

been returned to their countries of origin, as well as the number of women trafficked out of Bulgaria to other countries and the number of people engaged in trafficking who have been arrested, prosecuted and sentenced;

- ♦ develop appropriate measures to address poverty among women, particularly the most vulnerable women, including elderly women, women with children, and women with disabilities;
- ♦ undertake efforts to collect statistical information on the social, economic and political status of women of different ethnic minorities and ensure that such data is available to the Committee in the next periodic report;
- ♦ take special measures to encourage women to become entrepreneurs; provide training and take measures to facilitate access to credit and loans for women, in particular rural women; and
- ♦ facilitate consultations between Bulgarian women's NGOs and other European women's NGOs, in order to discuss Bulgarian women's issues and receive any necessary assistance.

THEMATIC REPORTS

Mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights

Extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary execution, Special Rapporteur on: (E/CN.4/1998/68, paras. 16, 17; E/CN.4/1998/68/Add.1, paras. 50–56)

The report refers to information received indicating that: police brutality continued to be a serious problem; during 1997 several individuals had died in custody under suspicious circumstances; and, while investigations had been initiated into several of these cases, little or no progress was made to punish the perpetrators.

Cases previously transmitted, to which the government replied, included one involving an arrest followed by death five days later from a brain haemorrhage. The government had informed the Special Rapporteur (SR) that the Regional Military Prosecutor's Office (RMPO) had initiated an inquest. The SR queried the government as to why the RMPO was responsible for conducting the inquest and whether results of the inquest had been made public.

The SR expressed continuing concern that little or no progress was reportedly made in bringing to justice those alleged to be responsible for violations of the right to life, in particular members of the police, and that as a result they continued to enjoy impunity. The SR called on the government to investigate all alleged violations of the right to life, to bring perpetrators to justice and to provide compensation to the victims' families.

Racism and racial discrimination, Special Rapporteur on: (E/CN.4/1998/79, paras. 46)

The report recalls previous concerns related to cases of racial discrimination against Roma, particularly by skin-heads. It notes newspaper accounts of 2 and 3 February 1997 reporting the death from starvation of three Roma children in the town of Stara Zagora. The Special Rapporteur reports that on 4 February, following an increase in the price of bread, 2,000 Roma demonstrated in the centre of the town of Pazardzhik in protest against the discriminatory policies of the central government and the local authorities.

Religious intolerance, Special Rapporteur on: (E/CN.4/1998/6, paras. 48, 50, 60, 63, 64, 66, 72)

The report refers to violations of freedom of religion and belief against Jehovah's Witnesses reportedly experiencing a climate of intolerance. Reference is made to allegations that the authorities have imposed controls on, and/or interfered illegally with their religious activities, and to reports that Jehovah's Witnesses have been arrested, detained, mistreated, harassed, threatened, convicted or expelled because of their proselytizing activities. In one city in Bulgaria, they are apparently forbidden to rent buildings.

The government stated that the reason for the refusal to register the Jehovah's Witnesses community was linked to fundamental tenets of the community's doctrine, such as the refusal to accept blood transfusions and to perform military service, which Bulgaria considered as contrary not only to its own legislation but also to numerous international instruments to which Bulgaria was a party. The government noted that, in 1996, the leaders of the Jehovah's Witnesses had used expired registration documents, dating from 1991, to hire rooms, and that lack of valid registration documents had been one of the grounds on which the authorities had intervened during public meetings held by the community. The failure of the community to re-register, and the consequent lack of an authorization for public activities, in no way limited the right of each individual member of the Jehovah's Witnesses to worship and hold religious beliefs. However, according to the authorities, proselytizing in public places or from door-to-door exceeds the individual right of followers to profess their religious beliefs. The authorities also stated that the claims that the Jehovah's Witnesses had been denigrated in the local press in the town of Assenovgrad were untrue. It explained that the police had intervened in numerous cases brought to their attention by citizens complaining that they had been disturbed at home by Jehovah's Witnesses, whose activities went beyond freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The government further stated that the Alternative Military Service Act, which was due to come into force, would deal in detail with the grounds for refusal to perform normal military service and with forms of alternative military service.