

The Committee's concluding observations and comments (CRC/C/15/Add.70) welcomed the fact that the Convention is fully incorporated into domestic law, and that the Civil Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure expressly provide that their provisions shall not apply in cases where they conflict with a provision of an international Convention in force in Syria. The Committee also welcomed the fact that a number of provisions of domestic law are currently being reviewed in order to ensure their conformity with the principles and provisions of the Convention.

The Committee viewed positively: initiatives taken by the government, such as the establishment at the ministerial level of a Higher Committee for Child Welfare, the setting up of a National Committee for Children to monitor the implementation of the Convention in Syria and the adoption of a national plan of action to implement the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s; the fact that education is free at all levels and that it has been made compulsory at the primary level; and, the intention of the government to publish its initial report, as well as the summary records of the debate with the Committee and the concluding observations.

Regarding factors and difficulties impeding implementation of the Convention, the Committee noted that part of Syria's is under occupation and the government is therefore not in a position to exercise control over all of its territory and consequently cannot ensure the implementation of the Convention in all parts of the country. The Committee also noted that significant budgetary resources are devoted to military expenses and that resources allocated to social expenses were insufficient and may contribute to the hindering of the enjoyment by children of their rights under the Convention.

The principal subjects of concern identified by the Committee were: the broad nature of the reservations made by Syria to the Convention; the insufficient coordination between bodies established at the national level, as well as with local bodies, in order to develop a comprehensive approach to the implementation of the Convention; the insufficiency of measures taken systematically to gather reliable quantitative and qualitative data on all areas covered by the Convention in relation to all groups of children, so as to evaluate progress achieved and to assess the impact of policies adopted with respect to children, with particular emphasis on education, health, child labour, refugee children and children belonging to minorities, girls, children involved with the administration of juvenile justice, disabled children, child victims of abuse or ill-treatment, and children living and/or working in the street; the insufficiency of measures taken to ensure that the principles and provisions of the Convention are made widely known to children, parents, officials and professionals working with and for children; insufficient systematic training in the field of children's rights for members of the police force and other law enforcement officials, judicial personnel, teachers at all levels of education, social workers and medical personnel; and, lack of measures to publish and disseminate the text of the Convention within the public, in formats intended for both children and adults, and according to their levels of education.

The Committee noted with concern that: the best interests of the child, the prohibition of discrimination and the respect

for the views of the children and their right to participate in family, school and social life, are not fully reflected in domestic legislation and implemented in practice; there is a lack of conformity of relevant domestic laws with the definition of the child under the Convention, especially with regard to the low ages of criminal responsibility (7) and of access to employment established by law; persistent discriminatory attitudes towards girls, including the practice of early marriage, and towards children born out of wedlock; and, the fact that the law sets a lower marriageable age for girls than for boys.

The Committee expressed concern over: the inadequacy of measures taken to ensure the implementation of children's economic, social and cultural rights, with a particular emphasis on health and education; the insufficient policies, measures and programmes for the protection of the rights of the most vulnerable children, especially children living in poverty, girls, disabled children, child victims of abuse, children belonging to minority groups and children who are living and/or working in the street; the situation of refugee and Syrian-born Kurdish children, noting the absence of facilities for the registration of refugee children born in Syria, and that Syrian-born Kurdish children are considered either as foreigners or as *maktoumeen* (unregistered) by the Syrian authorities and face great administrative and practical difficulties in acquiring Syrian nationality, although they have no other nationality at birth; the high drop-out rates from the secondary school, especially among girls, the low teacher/student ratio and the lack of adequate learning and teaching facilities; failure to incorporate into the school curricula a programme on human rights and children's rights education; the lack of appropriate measures to combat and prevent ill-treatment and abuse within the family and to provide physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration to child victims; the fact that disciplinary measures in schools, although it is prohibited by law, often consist of corporal punishment; the fact that the minimum age for employment of children is too low, and that, under article 129 of the Labour Act No. 91 of 1959, children working in family enterprises are not protected by the relevant provisions of the Labour Act, including the minimum age of employment, the prohibition of night work and other protection measures with regard to harmful occupations; and, reports of exploitation of child labour in the agricultural sector and of the lack of available means in rural areas to combat and prevent this phenomenon; the fact that the system of the administration of juvenile justice in Syria does not conform with provisions in the Convention and other relevant UN standards; and, the fact that children may be deprived of liberty at a very low age and that insufficient attention has been paid to date to find alternatives to institutional care of children.

The Committee recommended that the government:

- ▶ review its reservations to articles 14, 20 and 21 of the Convention and consider making interpretive declarations to clarify its position on these provisions;
- ▶ make further efforts to increase and systematize vertical coordination between central and local administrations and bodies involved in the protection of the rights of the child and in the implementation of the various policies and programmes;