

The Committee also welcomed, *inter alia*: the fact that a number of measures have been taken to improve the situation of women, including measures allowing women to own property, benefit from the medical insurance of their partners in case of de facto marriages, and benefit from land distribution in the framework of the agrarian reform; the adoption of a Women's Code; the activities and programmes of the General Directorate for the Advancement of Women; the information provided regarding the setting up of a State Secretariat for Women's Affairs; the proposed establishment of special courts to deal specifically with matters involving violence against women and children, including domestic violence; the establishment of a Bilateral Commission between the Dominican Republic and Haitian governments, as well as the agreement signed with the Haitian Government concerning the granting of temporary work permits for Haitian seasonal sugarcane cutters during the next harvest, in order to give them a legal status and to protect them from the exploitation related to the lack of such status; the policy set up and applied by the government giving priority to low-income groups and carrying out housing projects in consultation with the communities concerned; the holding in 1996 of a national conference on a "New Policy in the Housing Sector" organised by the National Housing Institute and the UNDP as a follow up to the Habitat II Conference; the proposed establishment of a State Secretariat on Housing to coordinate all government activities in the field of housing; and, the commitment of the government to suspend all forced evictions by public organs and to adopt a policy to provide adequate alternative housing or relocation to persons evicted or displaced.

The Committee further welcomed: measures taken to improve prison conditions with respect to economic, social and cultural rights, such as the provision for meals free of charge, including during weekends, to inmates, and a prison reform programme emphasizing the improvement of the visits regimes and rehabilitation through education; the new emphasis which the government has placed on education; and, the measures taken to improve the level of education in public schools through the increase in teachers' salaries.

Referring to factors and difficulties hindering implementation of the Covenant, the Committee acknowledged that the consequences of decades during which the promotion and protection of the economic, social and cultural rights of the population as a whole, and those of vulnerable groups in particular, were either neglected or not effectively protected by previous governments, continue to impede the full implementation of the rights set out in the ICESCR. The Committee also noted that, since the mid-1980s, the economic situation in the Dominican Republic had deteriorated at a rapid pace, mainly because of the deficient management of the country's economy and of the public finances by the previous administration. The consequences of this deterioration were acknowledged as including the heavy burden of the external debt on the national economy, the need for structural adjustment programmes, the high rate of inflation, the large-scale emigration of skilled workers out of the country, the growing poverty, the unequal distribution of wealth within the population and the deepening gap between the rich and poor sectors of the population.

The principal subjects of concern identified by the Committee were, *inter alia*: the lack of statistical information on the economic, social and cultural situation in the Dominican Republic in the information provided by the government; the occurrence of racial discrimination, despite denials by the authorities, noting that the existence of racial discrimination does not necessarily entail institutionalized or legal discrimination; the fact that, despite measures taken, women do not fully enjoy their economic, social and cultural rights; the persistence of a traditional male-dominated society detrimental to gender equality; the lack of protection afforded to women workers who are victims of discrimination in employment or arbitrary dismissal for pregnancy; the lack of family-planning services; the high maternal mortality rate; the unequal pay between women and men; the absence of legal recognition of de facto marriages; the large-scale emigration of Dominicans, many of whom are skilled workers; the fact that approximately 500 to 600,000 Haitian illegal workers reside in the Dominican Republic, some for as long as two generations, without any legal status and any protection of their economic, social and cultural rights; that fact that the children of these illegal residents do not, because of the restrictive interpretation of article 11 of the Constitution by the authorities, receive Dominican nationality on the grounds that they are regarded as children born from foreigners in transit; and, the denial to children of illegal workers of the benefit of their most basic social rights, such as the rights to education and health; the failure to take measures to improve the overall situation of Haitian illegal workers through the regularization of their status and that of their children.

Concern was also expressed over, *inter alia*: the fact that the minimum wage is not yet sufficient to ensure a decent living for workers and their families; reports on extremely unsatisfactory working conditions in the free trade zones; the information received indicating that workers in the free trade zones are discouraged from joining or forming trade unions and that employers do not comply with the regulations concerning the right to strike in the Labour Code; the fact that the national social security scheme covers only workers employed in the formal sector; the situation of children and, in particular, reports received on the occurrence of child labour and child exploitation, including sexual exploitation; the increasing number of street children; the low rate of school enrolment; the high rate of infant mortality and the high number of pregnancies among school-age females; and, the reported prevalence of violence against women and children within the family.

The Committee also expressed concern about: the fact that the draft plan by the National Council for Urban Affairs related to access to safe drinking water is limited to urban areas and that much remains to be done in order to ensure such access for the rural population and for all those living in deprived urban areas; the fact that the positive measures and programmes undertaken with regard to the right to housing may be hampered by a lack of resources allocated by the authorities at the national and local levels to alleviate the many problems associated with the lack of housing; the dispersion of the many organs and institutions set up to deal with housing and their lack of coordination; the failure of the central authorities to delegate more powers to local communities; the priority and preference given to the alleviation of the