

tice; economic exploitation of children; drug and substance abuse; sexual exploitation and abuse; sale of children, trafficking and abduction; the situation of children belonging to minority and indigenous groups; policies on child participation; access to appropriate information; freedom of religion, assembly and association; and family, social welfare, social security. The conclusion of the report contains the government's assessment of measures that remain to be taken to implement fully the Convention.

The Committee's concluding observations and comments (CRC/C/15/Add.93) welcomed, *inter alia*: the creation of a National Plan for Human Rights (March 1998); the enactment of the new Constitution (August 1998), which includes provisions for the promotion and protection of human rights, including the rights of the child; the measures taken to include the teaching of the Convention in the school curricula and for the establishment of bilingual education programmes for indigenous children; the establishment of a Programme of "Alcaldes Defensores de los Niños" (City Mayors for the Defense of Children); and Ecuador's accession to both the Hague Convention of 1993 on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption and ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.

Factors impeding the implementation of the Convention were noted as the damage to agriculture and infrastructure arising from natural disasters, the negative impact on children of economic factors such as structural adjustment and external debt, widespread poverty, long-standing socio-economic disparities, and uneven land distribution.

The principal subjects of concern identified by the Committee included, *inter alia*: continuing disparities between the principles and provisions of the Convention and domestic legislation; recent budget cuts and their negative impact on the provision of social programmes, especially those related to children; the lack of adequate and systematic training for professional groups working with and for children; the use of the biological criterion of puberty to set different ages of maturity between girls and boys; the predominance of discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, gender, social status, and disabilities; the increasing disparities between rural and urban areas as well as the growing number of persons living in urban poor and marginalized areas; the lack of awareness and understanding of birth registration procedures, especially in rural areas; noting the statement in the government report that "child abuse is a culturally accepted and justified practice", the insufficient awareness regarding the harmful consequences of ill treatment and abuse, including sexual abuse, both within and outside the family; the insufficient resources, both financial and human, as well as at the lack of adequately trained personnel to prevent and combat such forms of abuse; and the insufficiency of rehabilitation measures and facilities for abused children.

The Committee expressed concern over: the prevalence of malnutrition, high rates of maternal mortality, and the

limited access to health services in remote rural areas; the high and increasing rate of teenage pregnancies, the occurrence of suicides of girls, the insufficient access by teenagers to reproductive health education and counselling services, including outside schools; the increasing rate of substance abuse; the high incidence of environmental threats, including on the health of children, in particular those in oil exploitation areas of the Amazonia region; the widespread poverty and the declining living conditions affecting the majority of the population; and, the high drop-out and repetition rates between primary and secondary school, the existing gender disparities in secondary school enrolments, and disparities in access to education between rural and urban areas.

Concerns were noted related to: the lack of specific provisions in domestic legislation concerning the rights of asylum-seeking and refugee children and the right to family reunification; the insufficient measures addressing the issues of child labour and economic exploitation, including domestic labour and sexual exploitation of children; the increasing number of children living and/or working in the streets, who require special attention because of the risks to which they are exposed; the lack of sufficient preventive measures related to the trafficking and sale of children; the absence of data and a comprehensive study on the issue of commercial sexual exploitation of children; and, with regard to juvenile justice, the fact that deprivation of liberty is not systematically used only as a measure of last resort, the slow pace with which cases are processed, the insufficient provision of legal aid for children, and the situation of children under 7 years of age living in prisons with their parents.

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

- ♦ take all appropriate measures to facilitate the process of full harmonization of domestic legislation with the principles and provisions of the Convention; take further steps to reinforce, within the framework of the National Plan for Human Rights, existing coordinating mechanisms (e.g., National Commission for Children/CONAME), including at the municipal level, in order to strengthen coordination between the various governmental bodies involved in children's rights; make greater efforts to ensure closer cooperation with NGOs working in the field of human rights, in particular the rights of the child;
- ♦ develop a comprehensive system for collecting disaggregated data in order to gather all necessary information on the situation of children, including children belonging to vulnerable groups;
- ♦ conduct training on the Convention for professional groups working with and for children;
- ♦ continue taking all available measures to reduce economic and social disparities, including between rural and urban areas; reinforce measures to prevent discrimination against the most disadvantaged groups