill (1997), including through a specific reference to the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- ♦ consider ratifying all other major international human rights treaties — including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Convention against Torture — since they all have an impact on the rights of the child;
- ♦ strengthen its coordination efforts through the Coordinating Committee on Children, and develop a comprehensive system of collecting disaggregated data, in order to gather all necessary information on the situation of children, including children belonging to vulnerable groups;
- ♦ give further consideration to the establishment of an Ombudsperson for Children, or any equivalent independent complaint and monitoring mechanism;
- ♦ ensure, to the maximum extent possible, adequate budget allocations for the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights;
- ♦ harmonize the minimum age for marriage with the principles and provisions of the Convention;
- ♦ further develop a systematic approach to increasing public awareness of the right to participation of children;
- ♦ take a more active approach to eliminate discrimination against certain groups, in particular the girl child, children with disabilities, children in institutional care, children living in rural areas, poor children such as those living in slums, and children born out of wedlock;
- ♦ take all appropriate measures to improve its birth registration system, and launch awareness-raising campaigns regarding the parents' duty to register newborn children;
- ♦ comprehensively prohibit by law corporal punishment and take measures to raise awareness on the negative effects of corporal punishment;
- ♦ take all appropriate measures — including revision of legislation — to prevent and combat ill-treatment within the family, including domestic violence and sexual abuse of children; set up social programmes to prevent all types of child abuse as well as to rehabilitate the child victims; strengthen law enforcement with respect to domestic violence and sexual abuse of children; and develop adequate procedures and mechanisms — such as special rules of evidence and special investigators or community focal points — to deal with complaints of child abuse;
- ♦ accelerate the process of reform of legislation relating to adoption and to illicit transfer and non-return, and envisage acceding to the Hague Convention of 1993 on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption;